ORIENTING FANDOM: THE DISCURSIVE PRODUCTION OF SPORTS AND SPECULATIVE MEDIA FANDOM IN THE INTERNET ERA

BY

MEL STANFILL

DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Communications with minors in Gender and Women’s Studies and Queer Studies in the Graduate College of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2015

Urbana, Illinois

Doctoral Committee:

Professor CL Cole, Co-Chair
Associate Professor Siobhan Somerville, Co-Chair
Professor Cameron McCarthy
Assistant Professor Anita Chan
ABSTRACT

This project inquires into the constitution and consequences of the changing relationship between media industry and audiences after the Internet. Because fans have traditionally been associated with an especially participatory relationship to the object of fandom, the shift to a norm of media interactivity would seem to position the fan as the new ideal consumer; thus, I examine the extent to which fans are actually rendered ideal and in what ways in order to assess emerging norms of media reception in the Internet era. Drawing on a large archive consisting of websites for sports and speculative media companies; interviews with industry workers who produce content for fans; and film, television, web series, and news representations from 1994-2009 in a form of qualitative big data research—drawing broadly on large bodies of data but with attention to depth and texture—I look critically at how two media industries, speculative media and sports, have understood and constructed a normative idea of audiencing. The project considers how digital media have influenced consumption, including through transmedia storytelling that spreads content across multiple delivery platforms. I also interrogate the conditions of labor in the realm of fandom, with particular attention to the relationship between industry labor and unpaid user labor. Third, the project examines which fan bodies are recruited by industry in terms of race, gender, age, and sexuality. I contend that fandom has gone from being seen as something that periodically happened to media to being interpreted as something endemic to manage. In this orientation toward management, media organizations encourage particular practices in a way that, at a general level, produces, disseminates, and reinforces a norm of proper media use. This redefinition functions to transform and reorient the threatening or unruly fan into a domesticated, useful one, maintaining industry imperatives to the exclusion of other claims on media through the very figure of challenge itself.
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Acknowledgements

There are a great many people without whom this project would have been much poorer. Megan Condis, Brittany Smith, Michelle Rivera, Aimee Rickman, Stephanie Brown, and Andrea Ruehlicke helped sharpen my thinking and argumentation with their excellent feedback on several parts of this project in our writing group. Robert Mejia, my very first friend in the ICR, was always good for a complex conversation or a companionable meal, both of which are the fuel of grad school.

Many thanks to Lisa Cacho, Lori Kendall, and Michael Twidale whose first-rate classes made Fall 2009 the semester when this project started to fall into place. Similarly, I am grateful for the excellent methodological advice Mary Gray has provided on several occasions. Ray Fouché similarly went above and beyond as a mentor. The generosity with which these two senior scholars shared their time is greatly appreciated as well as inspirational for my own future mentorship.

My fan studies scholarly community has been indispensable as inspiration and generous with its members’ individual and collective intelligence. Thanks especially to Nina Busse and Karen Hellekson. Julie Levin Russo and Suzanne Scott were excellent models as scholars just ahead of me in this process, even if their work is so spot-on I first feared one or both of them had already written my dissertation.

Laurel Westbrook has been irreplaceable as my go-to academic and life sounding board. T.J. Tallie, Alicia Kozma, and Jaime Hough were always there with intellectual and emotional support, especially at the lowest points. Sarah Rosenberg and Emmy Gladney helped me keep perspective by sharing the view from outside this academic bubble. My appreciation and love always to my family for their support and belief in me and tolerance of my need to work on
vacations.

And, last but not least, thanks to my committee: CL Cole for having my back, Siobhan Somerville for striking that perfect balance between making me feel interpersonally safe and intellectually unsafe, Cameron McCarthy for pushing me to think globally, and Anita Chan for sharpening my thinking about method.

Portions of this dissertation have been previously published. Earlier versions of arguments made here appear as follows: “Doing Fandom, (Mis)doing Whiteness: Heteronormativity, Racialization, and the Discursive Construction of Fandom.” *Transformative Works and Cultures* 8 doi:10.3983/twc.2011.0256 (2011); "Fandom, Public, Commons." *Transformative Works and Cultures* 14 doi:10.3983/twc.2013.0530 (2013); and "Fandom and/as Labor" [editorial]. In "Fandom and/as Labor," edited by Mel Stanfill and Megan Condis, special issue, *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 15. doi:10.3983/twc.2014.0593 (coauthored with Megan Condis, 2014). These are reused under *Transformative Works and Cultures*’s Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 3.0 Unported License. Portions of my “‘They’re Losers, but I Know Better’: Intra-Fandom Stereotyping and the Normalization of the Fan Subject.” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 30 (2): 117-134 doi:10.1080/15295036.2012.755053, published in 2013, are reused here under Taylor and Francis policy allowing the right to include an article in a thesis or dissertation that is not to be published commercially, provided that acknowledgment to prior publication in the journal is made explicit. Parts of my article “‘The Interface as Discourse: The Production of Norms through Web Design.’” *New Media & Society.* OnlineFirst. doi:10.1177/1461444814520873 are reused under SAGE policy that one may use the published article in a book any time after publication in the journal with the inclusion of a link to the appropriate DOI for the published version.
Chapter 1

Introduction: Domesticating Fandom

This is not a study of “fans” as people or “fandom” as a culture or even “fandom” as a practice but of The Fan as a concept. As the Internet has become broadly accessible in the United States since the mid-1990s, media interactivity has come to be seen as normative audience behavior by both scholars and the general public. Because fans have traditionally been associated with an especially participatory relationship to their objects of fandom, the shift to a norm of media interactivity would seem to position the fan as the new ideal consumer. Orienting Fandom examines the extent to which fandom is actually rendered as an ideal mode of audience participation and in what ways in order to assess emerging norms of media use in the Internet era. The analysis proceeds by tracing cultural understandings of the fan across three sites: fictional and nonfictional representations of fans (television, film, news reports), official websites for media properties (television shows, sports franchises, etc.), and statements made by media industry workers who produce content for fans. The dominant narrative about the Internet era contends that because audiences can increasingly do things for themselves on the web, media companies have needed to become more responsive to them in order to retain their loyalty, lest the media industry become completely unnecessary. My project uses the figure of the fan as the lens through which to interrogate the constitution and consequences of this changing relationship between media industry and audience. It looks critically at how two media industries—speculative media\(^1\) and sports\(^2\)—have understood and constructed a normative idea of

\(\(^1\)\) I use the term “speculative” to encompass all media types premised in not being realistic, whether horror, comic books, science fiction, or fantasy, because these types of objects are represented and understood similarly, because fans of one genre are often fans of one or more of the others—and indeed because many media objects do not easily belong to single one of the genres. Spike TV channel’s implementation of an awards show for “science-fiction, horror, fantasy and comic book-inspired movies and TV shows” (S. Cohen, 2009c) suggests that others
audiencing\(^3\) in the period since the Internet first became widely available to the general public.

My approach differs from much scholarship in the field of fan studies. Since the early 1990s, when fan studies emerged as a field, it has been axiomatic that fans, while admittedly “a widespread and diverse group [ . . . ] may still constitute a recognizable subculture” (Jenkins, 1992, p. 1). The field of fan studies operates—as Angela McRobbie (1991, p. ix) argues that cultural studies does—on the terrain bounded by “lived experience,” “popular culture,” and “subcultures.” At the point of the field’s inauguration, the consensus among founding scholars was that “fan” was a stigmatized category, “maligned and sensationalized by the popular press, mistrusted by the public” (Lewis, 1992a, p. 1).\(^4\) This was not just the mass-mediated perception but an academic one: Before there was fan studies, scholars in media studies, sociology, and especially psychology used fandom as a receptacle for their anxieties about media (Jenkins, 1992; Jensen, 1992). A large part of fan studies’ critique of this early research was that it was “false to the reality fans experience,” because these scholars saw their role as “either to judge or to instruct but not to converse with the fan community” (Jenkins, 1992, pp. 279, 6). In reaction to this stance, scholars who themselves identified as fans proclaimed—and set out to demonstrate—that fans were actually just average, regular people, not deviants.

These early studies by fan-identified scholars participated in what became the American tradition of cultural studies. However, unlike British cultural studies work on football hooligans, see relations among these genres as well.

\(^2\) I consider sports franchises media companies because a far larger number of people experience professional sports through media than in-stadium and media revenues constitute a greater share of these companies’ incomes than any other source (Buraimo & Simmons, 2009), but also, as I’ll show, because they use the same techniques of audience incitement.

\(^3\) I use the term “audiencing,” referring to the act of membership in an audience, because it both makes being an audience a verb, emphasizing action, and maintains awareness of the structurally unequal position in relation to industry in a way that speaking of “participation” or other alternatives elides.

\(^4\) Brower, 1992; Fiske, 1992; Jenkins, 1988; Jensen, 1992 and others express similar views.
fan studies has generally not addressed the specific position of sports fans. By contrast to fan studies’ kinship with cultural studies, inquiry into sports fans (aside from that work on hooliganism) is a largely parallel tradition that typically takes place in a relatively social-scientific framework either in sociology or sports management research. While some sports studies scholarship draws on a cultural studies approach, the part of that field that studies fans is substantially social scientific and positivist. However, despite these differences both fan studies and these various modes of sports fan inquiry have a primary interest in fans as people or fandom as a practice or culture. These contributions have been important—certainly, my work could not exist without them—but there are questions they preclude asking.

Rather than thinking of fandom as a culture, identity, or practice in identitarian or positivist ways, I begin from the premise that fandom is not an unproblematic empirical reality, but rather a social construct—specifically, I consider “the fan” as a discourse. As Gillian Rose (2007, p. 142) notes, discourses “structure the way a thing is thought, and the way we act on the basis of that thinking. In other words, discourse is a particular knowledge about the world which shapes how the world is understood and how things are done in it.” Ruth Frankenberg’s (1993, p. 78) description of a “discursive environment” provides one useful way to think about discourse—like the material environment we inhabit, its shape is rooted and difficult to change, and it channels our actions in some directions more than others—even as it often goes uninterrogated as just how things are (White, 2006). These are, then, ideas with impact, “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” because assumptions about what is true or correct structure thought and action (Foucault, 1972, p. 49). Conceptualizing “the fan” as a discourse, then, lets me attend to the contents and consequences of what this identity, culture, and practice is culturally understood to be.
With the Internet, fans have become increasingly integrated into production logics—expanding beyond limited consideration as audiences or “eyeballs” (as in Nielsen ratings) or through the longstanding but industry-controlled institution of the fan club. For some media companies, the inclusion of fans was discovery of fandom for the first time; others began to take a formerly dismissed affective relationship to the object of fandom seriously. In either case, it was a seismic shift, and in the ensuing period fans have moved from being marginal (as was often the case with speculative media fans) or taken for granted (as was often the case with sports fans) to a constituency that media companies both recognize and actively seek to incorporate. Typically, this historical trajectory is recounted by industry, journalists, and scholars alike as one toward democratization: The belief is that having expanded choices of what to consume and how and the capacity to talk back to industry and increasingly get at least a social media reply means audiences now control their own media experience.\(^5\) This familiar narrative contends that the increased, technologically-enabled visibility of fans has broken down the barriers between producer and consumer, such that fan bottom-up resistance has to some extent overcome media company top-down control.

I contend that, if there ever was such a top-down vs. bottom-up conflict, it does not describe the relationship between fandom and media in the contemporary moment. Rather, power is more usefully conceptualized as something other than oppressive and exercised from above onto resisting subjects. Following Michel Foucault (1990, 2003, 2008), I employ a model of power wherein the remission of repression does not mean the absence of power. Making

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\(^5\) This view relies on the idea that media become “freer” when controlled “bottom-up,” by “the people,” on analogy with the ways voting is presumed to function in systems of governance. For examples of this argument, see Jenkins, 2006; Lotz, 2007. For a critique of the way this narrative encourages conflating media participation with political participation, see Ouellette & Hay, 2008.
something more possible, more normative, or more “common sense” is itself a form of constraint that encourages that outcome. My project does not rest on a claim that each and every fan must respond in a certain way to media industry action but rather seeks to uncover which responses are invited, encouraged, and considered correct in order to assess what this recruitment produces as the norm. The media industry’s relationship to fans through policies, web design, and representation structures norms, but doesn’t constitute an omnipotent system. The phenomena examined here reflect and produce cultural common sense about what audiences do (and should do). This project attends to outcomes of norms and practices rather than intentions. What media industry workers try to do matters less than the norms actually produced by their beliefs or acts of representation or web design.

In the contemporary moment, as sports and speculative fiction companies now pay more attention to their fans and invite them to participate, they represent and code for and have in mind certain practices and people and not others. This selectivity produces and reinforces a particular vision of who fans are and what they do as the norm for the category, and I will argue this norm benefits the media industry. As Joshua Gamson (1998, p. 5) points out, when a group has traditionally been excluded or marginalized and then suddenly seems to be everywhere, “It looks, for a moment, like you own this place,” yet that perception is, to use a cinematic metaphor, generated by the flattening effect of forced perceptive. Inclusion alone should not be taken as evidence of radical change. Thomas Frank’s (2000) account of the “democratization of the stock market” narrative from the 1990s provides a useful history here. With the rise of Internet-enabled stock trading, the rhetoric was that people could now control their own economic destinies by being included in finance, but as Frank shows, the vast majority of the benefits of expanded trading accrued to top-tier investors. I will argue that benefits accumulate at
the top in much the same way with fan “democratization.” Jenkins (2006a, p. 3) argues that “In the world of media convergence,” in which content and audiences migrate across means of distribution rather than being tied to one, “every important story gets told, every brand gets sold, and every consumer gets courted across multiple media platforms.” In fact it’s not every consumer, and it is necessary to ask which ones are “courted.” We should recognize that “important” modifies not just “story” but “brand” and “consumer.” Not everything “fan” is newly celebrated in the Internet era, as not all fans or fan practices have been ported to the mainstream—so what exactly is this notion of fandom being celebrated?

I contend that fandom has gone from being seen as something that periodically happened to media to being interpreted as something endemic to manage. Though advertising and marketing have always been centered on producing desire, I argue that technological innovations in the Internet era have made managing desire newly possible as a) media organizations now have better data about what their consumers do and b) increasingly the norm of media usage is interactive. Accordingly, this project examines the process of the management of fandom through the production of norms. Rather than paying attention only to whether the media industry notices fans, we have to ask much more specific questions: What ideals, assumptions, and norms animate media industry orientation toward fandom? At the points when media companies take fans into account, what do media industry workers want fans to do? Which practices comprise fandom as represented in film, television, and news, and with what valuations? Which practices comprise fandom as designed into official websites? Who are fans understood to be across these three modes of discourse? To what extent does the current construction of fans continue pre-Internet understandings, and to what extent does it differ? What do these media industry beliefs, representations, and web design practices mean for how
contemporary culture understands media audiences?

If, as many have argued, fans have become increasingly central to the mediascape, what this centrality means for culture depends on what fandom means. The moments when media industry logics include fans both come out of and reinforce particular understandings about how to interact with media. Consequently, examining these instances provides an opportunity to unravel this larger cultural formation that is “the fan.” Ultimately, this project argues that the figure of the fan demonstrates a fundamental tension in practices of media audiencing in the Internet era. Fans and practices traditionally associated with fandom have proliferated throughout the mediascape—producing, at the broadest level, a new era in which interaction and intense attachment are normal—but my analysis traces the ways that, as with all normativity, this is a strategy of containment. Finer-grained examination shows the media industry allowing, encouraging, and counting only particular fans and practices as legitimate or “real” fandom. This redefinition functions to transform and reorient the threatening or unruly fan into a domesticated, useful one, maintaining industry imperatives to the exclusion of other claims on media precisely through the very concept, “the fan,” that formerly was most emblematic of being beyond control.

**Ce n'est pas un fan: Moving Beyond Fan as Culture**

Fan scholars generally privilege the perspectives of the fans themselves, whether through participant-observation, interviewing, or the analysis of textual statements—like fan fiction, Scholars who identify fans as central include: J. Gray, Sandvoss, & Harrington, 2007; Hills, 2009; Jenkins, 2006a, 2006b; S. G. Jones, 2000a.


See, for example, Booth & Kelly, 2013; Jenkins, 1992; Kozinets, 2001; Ross, 2009.
vids (edited videos) and criticism or commentary—made by fans.⁹ Fandom, this view argues, needs to be taken seriously as a culture with a distinct identity. It is therefore unsurprising that the general conclusion has been that, like most subcultures, fandom resists mainstream culture.¹⁰ These scholars contend that fandom coalesces through opposition to dominant culture, having a conscious disregard for norms of measured aesthetic appreciation, intellectual property, and all varieties of social acceptability, choosing their subcultural values over those of the mainstream rather than just being abnormal vis-à-vis dominant culture (Fiske, 1992; Jenkins, 1992; Kozinets, 2001).

Fan-scholars’ attempt to construct fandom as active, if not heroic, arose as an understandable reaction to previous views of fans as excessive consumers nerdily focused on the object of fandom to the exclusion of a “real life.” In their history of fan studies, Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington (2007) identify this “Fandom is Beautiful” phase as only the “first wave” of research on the topic, but the argument about resistance has remained fundamental down to the current phase of scholarship. Thus, it is taken as self-evident that fan creativity represents an alternative to mainstream cultural production that blurs the distinction between reading and writing or production and consumption.¹¹ Julie Levin Russo (2001, p. 4) delightfully skewers this tendency when she argues that “If the defining fantasy of slash¹² is that characters of the same gender are having sex with each other, I would propose that the defining fantasy of academic

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¹¹ For versions of this argument about fandom and production, see, among others, Scodari & Felder, 2000; Stasi, 2006; Tosenberger, 2008; Willis, 2006.
¹² “Slash” is a form of fan fiction (and, later, fan vids) that focuses on same-sex activity between characters, typically those who are not romantically involved in the canonical media text and often officially heterosexual.
work on it is that slash is a form of grassroots political resistance”—which also describes fan studies more broadly. Historically and currently, then, fan studies has operated from the premise that fans are a culture, and particularly that they constitute a subculture that resists or appropriates mainstream culture.

Given this initial focus on fan resistance and marginalization, scholars have tended to take for granted that the more recent invitation of fans into the media industry’s definition of normativity (insofar as it has happened) is a positive development. Jenkins (2006a, p. 12), often considered the father of fan studies, contends that since his inaugural work in the early 1990s, he has "watched fans move from the invisible margins of popular culture and into the center of current thinking about media production and consumption." The argument that fans have become central or mainstream is commonplace (J. Gray et al., 2007; S. M. Ross, 2009; Sandvoss, 2005). In particular, scholars operating in this vein have a sense that that being classified as normal makes fans powerful (Baym, 2007; J. Gray et al., 2007) in addition to vindicating what fan studies has asserted all along.

However, sports fans did not match early cultural-studies-style fan studies scholars’ conclusions on several fronts: “Sport fans—in light of the violence and racism that marked much of their representation in particular in the 1980s—were a much less likely and indeed likeable subject of study, who evaded the paradigm of a bipolar power struggle between hegemonic culture industries and fans” (J. Gray et al., 2007, p. 4). This combination of negative associations and cultural legitimacy diverged so substantially from the heroic, trampled underdog fan that sports got defined out of cultural-studies-style fan studies, making for an incomplete picture. The fact that fan studies has operated with a model identifying fandom as a resistant practice has contributed to the “widespread disregard of sport fans in audience studies” (J. Gray et al., 2007,
p. 4). As Schimmel, Harrington, and Bielby (2007) argue, sport scholars and popular culture scholars (the larger groups containing these two bodies of fan studies) have fundamentally different understandings of what a fan is as well as how one should conduct research, such as who to cite, whether to be reflexive, and where to publish. There has been some recent change on this front, with a few sports fan scholars beginning to submit to fan studies journal *Transformative Works and Cultures* (Pope & Williams, 2010), but mostly the separation endures.

However, Jenkins, Ford, and Green (2013, p. 132) point out that “sports leagues,” like “comic book franchises,” are “media properties built on story worlds” in that the history of teams, players, and rivalries informs the experience of any given game. Jason Mittell (2013) notes from a slightly different angle that “Sports fans have a long history of drilling down statistically and collecting artefacts to engage more deeply with a team or player.” Sharon Ross (2009, p. 86) describes this similarity in more depth, showing that media industry strategy with respect to sports is no different from any other invitation to immersion and participation: “In literally all of my interviews with television industry professionals, sports was a genre listed over and over as ‘good for the Internet’ because of the importance to viewers of extra-textual elements (players’ contracts, statistics, lineup decisions, and coaching strategies) and because of the discussions sports prompts among viewers.” Sports fandom thus has substantial commonalities with speculative media fandom as an immersive and expansive practice, despite historical differences in the origins and membership of these cultures. Overall, then, the focus on actual populations of fans has produced a split between sports and popular cultural fan studies, and this has obscured similarities of media industry treatment of both groups of fans.

Indeed, greater cross-pollination between the two fields benefits both, and that is one key intervention this project makes. Popular culture fan studies is enriched by sports fan studies’
recognition that “subculture” need not mean “subordination.” Sports fandom, as a subculture composed, at least in the United States and Europe, substantially of heterosexual white men, comprises what Warner (2005) calls a subpublic: those not acting as the majority public in their participation in the subgroup but not imagined to be distinct from or antithetical to the larger public. In the attention to speculative media fandom as a subculture, there has been far more emphasis placed on the "culture" portion than the "sub" portion—and as a consequence we know much about how fandom functions as a culture but in a way that tends to be decontextualized from larger structural issues in media and culture more broadly, which sports scholarship generally avoids.

Both sports studies and fan studies have considered the construction of an idea of normative or proper fandom from a perspective internal to fan culture. To begin with the former field, a number of scholars have considered the idea that some people are invited or understood by teams or other fans to belong and not others. This invitation occurs on the basis of class, with the working class excluded from spaces of middle-class leisure (Quinn, 2009) or held up as the ideal in the popular imaginary (Crawford, 2004). The construction of who does and does not belong in sports fandom also happens with race, with white fans constructed by fans and the press as the unmarked default and fans of color either ignored or expected to join right in with those normative practices, no matter how racist (Müller, van Zoonen, & de Roode, 2007; Newman, 2007; Ruddock, 2005). Sports fans are similarly constructed as definitionally male, with female fans always lesser imitations of “real” fans—no matter how invested in the sport or the team they might be.13 Finally, sports fandom is a heterosexualized practice, in which homosexuality can sometimes be tolerated by other fans but only insofar as it reinforces the

13 See, for example, Gosling, 2007; K. W. Jones, 2008; Pope & Williams, 2010; Tanaka, 2004.
preeminence of heterosexuality (Nylund, 2004).\textsuperscript{14}

Similarly, some scholars have argued that treating speculative media fans as a resistant subculture overstates the extent to which fans comprise a tightly bounded or bonded community (J. Gray et al., 2007; Hills, 2002; Sandvoss, 2005). One aspect of this strand of analysis has been a fair amount of attention to conflict, hierarchy, and normalization within fan groups and cultures. Authors point to aspects such as the “impetus toward one-upmanship and elaborate hierarchies of authenticity which characterize all media fandoms, a competitiveness which coexists uneasily with fandom’s espoused paradigm of collective ownership” (Murray, 2004, p. 19; on fan hierarchy, see also Hills, 2002.). Dispute over the right way to read, write, or behave as a fan provides one key source of conflict and hierarchy, though such conflicts rarely endure due to direct or indirect fan community normalization. Fan communities have standards of reading,\textsuperscript{15} writing,\textsuperscript{16} and general fan practice (Busse, 2013; Jenkins, 1992; S. M. Ross, 2009), which tend to implicitly normalize community members by being understood as how one “ought” to do it. However, there is also periodic explicit normalization, with active policing and silencing of interpretations\textsuperscript{17} or modes of writing (Flegel & Roth, 2010; Jenkins, 2006e; Tushnet, 2007a). I extend such work to consider the production of norms not by fan cultures themselves but by cultural common sense more broadly.

This project also builds on a thread in fan studies considering how fans are represented as characters in media. At the dawn of fan studies, Joli Jensen (1992), Lisa Lewis (1992b), and Jenkins (1992) all described the way fans were envisioned as losers with pathetic real lives

\textsuperscript{14} For a similar argument about tolerance, see Brown, 2006.
\textsuperscript{15} See, for example, Hanmer, 2003; Jenkins, 1992; Kaplan, 2006; Sandvoss, 2005.
\textsuperscript{16} In this vein, see: Andrejevic, 2008; Fiesler, 2007; Karpovich, 2006; Tosenberger, 2008.
\textsuperscript{17} Those who describe such policing include: Jenkins, 2006c; Johnson, 2007; Scodari, 2007; Wakefield, 2001.
sublimated into fandom, who were somewhere between socially inept and dangerously pathological. As demonstrated by research produced well into the Internet era, mocking representative tropes continue to be used by non-fans.\textsuperscript{18} Thus, the broadly-circulating cultural stigma around fandom has not been solved by technological change (Booth & Kelly, 2013; Busse, 2013). From a slightly different angle, a number of fan studies scholars note the ways in which fans have internalized the dominant culture’s sense of what fandom means, shaping their identities for better or worse.\textsuperscript{19} Moreover, Derek Johnson (2007) examines the fan-industry interface as a site of power much as I do, considering how \textit{Buffy the Vampire Slayer} represented fans by making them the main antagonists in its sixth season and arguing that this narrative role functioned as way for producers to discipline some vocal sections of the show's own fanbase. Similarly, Laura E. Felschow (2010) and Lisa Schmidt (2010) both discuss the appearance of characters representing \textit{Supernatural}'s own fans within the television show itself, determining that these representations were ultimately not affectionate "shout-outs" but served to "out" a subgroup of fans committed to an incestuous relationship between the show's Winchester brothers in a way that solidified the producers' position of power. Building from this work on individual fandoms, I examine this process at a broader cultural level, asking how the concept of the fan comes to be and interrogating both in what (evidently limited) ways it has arrived into normativity and at what cost.

While scholars have examined fictional representations of fans intermittently throughout the history of fan studies, a more recent body of scholarship examines the impact of social and cultural structures on fandom. Some, most particularly work on fan activism, have looked at the

\textsuperscript{18} In addition to other sources in this paragraph, see Hills, 2002; Scott, 2008, 2011.

\textsuperscript{19} Work that includes arguments to this effect includes: Allington, 2007; Brower, 1992; Hills, 2002; Stanfill, 2013; Stasi, 2006.
fan/nonfan interface—how fans act on the world and how activists pick up fanlike tactics.20 Other areas of this contemporary scholarship, and my own, make a much-needed Industry Turn in audience studies. The innovation of Ross’s (2009) Beyond the Box, for example, is that it combines an analysis of fans with an analysis of the media industry to study television as a system. There has also been a recent turn to looking at the point of contact between fans and industry as a site of tension, as I do, and the substantial uptick in such work suggests its time has come. Some of these authors seek to help the media industry reach fans by parsing out what does and doesn’t work, taking a pro-industry stance (Baird Stribling, 2013; Jenkins et al., 2013). Others describe the ways media industry action recruits particular fan behavior without taking a position for or against (Li, 2012; Mittell, 2013; S. M. Ross, 2009). A third group of work is deeply concerned with how media industry action may exploit, undermine, or manipulate fans. These scholars express substantial concern about labor exploitation (De Kosnik, 2009, 2012, 2013; Lothian, 2009), exclusion of women (Busse, 2013; Scott, 2011) and queer people (Busse, 2013; Russo, 2010) from the media industry’s embrace, and the use of intellectual property law to constrain fans (Lothian, 2009; Noppe, 2011).

My project participates in this emerging “industry turn” in fan studies, and it also aligns with what Havens, Lotz, and Tinic (2009) call “critical media industry studies.” As Havens, Lotz, and Tinic (2009, p. 234) note, “if the ways that we have traditionally studied the media can be categorized into general areas of industry, text, and audience, then the vast majority of critical media scholarship has favored the latter two areas,” and I share this critique of scholars’ neglect of industry because it has resulted in an incomplete understanding of the media system. Havens,

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20 The majority of this work comes out of Henry Jenkins’s Civic Paths group at the University of Southern California. Work on fandom and activism was collected in a 2012 special issue of Transformative Works and Cultures. For a summary see the introduction: Jenkins & Shresthova, 2012.
Lotz, and Tinic (2009, p. 237) also view power “as ‘productive’ in the sense that it produces specific ways of conceptualizing audiences, texts, and economics” in a way similar to my approach. Critical media industry studies, in their formulation, pays attention to “discourse, in the Foucauldian sense, as the formation of knowledge (and thus power). This entails analyzing how institutions organize ways of knowing into seemingly irrefutable logics of how systems should operate, thereby bringing to the forefront the material consequences of industrial ‘common-sense’” (Havens et al., 2009, p. 247). Like critical media industry studies, my project here is akin to political economy because it is vitally concerned with inequality and pays special attention to economic inequality, but differs from political economy because I am not focused on regulation, ownership, and the news (Havens et al., 2009). Instead, I examine “tacit assumptions and cultural constructions that inform the everyday practices of cultural producers” for how they shape media texts and thus reinstantiate and reinforce the cultural conversation (Havens et al., 2009, p. 218). Ultimately, I too take the position that “members of the media industries define the conventions of production and distribution based on their assumptions of the prevailing cultural values and issues of the time” (Havens et al., 2009, pp. 249–50).

While the Industry Turn is new in fan studies, similar concerns have been raised in media studies somewhat earlier. Mark Andrejevic (2008) and Jonathan Gray (2010) note the ways the media industry works to “invite various forms of fan paratextual creativity and user-generated content” (J. Gray, 2010, p. 165) but also how this represents “an invitation to internalize the imperatives of producers” (Andrejevic, 2008, p. 34), such that ultimately this “inviting” (or inciting) has real limitations and fans remain subordinate. The media industry would like fans to act particular ways, such that they “subtly reinforce their own preferred meanings by privileging certain fan products whose meanings wholly conform to those of the firm, and hence that
effectively echo the firm's own paratexts and paratextual meanings” (J. Gray, 2010, p. 165). Finally, as a counterpoint to arguments like that of Cornel Sandvoss (2005, p. 3) that “fandom seems to have become a common and ordinary aspect of everyday life in the industrialized world that is actively fostered and utilized in industry marketing strategies,” others point out that fans are not actually normative. 21 For instance, Gray (2010) notes that fannish paratexts can scare off “mainstream” viewers and industry-produced paratexts will often downplay the fannishness of the center text in order to avoid that marginality. In this project, I build from these scattered mentions in this media studies work to a sustained, systemic investigation of the way media industry policy and action produces a notion of proper fandom.

Poststructuralist Fan Studies: Productive Power, Biopolitics, and Queer Insights

Challenging understandings of power as repressive, Foucault concieves of power as productive, asking what power incites, encourages, or produces. Taking this approach means appreciating that “yes” indicates power relations as much as “no,” understanding that providing something is as enmeshed in power as preventing it, and recognizing that the absence of repression does not result in subjects acting freely. In particular, Foucault’s (1990, 2003, 2008) concept of biopolitics provides a useful framework to analyze the productive properties of media industry beliefs and actions. In biopolitics, power operates at the level of the population—rather than the individual—to manage and optimize its functioning, and while for Foucault this is a state process I find it relevant for examining other large-scale action on aggregated people. Broad tendencies or patterns in how the media industry interacts with fandom function, as Foucault (2003, p. 246) describes the workings of this form of power, “not to modify any given

21 For similar arguments, to that of Sandvoss, see H. Jenkins, 2006a; S. G. Jones, 2000b.
phenomenon as such, or to modify a given individual insofar as he is an individual, but, essentially, to intervene at the level at which these general phenomena are determined, to intervene at the level of their generality”—in this case, through producing, disseminating, and reinforcing a norm of media use. After all, media-producing organizations don’t (and can’t) generally act on individual fans. Instead, from Nielsen ratings to page hits to advertising impressions, the media industry operates in terms of aggregates. Accordingly, analysis of those aggregated actions is vital to understand the contemporary mediascape, as the media industry produces an image of fans while in possession of a cultural megaphone such that its imagining carries social force.

Foucault explains that when the advent of population as an object of scientific measurement and management ushered in the age of biopower, an area of life formerly not subject to regulation and normalization by an institution came to be so. Accordingly, if fan activities that used to happen surreptitiously, unofficially, and illicitly are now being paid attention to or even incited, a Foucaultian model of power would consider this shift as a means to move fandom “into the order of things that are counted” (Foucault, 1990, p. 4) and allow those practices to become known, regulated, and normalized. In this orientation toward management, media organizations—like the governments Foucault (1990, p. 138) describes—“foster” certain practices and “disallow” others. Thus, in place of the stigma attached to science fiction fans or soccer hooligans in earlier eras, fandom has become “a thing to be not simply condemned or tolerated but managed, inserted into systems of utility, regulated for the greater good of all, made to function according to an optimum” (Foucault, 1990, p. 24). My project therefore asks how

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22 The one exception to this would be industry’s intermittent cease-and-desist letters or lawsuits for illegal downloading under the 1998 Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA), but even then the goal has been to make an example of those individuals for the larger population of downloaders.
media companies construct, orient, and manage their properties for this optimization. The organizing metaphor of this inquiry is the domestication\textsuperscript{23} of fans. Thus, just as livestock are bred bigger and more docile, fans are managed and optimized to be both more useful and more controllable. However, livestock also lead safer, easier lives than their wild counterparts, protected from external threats in much the same way that fandom becomes easier and safer with domestication. In this way, the layered meaning of “domestication” usefully illuminates the contemporary construct of fandom. The Internet era has seen a shift that works to bring particular fan behaviors onto the media industry ranch, to subject fans’ production of value (emotional and monetary) to productive power and incite it, but only in particular, circumscribed ways.

Importantly, the fact that this fan management may \textit{not} work seamlessly, that the cultural common sense of what people will/should want to do may \textit{not} be matched by actual embodied fans, is not an impediment to this model of power. Fans may well encounter media industry strategies and find themselves unwelcome. While they may then go elsewhere, adapt, or contest media industry management, the norm must be reckoned with in some fashion. Here, a norm is to be understood as a structuring ideal that locates a particular mode of behavior as correct, expected, desired—normal. Accordingly, the social valuation attached to a norm makes compliance with normativity, or at least striving toward it, a course of action that exerts a powerful draw (Butler, 1993; Ferguson, 2003; Foucault, 1990). Examining the norm is thus necessary, and to modify Tony Bennett (1995, p. 11), the degree to which such plans and projections are successful in organizing and framing the experience of the fan (though surely important) is a separate question from establishing the content of the norm itself. Here I answer

\textsuperscript{23} To give him his due, Mark Andrejevic (2008, p. 44) also refers to “domesticated interactivity,” but he uses the phrase only in passing rather than following through on the implications of the metaphor as I do here. Others who use “domestic” to discuss fandom refer to \textit{domesticity} rather than a metaphor of agricultural selective breeding.
the latter question.

In addition to this overall view of power, this project makes three more specific poststructuralist moves: I take an anti-identitarian approach to things usually thought of as identity; I maintain critical suspicion of invitations to normativity; and I take seriously the operations of pleasure/desire. To begin with identity, in this project I do not take fans as self-evident but rigorously interrogate the process by which this category is produced and the selective norms that are the inevitable byproduct. Rather than taking the positive existence of “fans” as a starting point, I ask how we come to have an idea that there is such a thing as a fan. Previously, fan studies has said, “There are people called fans, who have a particular experience—to some extent, a marginalized experience—and we should document what it’s like to be this sort of person.” This work has been and continues to be important, for fans as much as for any of the other categories of people researched in this way (those minoritized on account of gender, race/ethnicity, or sexuality), because there are, in fact, groups of people out there whose experience is not known or valued. However, I want to know about the production of the fan: What are the processes by which we come to understand that there is such a thing as a fan? What do we then understand that thing to be? What do this construction process and its results mean for how we normatively understand media audiencing in the Internet era? Who benefits from these processes and who does not?

Second, I take up the insight of queer theory that power functions through the production of norms, rather than specific identity categories, such that the production of norms is a vital site of analysis. In particular, “queer theory has emphasized and theorized the violence of neutral

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24 Authors examining fandom as a marginalized culture whose experience should be valued include: Coppa, 2008; Fiske, 1992; Jenkins, 1992; Penley, 1997.
25 Among the key scholars advocating this approach: Butler, 1990; C. J. Cohen, 1997; Rubin,
norms” (Reddy, 2011, pp. 171–2). Roderick Ferguson (2003, p. 65) reminds us that “promises” of normativity comprise “techniques of discipline rather than vehicles toward liberation.” As the media industry invites fans into normativity, then, it recruits them into a system of management—and in particular a selective and specific one passing itself off as neutral and universal. Rather than fighting for access to the norm (as in gay marriage lawsuits) or celebrating arrival at normativity (as in the repeal of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell), my approach highlights that normativity is a trap and should be engaged with strategically if at all.

Norms matter because, as Sara Ahmed (2006, p. 14) contends, “The lines that allow us to find our way, those that are ‘in front’ of us, also make certain things, and not others, available.” It is therefore critical to figure out what those lines are and where they point, attending to what that orientation renders possible. In the context I examine in this project, the relevant lines point to what one is normatively supposed to do when interacting with media, and it is important to ask, as with my title’s framing of orienting fandom, where fans are being pointed: What kinds of consumption and labor are becoming standard in the new media order and what kinds of subjects are recruited? After all, when some practices get moved to the acceptable side of the fence and not others, the former get normalized and the latter reinstated as doubly marginal. Rather than assuming that fandom has shifted from historically stigmatized (as was argued in the early 1990s) to contemporarily centralized, I take seriously the possibility that fan-industry inequalities have not gone away, but may have merely changed forms. It is a mistake to simply assume that a relationship that looks different has no continuity—the playing field remains tilted even as the rules of the game have changed. This project pays close attention to the ways in which media logics of fandom have an impact on how fan desire is ultimately managed.

26 For versions of this argument, see Duggan, 2004; Puar, 2007; Reddy, 2008; Warner, 1999.
Third, this project draws upon queer theory in that it takes desire and pleasure seriously as not only valid but vital sites of inquiry. Much of the historic dismissal of fandom by industry, academia, and the general public has arisen from discomfort with its impolite imbrication in pleasure and desire. Fans have variously been conceptualized as having excessive pleasure and desire or pleasure/desire directed toward the “wrong” things. The fan studies response to this notion of excessive and socially inappropriate pleasure and desire has historically tended to be an attempt to classify fandom as resistant. In other words, this line of argument makes fandom legible as traditionally political rather than to staking a claim for the importance of desire and pleasure (Green, Jenkins, & Jenkins, 1998; Hills, 2002). Instead, I join the tradition of feminist and queer scholarship in fan studies that does stake claims to pleasure/desire as something with political and intellectual value rather than shying away from them as undermining fandom’s legitimacy. This project attends to the production of the fan as an identity category through norms, keeping in mind that desire and pleasure drive that process.

**Discourse as Method: Big Reading**

I call my method in this project “Big Reading.” Big Reading is close reading on a large scale. It shares the drive to comprehensiveness of big data, “drawing on large data sets to identify patterns” (boyd & Crawford, 2012, p. 663), but wants to preserve nuance, asking not just whether or with what frequency something appears in the archive but how. Like big data, Big Reading relies on “a capacity to search, aggregate, and cross-reference large data sets” (boyd &

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27 For descriptions and critiques of fandom as excessive pleasure and desire, see, among others, Busse & Hellekson, 2006; Busse, 2013; Coppa, 2008; Jensen, 1992.
28 Flegel & Roth, 2010; Penley, 1997; Russo, 2010; Willis, 2006, among others, have critical accounts of fan desires being categorized as socially inappropriate.
29 See, for example, Busse & Hellekson, 2006; Busse, 2013; Coppa, 2008; Willis, 2006.
Crawford, 2012, p. 663), which I accomplished using qualitative data analysis software ATLAS.ti. The software allowed me to aggregate thousands of analyses at the level of the sentence or paragraph to get a big picture made up of those small, specific interpretations, like tiles in a mosaic. One key benefit is that the software allows a single piece of text to be classified in potentially infinite ways, allowing attention to how a given textual moment may work on multiple levels. I began by close reading the entire corpus of interview transcripts, web interface screenshots, Terms of Service documentation, news articles, and television, film, and DVD special features transcripts for themes both a) by starting from the three areas of inquiry I developed from my reading of the literature—consumption, labor, and fans as subjects—and b) with attention to unexpected commonalities that were emergent as I read. I then used Atlas to collect the themes that emerged from both ways of reading that had turned out to be relevant to, for example, “consumption” into a master grouping. Within that, I went through again to find themes that emerged with more focused analysis within that broad area. The themes that emerged in the second pass then became the building blocks of the specific arguments developed in each chapter. Importantly, like boyd and Crawford (2012, p. 667), I maintain an awareness that “the design decisions that determine what will be measured also stem from interpretation.”

Put into Deborah Eicher-Catt’s (2003) phenomenologically-derived terminology, I take seriously that my data (what is given) is always-already capta (what is taken).

Big Reading shares some characteristics of what Franco Moretti (2005) has called distant reading. As Moretti (2005, p. 4) notes in his discussion of literature, “A field this large cannot be understood by stitching together spare bits of knowledge about individual cases, because it isn’t a sum of individual cases: it's a collective system, that should be grasped as such, as a whole” (original emphasis). This grasping as a whole constitutes distant reading, “where distance is
however not an obstacle but a specific form of knowledge; fewer elements, hence a sharper sense of their overall interconnection” and their “shapes, relations, structures” (Moretti, 2005, p. 1, original emphasis). Close reading, by contrast, looks at the language, imagery, or other specifics of particular moments fans appear in the discursive archive for what these structures convey about the category. Big Reading zooms in and out between these two scales of analysis and allows two interventions. First, Orienting Fandom has a great deal of breadth, encompassing multiple types of source—fiction and nonfiction; speculative and sports; media industry workers, web design, and representation—across a long period (1994-2009). This allows the general understanding of the concept “fan” to emerge precisely through the accumulated commonalities across disparate locations. In this way, it usefully supplements work that looks only at what media industry workers say or that takes the fan insider view. Second, the project’s depth allows not simply taking the presence of fan characters, the term “fan,” or fan-associated practices such as video remix as the entire story, but instead uses close reading to explore on what terms such inclusion occurs.

The object of this Big Reading inquiry is to understand fandom as a discourse. Indeed, this is a particularly good way to approach discourse, which exists in and as quotidian micro-moments that reflect (and can be used to investigate) larger systems of which they are a part. Much as Mary Gray (2012) has argued about ethnographic data, this is a form of big data because of its pervasiveness, but also because any given data point in isolation seems insignificant and it is only through large-scale aggregation that they become useful. Through the accumulation of these individual data on that scale, it becomes possible to read back the discursive formation from which they arise. The mode of the examination, then, was to look for patterns between individual appearances of the concept “fan.” In this process, as Foucault (1972,
p. 29) tells us of discourse in general, it is vital to attend to the relations between statements (even if the author is unaware of them; even if the statements do not have the same author; even if the authors were unaware of each other’s existence); relations between groups of statements thus established (even if these groups do not concern the same, or even adjacent fields; even if they do not possess the same formal level; even if they are not the locus of assignable exchanges); [and] relations between statements and groups of statements and events of a quite different kind (technical, economic, social, political).

Taking commonalities seriously, the patterns illuminated by Big Reading emerge out of (and demonstrate) the underlying logic animating the turn toward fans, as demonstrated in web page layout, statements to news media, the visual layout of scenes, and all the rest. Rather than the apparent disjunctures, I focus on linkages, even if different people produced the specific concepts of the fan—even if the concepts were produced in what appears to be isolation from each other—with attention to larger technical, economic, social, and political structures like consumer capitalism or the contemporary tendency to seek the broadest possible intellectual property protection for corporations.

My inquiry is therefore related to the strand of cultural studies that argues that “how anything is represented is the means by which we think and feel about that thing, by which we apprehend it” (Dyer, 1997, p. xiii). By consuming media, such scholars say, we come to know about the world beyond the limitations of our personal experience (Gross, 2001 [1989]; Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, & Robert, 1978). As Isabel Molina-Guzmán (2010, p. 8) puts it, “Media practices produce dominant norms, values, beliefs, and public understandings.” I expand this thinking beyond representations of fans as characters to how the fan is constructed by web
interfaces and in the things industry workers say, but still seek to uncover what is in fact “cultural” and “historical” about what seems “natural” and “universal” (Fiske, 1988, p. 21), question the “what-goes-without-saying” (Barthes, 1972, p. 11), unravel social “assumptions” (Gross, 2001 [1989]; Hall et al., 1978), parse out how certain things come to be “common sense” (Collins, 2000; Fiske, 1988; Hebdige, 1981), and generally understand how reality is socially constructed (Hall, 2001 [1980]; Hartley, 1992; Williams, 2001 [1980]). The discursive construction of fandom as a concept matters because discourse creates reality: It is performative, such that when a statement is produced from within that regulated and authoritative space of the possible, the act of saying something makes it “true.” Chandan Reddy (2011, p. 165) describes the law as something that “organizes social and historical differences”; it is “not a dispassionate or disinterested space of records. Rather, it is the privileged ledger by which knowledge, idealized as dispassionate and disinterested,” is socially produced. I take discourse to function the same way in its own register. In Foucault’s (1972, p. 129) framing, what I examine is “the law of what can be said.”

With this atypical approach to data and analysis, my method in this inquiry can be understood as queer. Jasbir Puar (2007, p. xv) argues that “Queerness irreverently challenges a linear mode of conduction and transmission: there is no exact recipe for a queer endeavor, no a priori system that taxonomizes the linkages, disruptions, and contradictions into a tidy vessel.” My methodological approach is queer in the sense that it (productively) disrupts the norm of how one does research, disarticulating usual links and linking aspects usually kept separate—whether types of fans or methods of analysis. It is queer in the way Halberstam (1998, p. 10) describes, “because it attempts to remain supple enough to respond to various locations of information” at the same time that it “betrays a certain disloyalty to conventional disciplinary methods.” It is “a
scavenger methodology" that "attempts to combine methods that are often cast as being at odds with each other" (Halberstam, 1998, p. 13). The word “queer,” José Muñoz (1999, p. 31) reminds us, comes “from the German quer meaning ‘transverse,’” and Ahmed (2006, p. 102) further characterizes queer orientations as approaching the world “slantwise” to bring different things into view or reach than “straight” ones can. This improved vision is what I seek to accomplish by looking at fandom queerly. Through finding the relations this queer angle renders visible, it becomes possible to ask: “How is it that one particular statement appeared rather than another?” (Foucault, 1972, p. 27). What set of beliefs drive the media industry and are built into their relationships with fans? And, ultimately, what are the consequences of these media industry values and choices?

To answer these questions, this project conducts an analysis of the discourse of fandom as it has traveled across varied cultural locations in the U.S. between 1994, at the beginning of the mid-90s expansion of Internet access, and the start of research in 2009. In a practical sense, I examine three types of objects: representations, the design of official web sites, and the views held by media industry workers. These three discursive locations usefully supplement each other. Media industry worker statements, whether directly revealing their beliefs about fans or what they believe they should say about fans, equally help uncover industry “common sense” about fans. Web design, by contrast, illuminates how beliefs are enacted at the point of contact between the media industry and fans. For their part, film, television, and web series representations demonstrate how the media industry conceptualizes fans when not specifically holding fan attention and also what seems reasonable to say about fandom to general audiences. With these varied angles of vision, like ethnographic triangulation (Fetterman, 1998) a richer picture emerges. In the following three sections, I describe each body of texts that this project draws on
and the ways I examine them.

**Representation**

The representational archive for my study consists, first, of 90 audiovisual texts that were released between 1994 and 2009 either a) *about* speculative fiction or sports fans or b) *including* speculative fiction or sports fan characters. These include 48 films and 42 seasons of television shows; 81 fictional representations and nine nonfictional ones; 56 representations of speculative media fans and 34 for sports (13 football, 11 baseball, four basketball, three hockey, and one each for surfing, golf, and fictional sport BASEketball).\(^{30}\) The audiovisual archive was gathered from listings of characters called “fan” in the Internet Movie Database (www.IMDb.com), useful both as a mainstream clearinghouse popularly understood as comprehensive (thus delimiting what counts as relevant) and as editable by the media industry, whose stake in making information about their media products accessible contributes to actual comprehensiveness. I supplement this list with media objects discovered intertextually from the previews attached to texts found at IMDb as well as objects mentioned in the work of other scholars (Johnson, 2007; Scott, 2011) and that colleagues told me about personally. These diverse means of finding texts of interest make the archive as comprehensive as possible, but it is also unavoidably incomplete. However, in gathering all *well-known* sources that represent fans, I am able to access the main currents in thinking about fans in this period.

Historically, cinema and television have been examined by different scholarly traditions because they arose in different time periods and were situated in different contexts of production and reception. Instead, I consider film and TV texts concurrently and include short-form web series not traditionally examined by either field. I do so because I am less interested in the

\(^{30}\) See Appendix for a complete list of audiovisual objects.
aesthetics of the different media on their own terms than larger cultural understandings of the fan
eye illuminate. This combination of formats also rests on the fact that in the Internet era the
difference between these media is rapidly diminishing. Audiences can increasingly watch all
sorts of content on the same screen or screens (home TV, computer, mobile devices), shrinking
(with some help from digital production technologies) the traditional production value divide
between cinema and television. Moreover, the rise of heavily serialized TV and franchise films
allowing long narratives and web series, webisodes of TV series, and DVD extras as varying
sources of short narratives has steadily eroded the previous genre divide, such that increasingly
the medium does not determine the kinds of stories that can be told. The convergences apparent
with respect to reception and content are not as prevalent in terms of production, but TV and film
are increasingly hooked into the same circuits of corporate synergy, bringing some similarity
between the two media in this respect as well.

The archive gains further depth and breadth by including newspaper coverage of the
largest-scale events in these two fields of fandom. These are San Diego Comic-Con, one of the
largest annual speculative media conventions and one made more “official” by being heavily
attended and promoted by the media industry, and the Super Bowl, the annual U.S. football
championship. This archive comprises 1,088 Associated Press (AP) news stories from 1994 to
2009 retrieved from database LexisNexis, 675 for keyword “Super Bowl” and 413 for keyword
“Comic Con.” The AP, as a major source of news reports relied upon by broad swaths of the
U.S. press, was selected as the source to narrow down the archive from the unwieldy size all
coverage would incur while still getting at major trends in understandings of fans, as wire
services such as the AP tend to anchor the discussion of news topics.

Media images work both to define the categories represented and to define the relation
one ought to have to them—“simultaneously ordering objects for public inspection and ordering the public that inspect[s]” as Bennett (1995, p. 61) says museums do. Representation, then, both acts on fans’ own identities (as my previous research on Xena fans has shown, see Stanfill, 2013) and works to produce a sense of fandom at a remove from actual fans—either in nonfans or at moments when one precisely does not seek to learn about fans but encounters a particular vision of them anyway. Representations of fans, therefore, help produce the broad social meaning of fandom. Particularly, representations of fans often create a notion of “the fan” in the absence of any actual fans. As Jonathan Gray (2010, p. 52) has argued, paratexts such as movie trailers allow us to make sense of the texts they surround; "even in the many instances in which a trailer results in us resolving to never watch the film, clearly some form of interpretation, judgment, and understanding has occurred without the show" (original emphasis). Paratexts provide a useful model, particularly with Gray’s (2010, p. 79) further contention that “In the case of casual viewers, paratextual frames are likely to rise in importance, precisely because there is less countervailing textuality on offer from the film or television program itself to challenge the paratextual frames.” Representation, as an indirect mode of producing fandom, has the most impact when unchallenged by competing truths. That this production of fandom often happens without people being conscious of it should not be a reason to disregard it.

Web Design

My second type of source is the interfaces of ten official websites—five for speculative fiction and five for sports. These sites were selected using theoretical sampling: the companies behind them are known to be particularly controlling of their fans or particularly giving to them or their cultural position suggests they will provide particular insight. For speculative media, I examine the sites for Star Wars, whose creator, George Lucas, is notoriously controlling; the
2003 *Battlestar Galactica* reboot, whose executive producer, Ron Moore, is known for seeking to provide fans with lots of behind-the-scenes information; *Doctor Horrible’s Singalong Blog*, a project from fan-beloved auteur Joss Whedon; the cable channel SyFy, which does a lot with social media to get fans involved (such as inviting them to retweet announcements to get a prize); and *Star Trek*, indispensible as the most culturally mocked fan object. The sports sites are Purdue University, which integrated technology to improve their fans’ experience (Ault, Krogmeier, Dunlop, & Coyle, 2008); University of California, Berkeley, chosen as a second college athletic site to contrast with Purdue; the Seattle Mariners, who are reputationally fan-friendly and new media savvy; ESPN, which was early on the bandwagon of letting fans interact (Bryant & Holt, 2006), and Major League Soccer, a sports organization which came into being simultaneously with the Internet and is therefore net-native (Wilson, 2007). The specific websites have been chosen to include both "old" properties that were established before the advent of interactive media (such as *Star Trek* and the Seattle Mariners) and "new" properties with origins in the Internet era (such as the 2003 instantiation of *Battlestar Galactica* and Major League Soccer), to enrich the breadth of the method through the potential to find a range of continuities and discontinuities of industry logics across sites.

My project participates in a tradition of examining technology as not natural or inevitable progress but the product of social process. 31 This work takes as a premise that these socially constructed technologies render certain uses possible and not others, and accordingly it disputes the technology-brings-freedom narrative that recurs in media studies32 and especially fan

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31 In this tradition, see pieces such as: Friedman, 2005; Gillespie, 2007; Weizenbaum, 1976; Williams, 1975.

32 For example: Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013; Jenkins, 2006a; Lotz, 2007; Ross, 2009.
As television scholars Ouellette and Hay (2008) point out, the sense that new technological possibilities bring interactivity and put consumers in control was much touted when the remote control was introduced, such that this narrative has in fact been recycled for contemporary technologies and should be interrogated. Beyond this critique of the conflation of interactivity with freedom, this body of work also questions the assumption that the decentralized technology of the internet in particular is inherently liberating. This scholarship contends that, though democratization-narrative proponents are correct that “no one controls networks,” nevertheless “networks are controlled,” and as a consequence “it is foolish to fall back on the tired mantra of modern political movements, that distributed networks are liberating and centralized networks are oppressive,” because “the mere existence of this multiplicity of nodes in no way implies an inherently democratic, ecumenical, or egalitarian order” (Galloway & Thacker, 2007, pp. 39, 13). Instead of assuming that these new technologies facilitate democracy, we have to examine what kind of system interactive, networked technologies actually produce.

Thus, I parse out how particular assumptions are built into websites and reinforced by the shape of interfaces as “normative” or “correct” or the path of least resistance though, like all norms, not deterministically guaranteed in the moment of the actual encounter with a user. While others have done this sort of work, my project provides a new method for how one goes about examining interfaces: discursive interface analysis. I investigate what types of norms are produced through the "affordances" of websites—defined by H. Rex Hartson (2003, p. 316) as what a site "offers the user, what it provides or furnishes" (emphasis in original). Accordingly, discursive interface analysis examines the affordances of websites for their inbuilt assumptions

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33 Scholars who make this argument include: Baym, 2007; Bielby, Harrington, & Bielby, 1999; Hanmer, 2003; Tosenberger, 2008.
about their own purpose and appropriate use. This approach builds on the foundational work of Donald Norman (2002), who identifies “good” design as making it so that objects can only be operated in the intended manner and “bad” design as rendering users unable to understand or operate the designed object. Rotating this premise somewhat, analyzing design allows one to see the intended manner of operation for an object. This approach resembles that taken by Lucas Graves (2007), who considers the ways in which blog platform affordances facilitate journalistic uses, or Wellman et al.’s (2003) examination of how affordances like higher bandwidth, personalization, and constant, global, and wireless connectivities make the contemporary web particularly suited for social use.

In terms of interfaces more specifically, the current project has a kinship with the work of Michele Dickey (2005), who considers how properties of different 3D interactive environments facilitate learning, or Carmen Lee’s (2007) analysis of the ways properties of Instant Messaging interfaces encourage particular linguistic choices among bilingual users. The instantiations most similar to the method proposed here are the work of Lisa Nakamura (2008) and Michele White (2006), who both consider interfaces as they structure users and knowledge about categories and belonging. I build on these important contributions by expanding this kind of thinking to include the structures of race (Nakamura, 2008) and gender (White, 2006) as (vital) factors in a broader theory of the social structuration of media technology that makes Foucault’s insights central and focuses on questions of normativity rather than control. In other words, I examine the places the interfaces say “yes” and not just “no.”

This mode of inquiry goes beyond the more familiar analysis of affordances in terms of function, examining what is possible on these sites in a broad sense—I ask what features sites have, but also which categories of use sites foreground, how they are explained, and the ways in
which uses that may be technically *possible* are rendered more or less *normative*. Due to the concept’s origins in ecological psychology (Gibson, 1977), affordances tend to be thought of in a literal or utilitarian sense—e.g., this branch affords increased reach for the squirrel that stands on it—but the term also provides leverage in these sorts of less concrete deployments. Finding the patterns in these design elements works to unravel the cultural common sense about what fans users do, which, by being built into the technology, becomes a normative claim about what they *should* do. In this way, the interface works to "configure the user" (Hutchby, 2001, p. 451)—at least as an ideal. The contention that communication technologies construct their own proper use does not constitute a form of technological determinism, however; though affordances "do set limits on what it is *possible* to do with, around, or via the artefact," how a user responds to the "range of affordances for action and interaction that a technology presents" is not predetermined (Hutchby, 2001, p. 453). The capacity to parse out such distinctions is the value of considering norms. Hartson (2003) identifies four types of affordances: cognitive, physical, sensory, and functional. In examining virtual interfaces on the web, physical affordance becomes a less applicable concept, leaving "functional affordance," what a site can *actually* do; "cognitive affordance," which lets users *know* what a site can do; and "sensory affordance," which "enables the user in sensing (e.g., seeing, hearing, feeling) something" (Hartson, 2003, p. 322, emphasis removed).

The functional affordance is what people tend to generally think of as an affordance—quite basically, what functionality does this site have? What can you do with it? Thus, for example, does a site have video? If so, can you download a copy? Importantly, this question does not rest on a claim that the media technology determines the use entirely, as in the video example the clip can be moved around at will if a user has the tools and knowledge to crack the encoding.
on a non-downloadable format such as Flash. Instead, my approach identifies the important aspect as the fact that the affordances provided on the site as produced permit coloring inside these particular lines, making that use easy and normative. Thus, though functional affordances may seem the least discursive, they produce norms as much as any other feature. Allowing users to do this and not that makes an implicit claim that “You ought to do this and not that.”

Beyond pure functionality, websites also produce norms with two other types of affordances, cognitive and sensory. These arise in aspects like menu labels, how easily one can tell what a feature does (and distinguish it from other features), and which features are easier or harder to locate due to their position on the page or how noticeable they are (Hartson, 2003). A cognitive affordance lets the user decide whether to take an action. Hartson uses the example of the label on a button. The discursive nature is clearer here: Cognitive affordances facilitate understanding, thinking, and processing information, which are closely tied to meaning-making and easily understood as doing social and normative work. This sort of affordance can be seen in issues of language, naming, labeling, and/or site taglines and self-descriptions.

Building upon Louis Althusser’s (1971) notion of interpellation, which used the example of a police hail—‘Hey, you there!’—as a moment when the state addresses an individual as a (guilty) subject, cognitive affordances are also those that address particular types of people as site users. In Althusser’s original framework, the subject was hailed as guilty, but the concept can be transposed to illuminate the relationship between being (literally or figuratively) hailed as a member of any given category and a sense of recognition that you are the intended target. Interpellation is a quotidian occurrence in moments that demonstrate that something is intended (or not intended) for you or someone like you (Sandell, 1997). This process of addressing a particular type of user through design can be seen, for example, when a membership signup form
defaults to “male” (White, 2006) or indeed when such a form a) has a required entry for sex that b) has exactly two options (Brookey & Cannon, 2009), cognitively affording a particular understanding of what kind of people most belong at the site—in this example, people of particular sexes. Similarly, a site may hail users as particular types of people: Having a section for “Fans” at the Seattle Mariners’ site indicates and reinforces an understanding that “fan” is a term with which people who use the site (should) identify.

Last but not least, there is the sensory affordance, which requires that analysis pay attention to questions of visibility, legibility, and/or audibility. Hartson (2003) uses the example of the font size on a button, and we can also think here about having moving, Flash-based advertisements rather than still ones or a unified color scheme as opposed to colorful ads. The principles of “good design” require that a site have a unified interface, “clean” rather than “tacky” or “busy” (Nakamura, 2008), whereas the imperatives of commercialization encourage the use of banner ads that often rely on color and/or motion to catch attention and prompt click-through. How a site negotiates the contradictory imperatives of design and economics through its sensory affordances, then, reflects and reinforces a set of beliefs about the site’s purpose and what users (should) care about. Another key issue is page placement, where occupying space at the top or left makes something more visible (for readers of these English-language sites) than placing it lower or on the right. Hartson (2003, p. 325) borrows newspaper layout terminology to argue that what is "below the fold"—what cannot be seen when a webpage initially loads without scrolling—is easy to overlook. Reversing this statement demonstrates that aspects “above the fold” acquire more visibility and weight from that placement. Importantly, though of course not every user will have the same “fold,” items near the top and left provide a useful proxy for what the site considers important. The relevance of “above the fold” to design decisions can be seen
from the fact that Google Analytics provides a “browser size” tool to let site administrators check what is visible on their site for what percentage of their users (Yahas, 2012). Here again, sensory affordances may seem more “objective” and less able to carry the force of norms, but putting something at the top or making it highly visible through design choices apportions scarce screen real estate and attention in a way that both reflects and reinforces assumptions and valuations around site use and users.

Accordingly, when analyzing website interfaces, I ask: On official websites, what does web design construct as the ideal use and ideal user? What do you see on the screen when it first loads? What links are readily available? What does it allow users to produce? What does it allow them to consume? What kinds of input does it allow or solicit? Does it explicitly mention fans? If so, how? What overall beliefs about fans do such features show? Through this analysis, I interrogate what site owners build into their site as the norm for fan interaction.

Industry Workers

My third set of sources is both conducting my own interviews with media industry workers and examining statements by workers in publicly available sources. I interviewed marketing professionals in charge of interaction with fans at two sites, one for speculative media and one for sports. First, I conducted three interviews with the creative staff at transmedia marketing agency Campfire in New York, NY. As Campfire is a small firm, these three workers constitute everyone in charge of decisions around their production of content for fans. Campfire describes itself on its website as "a marketing agency that launches products and changes perceptions through storytelling. We ignite the influencers, fan cultures and communities that drive results for our clients." Various members of the Campfire staff have been involved in producing transmedia content for speculative media properties such as the independent film Blair
**Witch Project** and the HBO series *Game of Thrones* and *True Blood*. My second site is the athletics marketing department at a large public university in the U.S. Midwest that I’ll call BMU, for “Big Midwestern University,” where I interviewed three current and former workers. BMU has over 30,000 undergraduate students and over 20 intercollegiate athletics teams operating on a budget of $60-70 million, with a dozen employees in the marketing and media departments alone.

Additionally, I examine the statements made by media industry workers (writers, producers, directors, actors, etc.) about fans and audiences in news stories, web documents, and any bonus materials included on the DVD releases examined for the representation method. This last source provides particular insight because of the capacity to put the statements of the creators of particular objects alongside the objects themselves. However, conversely something may be lost, since when media industry workers record commentaries there is often an awareness, as reflected in the use of the second person “you” to refer to fans, that fans are who is listening, which may reduce the incidence of negative comments—although such awareness is not universal, and criticism of fans does still appear.

In the selection of which workers’ statements to consider, I was constrained with respect to access. I spoke with the particular workers, at the particular sites, that were willing to talk to me and I collected statements from people who happened to have spoken publicly. Campfire was selected because I had an opportunity to meet executive Mike at a conference and thus had a point of entry; I selected a university athletics department because the academic mission of the university as a whole made it more likely that they would agree to assist with research. Though power has nodes, and it’s not the case that any point of entry is equally good, I ultimately did not

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34 While Campfire workers were all happy to have their real names used, BMU employees asked to have their identities and workplace pseudonymized.
have complete freedom to choose how and where I intervened when it came to the media
industry workers. Analysis of this area of discourse inquired about the strategies workers used to
court fandom and how they talked about fans in order to examine who fans are imagined to be,
what they are imagined to do, and what organizations want their fans to do or not do.

In turning to the media industry to examine fandom, I to some degree participate in the
tradition of examining how structural changes in technology (Lotz, 2007; S. M. Ross, 2009) and
law (Olson, 2012; Vaidhyanathan, 2003) have impacted media, though in addition to these
structures I also interrogate systems such as heteronormativity these scholars do not consider.
Moreover, this project shares a kinship with ethnographic studies of media work processes in
that I look at the statements of workers as a key source of information about the media industry
(N. S. Cohen, 2012; Deuze, 2007; Gregg, 2011). Finally, I work in the orbit of analyses done on
the values or beliefs held by media workers, whether related to economics and the commercial
(J. E. Campbell, 2011; Lotz, 2007), or what constitutes justice for workers (Fish & Srinivasan,
2012; Rodino-Colocino, 2012). Through this analysis, I trace the media industry logics that
animate the discursive production of fandom.

This project contributes to making sense of the shifting relationship between fans and
media since the Internet began to be widely available in the mid-1990s. To parse out the
constitution and consequences of the concept of fandom in circulation in popular culture in the
period I examine, I consider a series of interrelated questions: How do these various sources
construct cultural common sense about what it means to be a fan? How are fans understood to
behave under this logic? What kinds of gendered and raced bodies are imagined to occupy the
position of fans? Through these questions, I am able to demonstrate the conflicting aspects of the
figure of the fan in the Internet era. I argue that, while the figure of the fan has proliferated
throughout the mediascape in some senses, attending to the way this presence is described and
indeed circumscribed demonstrates the fundamental, intractable limitations of achieving
(apparent) normativity in a structurally unequal media system.

Road Map

This project is organized around three themes: consumption (Chapters 2 and 3), labor
(Chapters 4 and 5), and fan subjects (Chapters 6 and 7). Each chapter draws promiscuously from
across the archive of fictional and nonfictional representations of fans, the policies and structures
of the official websites, and statements made by media industry workers. By considering these
different sources simultaneously as aspects of a single system, rather than organizing this project
as case studies, I am able to get at the structure of contemporary norms of fandom. My deliberate
mixing of discursive registers enables the big picture of the orientation of fandom to emerge
from the commonalities across the details of these disparate locations at the same time that the
specificity of particular appearances of the concept “fan” grounds the analysis.

Chapter two, “Consumption and the Management of Desire,” parses the varieties of
audience consumption considered normative in the contemporary era. Foundationally, we have
what I call Consumption 1.0: consuming the object of fandom itself—whether watching in
person or via media, whether paid or free. Contemporary fandom also normatively includes the
expansive mode of ancillary consumption around the main object like concessions or travel or
the acquisition of merchandise. This sub-consumption, termed Consumption 0.5, is seen as
supplementary and supporting the “main” experience rather than able to stand alone. The norm
further expects and recruits fans to consume licensed or franchised extensions of an object of fandom in Consumption 1.5. Indeed, it’s nearly obligatory to describe this normalization in passive voice, as no particular actors do these things, but the construction of such a norm nevertheless occurs through accreted, seemingly disparate decisions. All three of these modes are at once constructed as essential fan desires and actively encouraged, demonstrating the way the industry-fan relationship works through managing desire. These constructions of normative consumption, I argue, fundamentally tie fandom’s desire to consumptive modes.

The third chapter, “Consumption 2.0: Transmedia, Reactivity, and the Specter of Excess,” contends that while transmedia, premised on a particular interactivity, initially appears to differ substantially from pre-Internet modes of consumption, upon further investigation it is both new and old and thus usefully understood as Consumption 2.0. The consumptive nature of transmedia is most visible when a fan’s ability to access the expansive information requires further purchases, but even when additional content is free of charge transmedia ultimately acts to corral fan desire into consumptive activity. The forms of interactivity provided in transmedia are often of the “point and click and be entertained” variety. Contemporary media industry approaches to fans undoubtedly recruit and desire fan desire, but in the form of reaction, working to domesticate and reorient fan desire into manageable forms. This structure therefore troubles ideas that being courted by the media industry empowers fans in the post-web era—to be the ideal consumer is still to be distinguished from a contributor.

Fans are actually incited to take action, however, as they are both assumed and recruited to do what I contend is labor in the contemporary era. In “Fandom and/as Labor,” Chapter 4, I analyze the way fans are asked to work. First, they labor as the audience commodity by watching the ads that support their “free” media, generating direct monetary value for the media industry
through ad sales. Fans also produce value by means of the data trade in which knowledge about user activity has value as a data commodity. The norm expects and invites fans to work to make themselves seen and known—to work by being watched. Fans are even recruited to produce the very incitement to participate intended to get them to show up to do all of this other work, making their own “free lunch.” Moreover, fans normatively do promotional, word-of-mouth work to increase the awareness of and interest in the object of fandom. Fan work also contributes to producing the media objects themselves. Last but not least, the norm assumes and encourages fans to do what I call “loverbor”—the work of loving and demonstrating love that generates a more intangible sort of value for the media industry. What all of these forms of normative and recruited activity have in common is that the media industry extracts surplus value from them.

The fifth chapter, “Enclosing Fandom: Labors of Love, Exploitation, and Consent,” grapples with the key challenge of the labor model: Fan work often seems not to be labor because fans do it out of love. Thus, seemingly fans don’t require payment because they engage out of enjoyment—or because fandom is understood as anticapitalist and resistant to market exchange logics. I consider such arguments insufficiently structural, inattentive to both the unequal playing field on which fans make such choices and the ways in which conducting fandom on the media industry’s terms fundamentally differs from a fandom by and for fans. I argue that fan labor can only be made sense of against the background of labor-cost reduction on the media industry’s part and rejection of capitalist projects by many fans, which together produce perfect conditions for exploiting fan labor. Given the low level of awareness of the full implications of fan activity and the structural coercions involved, I argue that fan willingness to participate cannot be taken as a meaningful form of consent to these forms of labor and value extraction. Ultimately, I articulate a theory of the contemporary media industry embrace of
fandom as a form of enclosure of the commons of fandom that turns fans into a workforce for media industry ends, calling for greater attention to how the benefits of fan work are distributed.

Reorienting the inquiry to look at how fans are conceptualized as a population and not simply as a set of normative practices is the goal of the sixth and seventh chapters. Chapter 6, entitled “Fandom’s Normativity: Assuming and Recruiting the Socially Dominant Fan Subject,” considers which historical subjects are recruited into the norm. It demonstrates that white bodies numerically dominate visual representations of fans, which combines with the refusal of industry, fandom, and scholars alike to consider race except as racism and the marginalization of fans of color to entrench fandom as white. Moreover, men are the normative fans represented, and practices disproportionately done by men are the ones invited, with women both indirectly marginalized and at times directly classified as not proper fans at all, constructing fandom as “rightfully” belonging to men. Fandom has also been articulated to normativity through being deemed appropriate for all ages. Overall, examination of fans as subjects shows the association of “fan” with dominant social categories, which both gives fandom the benefit of that normativity and inevitably shifts off the former marginality of the category “fan” onto less socially powerful subjects.

The penultimate chapter, “The Fandom Menace: Failed Masculinity, Maturity, Heterosexuality, and Whiteness,” examines the ways that, at other times, representations of fans appear opposite to Chapter 6. While on one hand fandom is constructed as an activity done by socially-dominant groups, on the other conceptualizations persist of fandom as involving failed masculinity and failed whiteness because it is a site of failed adulthood and heterosexuality, recapitulating the same stereotypes that the Internet and the media industry’s embrace of fandom have supposedly rendered past. What is new in the contemporary era is that failed masculinity
now comes along with a path to redemption for white male fan bodies. I argue that this redemption trajectory works both to reinforce the cultural commonsense of privilege as a "natural" property of white, heterosexual masculinity and to produce fandom as white, and thus rearticulates fandom to dominance despite the seeming marginalization with which these narrative trajectories start.

Finally, Chapter 8, “Conclusion: Owning Fandom, Owing Fandom,” examines the other side of the fan-industry relationship. While the main trajectory of the relationship is undoubtedly toward managing and controlling fans, there are moments when media industry workers reveal a more complicated and contradictory set of attitudes and beliefs around the figure of the fan. At times, media industry workers orient themselves toward prioritizing fans’ desires over financial considerations or their own wishes for their properties or express a sense of owing fans something for their loyalty. In particular, the figures of the (white, boy) child as a worthy fan to whom the media industry has a responsibility, the rude, unsympathetic celebrity who takes fans for granted, and the fan hero mobilize the notion that fans matter. I put this pro-fan tendency into conversation with the overall thrust toward inciting fans to comply with media industry desires explored in the previous chapters to consider what potential there may be for decentralized information technologies in the Internet era to actually increase participation in media by those who have formerly been excluded.
Chapter 2
Consumption and the Management of Desire

Consumption is expected or obvious for fans. As sports scholar Garry Crawford (2004, p. 34) puts it, "Being a fan most often (and increasingly) is associated with consuming."

Consumption’s centrality to contemporary norms of fandom can be seen from the fact that each of the ten websites in my archive has at minimum the opportunity to buy something, and nine of the ten have an on-site store. A montage of merchandise or a panning shot across piled-up goods either in fans’ homes or at conventions is a standard establishing shot, and verbal catalogues of collections similarly establish individuals as fans. These patterns are remarkably consistent in fictional, news, and documentary representations of fans. Thus, consumption would seem to be necessarily at the center of any inquiry, not least because the bare minimum standard of being a fan is enjoying the action of consuming the television show, sport, or other object of fandom.

Certainly, Crawford (2004, p. 113) contends that "The activities of fans and fan cultures are principally constructed around consumer activities." More dramatically, both Matt Hills (2002) and Cornel Sandvoss (2005) define being a fan specifically as consistent, affectively charged consumption of the object of fandom. However, these scholars are in the minority among sports or media studies scholars in this consumption framing for fandom due to a preference in both fields for considering fans active and productive.

Nevertheless, the process by which desire becomes socially transformed into a “need” to be satisfied by consumption animates capitalism in general and mass-mediated fandom in particular, such that it has to be part of analyzing the contemporary normalization of the fan. Moreover, the long history of management and education of desire, both broadly and in the context of consumption, provides a useful lens to understand fans in this context. Despite the
obviousness that attends fan consumption, then—or, perhaps, because of it—it is important to rigorously examine what kinds of consumption appear in the discourse of fandom, since the normativity of consumption is a considerably more complex question than it may initially seem. This chapter probes the archive of fictional and nonfictional representations of fans from 1994-2009, the structures of official websites for media properties (films, sports franchises, etc.), and statements made by industry practitioners who produce content for fans to see how consumption functions in the discursive production of fandom. I trace the figure of the fan across these multiple types of source, deliberately blurring their boundaries, zooming in to examine how the concepts appear and out to see broad structures. In so doing, I allow the ways consumption articulates to the concept “fan” to emerge precisely through the accumulated commonalities across these disparate locations in what kinds of consumption appear and with what valuations, producing insight not available from other methods. I begin the analysis by making a case for the relevance of consumption and discussing the way certain intellectual investments have caused it to be marginalized to this point. The chapter then proposes a model for understanding the management of desire in fandom. I follow this discussion with a taxonomy of the varieties of consumption that existed before the web and remain normative today, parsing out how they function. Ultimately, I demonstrate how selective forms of consumption are both framed as essential fan desires and actively facilitated, working to normalize modes of engagement that benefit industry.

Re-centering Consumption and Desire

Why (Not) Consumption?

Consumption is, oddly enough, not a term that appears very often in academic
discussions of audiences in general or fans in particular. Indeed, when fan or audience scholars do discuss consumption it is generally to declare the distinction between producer and consumer outdated. This is not a neutral intermingling of the two, however, but rather a focus on how consumers have become producers, reducing all interaction with media to production and removing consumption from the scene altogether. This emphasis on production has been particularly prominent after the rise of the Internet due to increased technological production capacity available to everyday people,¹ but the idea that consumption is always-already production was suggested considerably before the advent of user-generated content or even the web by de Certeau (1984).

There were, of course, excellent reasons to eschew a consumption framing at the dawn of fan studies. Outside fan communities (and fan studies), ans were traditionally understood as uncontrolled, bad consumers. Under the hierarchy of consumed objects and the people who consume them described in different ways by both Horkheimer and Adorno (2001 [1944]) and Pierre Bourdieu (1984), fans were considered substandard. Henry Jenkins (1992, p. 16), drawing on Bourdieu, argued in his early work that “taste distinctions determine not only desirable and undesirable forms of culture but also desirable and undesirable ways of relating to cultural objects, desirable and undesirable strategies of interpretation and styles of consumption.” Fans were traditionally understood to operate outside “taste” in their consumption of and relationship to the object of fandom—though Jenkins (1992, p. 53) also noted that the same kinds of close attention and repeated consumption classified as excessive when done with television are completely acceptable with high culture texts. In addition to being seen as too intensive in their consumption, fans have also been seen as consuming too extensively, stereotyped as “brainless

¹ See, for example, Arvidsson, 2005; Beer & Burrows, 2010; McCracken, 2013; S. M. Ross, 2009.
consumers who will buy anything associated with the program or its cast” (Jenkins, 1992, p. 10). Such a view also persists into more contemporary visions of fans, with Derek Johnson (2007, pp. 285–6) describing a conceptualization of fans as "undisciplined consumers amassing trivial knowledge and possessions."

Resistance to these stereotypes produced an uneasy relationship between fandom and consumption that was compounded by the fact that consumption itself has been traditionally marginalized as an area of inquiry. Consumption is seen as related to waste or destruction rather than creation, as natural (Baudrillard, 2000; C. Campbell, 2000), personal or private (Baudrillard, 2000; Sandlin & Maudlin, 2012), irrational or emotional, and feminine (Hebdige, 2000; Sandlin & Maudlin, 2012; Veblen, 2000). Most of these associations might lead to consumption seeming unworthy of study given their devalued cultural status, and in combination they make a powerful discouragement. If we see these negative cultural associations as traces of inequality, however, we can take seriously consumption’s importance as a social phenomenon.

These negative associations also shape the position of consumption with respect to fandom and media in particular. An essential part of the process by which “‘good’ fan audiences are constructed against [ . . . ] the ‘bad’ consumer” (Hills, 2002, p. 27) is gender. Crawford (2004, p. 34) contends that at least part of the rejection of consumption comes from male scholars’ desire to secure the status of their own “masculine” behaviors against modes of fandom that “tend to be deemed as more ‘feminine’ and hence less ‘resistant’ and ‘authentic.’” The argument that consumption is a feminized practice is not new, having been made by Thorstein Veblen

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2 Scholars who make this argument include: Arvidsson, 2005; C. Campbell, 2000; Jenkins et al., 2013; Sandlin & Maudlin, 2012.
3 This position is taken by work such as: Campbell, 2000; Hebdige, 2000; Rafferty, 2011; Sandlin & Maudlin, 2012.
4 Indeed, the way these associated concepts relate to each other overdetermines consumption as illegitimate; see Figure 1 at the end of this chapter.
(2000) in 1899 and Dick Hebdige (2000) in 1988, but the gendered valences of “serious, resistant, and/or productive” fandom nevertheless seem to escape those who valorize them. Lynn Spigel (1992, p. 61) has argued in general that “Culture critics have often expressed their disdain for mass media in language that evokes contempt for those qualities that patriarchal societies ascribe to femininity. Thus, mass amusements are typically thought to encourage passivity, and they have frequently been represented in terms of penetration, consumption, and escape.” Re-centering this constellation of the devalued on consumption, it is clear how, as a form of taking culture in, consumption easily picks up associations with passivity and penetration—concepts themselves devalued as feminine.

Another key factor in consumption’s absence from the conversation is that part of cultural studies’ increased attention to reception was the result of scholars’ resistance to the passive consumption model that a focus on ownership or media effects assumed. To some extent, the active audience argument made consumption, already articulated to passivity, a taboo topic in cultural studies even as reception, common-sensically a process of consumption, was centered in the discussion. This attitude led to a disarticulation of reception from consumption, a distinction picked up in fan studies also. Hills (2002, pp. 27, 29) describes a widespread reluctance to call fans consumers, noting that this hesitancy has led to valuing production over consumption, as when scholars such as Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst (1998) valorize and prioritize fan practices that move toward professionalization. Hills (2002, p. 30) notes much the same impulse in John Fiske’s (1992) articulation of “‘semiotic’ and ‘enunciative’ productivity, in which reading a text and talking about it become cases of ‘productivity.’” Correspondingly, sports studies has a strong anti-consumerist streak whose proponents make arguments like Richard Giulianotti’s (2005) that the shift from “fans” to “customers” has fundamentally altered
the relationship to the team—for the worse. This tradition has a generally strict rejection of commodified sports as inauthentic. From their different angles, then, both of these modes of scholarship demonstrate a sort of horror of consumption.

However, if we take a queerer stance toward consumption as pleasure and take this aspect seriously, it becomes evident that desire is in fact "a vital axis of the architectures that span fandom and capitalism" (Russo, 2010, p. 28). This desire is reciprocal, but uneven, disjointed, triangular if not some other polygon. Industry desires (some) fans. Fans desire the object of fandom. As the nonparallel terms already suggest, these desires are often poorly aligned. Industry desires fans—they desire fans’ desire. Wanting fans to want them is fundamental to the speculative media or sports business model, but as the language of desired audiences or demographics indicates, the recruitment of fan desire has limits (Hills, 2002; Jenkins et al., 2013; Scott, 2011). Indeed, Jenkins, Ford, and Green (2013, p. 129) raise the possibility that the “surplus,” undesired audience can be detrimental if it outnumbers the preferred one. Thus, Jenkins’s (1992, p. 15) earlier contention that fans cause “dread and desire” on the part of industry remains relevant even as the fan is no longer automatically assumed to be a stalker or killer.

Fans also desire in more directions than straight lines, for they desire the object of fandom (the text or team), for which the industry is a (potentially obstructionist) purveyor. Fan studies has clearly articulated how fandom is a space of specifically sexual desire, whether fans’ desire for the object of fandom (Coppa, 2008, 2009; Green et al., 1998; Jensen, 1992) or fans using the object of fandom, fan community, or fan practices to work through their own desires or identity.\(^5\) Though these desiring practices and subjectivities are often framed as liberatory, there

is some recognition that they sometimes reproduce normative forms of desire under non-normative guises (Flegel & Roth, 2010; Scodari, 2012). I build from this line of inquiry to stake a claim to the importance of desire to fandom more expansively than the forms these authors have addressed. The simultaneous mutuality and misalignment of fan and industry desires is longstanding, but only in the Internet era has industry undertaken large-scale work to bring them into congruence. Jenkins (2006a, p. 62) writes of action to “mold those consumer desires to shape purchasing decisions.” Ross (2009, p. 219), while focusing on the desire to participate, gestures toward the relationship that interests me when she uses the language of stimulating, managing, and even partially creating desire and discusses industry “seeking to match viewers’ desires with their own.” I conceptualize industry’s work of alignment as the management of desire.

**The Management of Desire**

The idea that desire does not inherently slot neatly into orderly relations of consumption, that it might, if left unmanaged, flow in directions not considered normative or productive, has a long history. Sigmund Freud (1995 [1924], p. 247) classified perversions as cases when desire was anatomically misaligned vis-à-vis the norm or lingered too long rather than getting on with “the final sexual aim,” and a similar spatial or temporal non-normativity of desire similarly animates fan divergence from industry desire. This unruliness—or this fear of unruliness—has historically given rise to management strategies such as the command ventriloquized by Michel Foucault (1990, p. 21): “You will seek to transform your desire, your every desire, into discourse” or what Ann Laura Stoler (1995) termed “the education of desire” in the colonial context she examined. In the more specific context of consumption, Colin Campbell (2000)

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6 I’ll return to this non-normative sexual directionality in Chapter 7 to consider fandom as a sexual orientation.
argues that the biological drive for food and shelter could be met with any number of things, whereas under a consumption regime desire generally attaches to a specific object, the mark of social shaping. Thus, Jean Baudrillard (2000, p. 20) notes that “Use value—indeed utility itself—is a fetishized social relation.” The inescapably social condition of consumption therefore merits attention (Douglas & Isherwood, 2000; M. M. Willis & Schor, 2012). Campbell (2000) identifies the idea that consumers are inherently insatiable as a distinctly modern ideological phenomenon and not a transhistoric desire newly practicable in the era of mass production. Thus, it is vital to take seriously that “Consumer culture also produces consumers [. . .] in a variety of ways” (Sassatelli, 2007, p. 6, original emphasis).

The historical processes by which consumption was taught and people came to be understood as—and understand themselves as—consumers provide important precedents for the kind of desire management that occurs with fans in the Internet era. Kevin Floyd (2009, p. 35) notes that “Unprecedented corporate and governmental efforts to manage social demand—to socialize a national population into a consumption norm—have been one of the defining characteristics of capitalism as it has developed in the United States since the early twentieth century.” Adam Arvidsson (2005, p. 243) similarly writes of “modern, or Fordist[,] marketing,” in which “the intent was to discipline consumers, and to educate or ‘rationalise’ their tastes and desires” (original emphasis). As Hebdige (2000, p. 139) points out, mass producing a new product is so expensive that the only sane thing to do is prepare consumers as carefully as any other component of the process; “corporate viability was seen to rely increasingly on the regulation of desire.” Certainly, Spigel’s (1992) cultural history of television demonstrates that the medium was often used to teach people what to buy and how. Thus, it is important to recognize that new attention to fan desires and the appeal to them as an emerging market
replicates much the same pattern Alexandra Chasin (2000) identifies as having occurred with groups such as women, African Americans, and gays and lesbians as they became seen as legitimate citizen-consumers.

Given this relationship of fandom to pleasure to desire to consumption, then, it becomes necessary to ask how industry acts to incite, recruit, and manage fan desire. Consumption is conspicuously scarce in fan studies, and an examination is overdue, particularly given that technological change has increased the unruliness of media consumption (H.-K. Lee, 2011; Russo, 2010). By the idea that fans are incited or managed in their consumption, I do not reference what Nitin Govil (2004, p. 382) contends is the way Digital Rights Management technologies work to “determine the appropriate consumption of the media commodity by inscribing the logic of proper use in the information good itself” or Arvidsson’s (2005, p. 245) discussion of “making the object resist certain uses, and invite others,” though clearly these also happen. Instead, my point here resembles Jenkins’s (2006a, pp. 72–3) argument that “Some [companies] have learned that such [active] consumers can be allies, but many still fear and distrust them, seeking ways to harness this emerging power toward their own ends” or Laurie Ouellette and James Hay’s (2008, p. 114) contention that contemporary media formations encourage “rational” shopping and correct or controlled consumption. The process can be understood on analogy with moving consumers into legitimated forms of consumption instead of piracy (Edwards, Klein, Lee, Moss, & Philip, 2013; Jewitt & Yar, 2013) as a form of active management and education instigated by industry.

By contrast to the framing of fandom as always-already productive and the general disregard of questions of desire, here I make the opposite move, to expand the conceptual framework of consumption to areas typically not considered such. This shift resembles
Crawford’s (2004) rejection of the dichotomy between “traditional” versus “consumer” sports fans, in which he argues that fan consumption should be considered in the context of other forms of consumption and that consumption should not take a secondary and incidental place in favor of considering only production. Though in some ways an equal and opposite step to the blanket insistence on production, it is strategically so rather than a corresponding ground-clearing gesture: I undertake a deliberate, analytic reorientation to see what explanatory power consumption brings to bear on contemporary formulations of fandom. Thus, though the management of desire is not unique to fans, I ask how it is instantiated in this particular case and with what implications.

**Promiscuous Consumption and the Paratextual Orientation**

The more expansive notion of consumption proposed here requires looking from a slightly different angle than is typical. Jonathan Gray’s (2010) theorization of the paratext in the context of media usefully illuminates the relationships between various modes of engagement with objects of fandom, and I use it to put ancillary, seemingly unrelated consumption, licensed merchandise, and transmedia storytelling into conversation with more evident forms of consumption like buying or watching. Gray (2010, pp. 6, 4) identifies paratexts as both "distinct from" and "intrinsically part of" the text, and calls for an “off-screen studies' to make sense of the wealth of other entities that saturate the media, and that construct film and television." This approach requires more promiscuity in the definition of consumption, but the inclusivity provides analytic leverage, "for while purists may stomp their feet and insist that the game, bonus materials, or promos, for instance, ‘aren't the real thing,’” this field of things nevertheless acts to "establish frames and filters through which we look at, listen to, and interpret" the
ostensible “real thing,” and thus is entirely relevant to the overall phenomenon (J. Gray, 2010, pp. 2, 3).

In the following sections, I elaborate the first three components of a tetrapartite taxonomy of the forms of consumption recruited from and normalized for fans. I begin with what I call Consumption 1.0—consuming the object of fandom itself, whether watching in person or via media, whether paid or free, demonstrating a consistent norm of basic consumption of the object of fandom itself. I then examine Consumption 0.5, or sub-consumption, encompassing consumption around the main object like concessions or travel or the acquisition of swag seen as supplementary and supporting the “main” experience rather than able to stand alone. Third, I describe Consumption 1.5, licensing, which can expand beyond 1.0 and stand alone, but still maintains the “original” object as the core. The fourth type in the taxonomy is Consumption 2.0, transmedia and interactivity, and because it is a dramatic change I will pick it up in Chapter 3. Throughout, I de-emphasize difference on the basis of buying in order to see the ways both paid and unpaid activities have structural commonalities as modes of consumption, understood broadly as taking in something related to fandom.

90% of Success is Showing Up: Attendance, Eyeballs, and Consumption 1.0

In the discursive construction of fandom there is a consistent norm of basic consumption of the object of fandom itself, whether watching in person or via media, whether paid or free. Perhaps the most obvious way fans are articulated to consumption is the norm of showing up to events. Primarily this norm takes the form of sports fans attending games, something all three of the sports industry workers I interviewed stressed as central to their jobs. My sports informants not only consistently identified media as only a means to get people to attend in person and omitted reference to media-enabled consumption of their college’s team, but when I specifically
brought up consumption of games at a distance through media they were dismissive. Though sports clearly has more investment in in-person consumption, there is also a norm of attendance at speculative media conventions as something fundamental to the fan experience, demonstrated by listings of upcoming events at both the Star Trek and Star Wars web sites and the frequency of convention attendance in fictional and documentary representations of fans.

When sports industry workers frame consumption as attendance, they often focus on fans paying for tickets. Lisa of BMU, when asked for an example of a fan campaign that was successful, described:

With volleyball, we did a [play on words involving venue name] event last year, or not this past year but the year before, when [BMU] was going to be playing Penn State, who was the 4-time national champion. And so we decided for the first time we were going to pre-sell tickets, which never happens, we don’t do that ever, and we presold 1500 tickets. And we sold out the building [. . .]. We wanted to make history by selling out and beating Penn State. [. . .] So I think that was a huge, huge thing for us.

This story foregrounds pre-selling tickets and filling the venue to capacity as what constitutes success with fans rather than any other metric such as enjoyment. This quantitative assessment centers on the sports organization’s desire for fans and for proof of fans’ large-scale desire for volleyball, to the exclusion of a qualitative concern for fulfilling fans’ desires, and it demonstrates the boundaries of industry desires quite clearly. Similarly, when James at BMU was asked “What types of things that fans were doing would make it easier for you?” He replied, “Coming in groups” almost before I’d finished the question, indicating that this answer was obvious or automatic for him. He then continued at a regular pace, “And so we- if you focus on

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7 Pseudonyms for the sports practitioners, who all requested anonymity, were selected from the list of most common names in the U.S.
group sales and group attendance, particularly at the nonrevenue events, you could really pad, you know- you could make an impact.” Here again, getting people to show up represents the sports gold standard.

The same logic leads sports organizations to blanket their web sites with opportunities to buy tickets. The Mariners do so with particular intensity, offering not just general invitations to buy but specific self-advertisements for season tickets, tickets to particular matches, or multi-game package deals. From the negative side, this structure manifests as concern about the financial consequences of fans not showing up to games, demonstrated as part of cultural common sense in football films like Any Given Sunday and The Replacements. More positively, there is a norm of fans as dedicated to paying to show up, touting their possession of season tickets in Friday Night Lights the film, lining up before nine in the morning to purchase tickets to a high school playoff game in Friday Night Lights the television series, selling out the venue for women’s college basketball in The Mighty Macs, and generating more than $10,000 in gate receipts in Leatherheads (a truly vast sum in its 1920s setting). Certainly, CalBears.com’s employment of the imperative mood in exhortations to “Buy Tickets” grammatically demonstrates consumption in the form of paying to attend events as both normatively expected and actively encouraged or facilitated. These examples suggest that, like all norms, fan desire to consume through attendance is both optional and not, both claimed as inevitable and evidently fragile.

However, attending events constitutes consumption—in the sense of taking in a product made by another—even when no money changes hands. Sources almost never discuss the price

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8 James used “revenue” specifically to mean sports that turn a profit—football and men’s basketball—to the explicit exclusion of net-loss sports such as volleyball and women’s basketball that charge for admission to games, such that “sales” often coexists with “nonrevenue” at BMU.
of attending a convention—unlike, say, the effects of the scalping market on Super Bowl ticket prices (Associated Press, 1998; Foster, 2002). Instead, news coverage emphasizes the experience itself or the things one might buy when one gets to the convention, reorienting the emphasis away from event attendance itself as revenue generator (although clearly it nevertheless is). Similarly, the staff at BMU accorded attention to attendance at games even for the sports which did not charge for admission, with Lisa saying, “For football, we're obviously concerned about revenue, and just making money, whereas with the other sports I'm concerned about just getting butts in seats, and just getting people there.” This same logic leads to representations of fans that show them attending practices (Friday Night Lights [TV] and The Longshots), free events (Mystery, Alaska and BASEketball), or children’s games (The Simpsons, To Save a Life).

Alternately, fans may not attend in person at all, but rather consume the object of their fandom through media. Clearly this is the primary means of consumption for speculative media (being media, after all). Sports organizations—whose product might be thought of as the game itself—have a more ambivalent relationship to media consumption, but media represents no small portion of their business model: Buraimo and Simmons (2009) argue that a far larger number of people experience professional sports through media than in-stadium and media revenues constitute a greater share of sports companies’ incomes than any other source, and Adam Cox (2012) conducted a study to understand the substitution of watching on television for live attendance, concluding that the gain in revenue from media outweighs the in-stadium loss. Considerably more media consumption is not paid for than with in-person events, with both broadcast and basic cable being advertising-supported and not purchased directly by their consumers. The low cost of media consumption drives one memorable scene in Big Fan, in which football fans Paul and Sal attend a tailgate party in the parking lot of the New York
Giants’ stadium and then stay out there watching the game on a television hooked to their car battery while their fellow fans go in to watch in person. The event fandom of the tailgate transitions rather seamlessly to mediated fandom due to financial constraints preventing the two from buying tickets.

Part of the recruitment of fan desire, then, is the normative appeal to watching. Thus, SyFy devotes of much of its website’s screen real estate to explicit invitations to watch its shows and ESPN deploys the imperative verb calling fans to “Watch.” Additionally, the sensory affordance of motion confers emphasis to ESPN.com’s ticker at the top that cycles through what is ‘Live Now’ on the company’s various TV outlets (ESPN, ESPN2, etc.). Attracting site visitor attention to this feature with motion makes the site an invitation to also consume ESPN’s traditional-media presence. In a similar normative plea for watching—without the grammatical strong-arming of the imperative—after the 2007 fan campaign to save CBS show Jericho, the network’s president “expressed to the fans our need to bring more eyeballs to the broadcast of the show” if it was going to be able to continue (Littlejohn, 2008a), an active and direct recruitment of watching. Beyond inviting broadcast viewers, many organizations position watching as normative when they freely provide streaming content on the web: Dr. Horrible’s Singalong Blog was first released in a free web event; Star Trek and SyFy offer full episodes of their respective various series; ESPN provides clips; and Purdue University has live audio streaming of its sporting events. All of these modes of consuming are free to the fan and positioned squarely at the center of what fans are imagined to desire and do.

Of course, at other times media consumption quite clearly figures as something fans purchase. As was clear from mentions by Campfire’s Mike, in the documentary We are Wizards, in news coverage of Comic Con, and of a diegetic book series in TV show Supernatural,
speculative media fans normatively buy the science fiction/fantasy novels or comic books themselves. They are assumed—and encouraged by the ease of finding the option on the website—to pay to purchase *Dr. Horrible* on iTunes after the initial streaming event. They pay for movie tickets—hundreds of millions of dollars’ worth, in the case of franchises like Batman (S. Cohen, 2008a). Fans are also understood as buying DVDs of the object of fandom (as opposed to, say, renting or checking them out from the library) and frequently hailed as buyers in special features and commentaries, as when *The Guild* actor Sandeep Parikh follows up the introduction of the actors at the beginning of the second season commentary with “and thanks for purchasing a DVD and for listening to our commentary track.” Whether it is in person or at a distance, whether it is paid or free, there is a consistent norm of basic consumption of the object of fandom itself.

**Consumption 0.5: Lesser, Supplementary, Integral**

Beyond basic or thing-itself consumption lies a whole field of more or less closely related consumptions. I term this constellation Consumption 0.5, or sub-consumption, for this mode is dependent on 1.0, always co-present, and seen as supplementary and supporting the “main” experience rather than able to stand alone. To some extent, my expansion of the consumption frame to areas typically not seen as such makes the same move as Crawford (2004, pp. 77, 113), who identifies both buying and watching as consumption and also includes the “wearing of clothing that signify certain team allegiances” and "going to a bar or pub before or after games, consuming food and drinks at the game, using your car or public transport to get to games, [and/or] buying in beers and food to watch the game at home” as “related acts of consumption.”

Thinking in this way, then, one type of consumption not adequately addressed by Consumption 1.0 is when fans consume freely provided fandom-related objects: This behavior is
sub-consumptive in that these items are not purchased and so do not participate in the strict economic definition of consumption, and neither are they the fan object itself. However, free items do participate in the more general sense of consumption as taking something from the fandom object’s owner. As Jenkins, Ford, and Green (2013, p. 73) indicate, the intent is that “the receiver will incorporate the objects into their everyday lives, the brand regularly reminding them of the company, while the utility of the gift generates some sense of goodwill,” gesturing again toward their status as supplements to a core object.

Moreover, sub-consumption is clearly an expected or normative mode of fan desire. Lisa at BMU, for example, mentioned “t-shirt toss” at two distinct points in our conversation as something she routinely did to improve the fan experience at sports like baseball that were free to attend at her university. Giving free items to fans is standard even at paid events like Mariners games. The team’s website announces that bobble-head dolls of pitcher Félix Hernández will be provided to the first 20,000 fans to arrive at a particular game. There is also a storied tradition of giveaways of swag or tsatskes at Comic-Con, mentioned repeatedly in the news coverage. Indeed, “Fans snap up freebies such as postcards, stickers and graphic novels, hauling huge tote bags through the crowded convention floor,” and fans’ desire for swag reaches its apotheosis with entertainment writer Sandy Cohen’s (2007a) parenthetical aside that “Some waited in hour-long lines for the free totes.”

While free objects clearly relate to the object of fandom and only tenuously to the purchasing part typically associated with consumption, Consumption 0.5 also includes the mirror image: clearly monetary in nature but better described as articulated to the object of fandom than enmeshed in it. We might think here about fans who show up to sports events wearing non-branded clothing in team colors, such as the plain red sweatsuit modeled by the parent of a high
school basketball player in *The Winning Season*, much to his teenage daughter’s embarrassment. The consumption of body paint (for faces and spelling out words on bare male chests) or window paint (for businesses and vehicles) that fans use to demonstrate their support also fits here. Fans need to buy these items if they want to have them, but they are not licensed goods purchased directly from the people who produce the object of fandom. The somewhat attenuated relationship often causes these modes of support to fly under the fan studies radar even as these acts of sub-consumption are well within the orbit of normative fandom.

Another form of Consumption 0.5 consists of the purchase of concessions at a sporting venue, which Lisa of BMU mentioned as a place her organization can recoup costs at free-admission events or after offering reduced-cost admission to groups. The centrality or normativity of concession-based consumption is evident from the inclusion of an “Amenities Map” link on the Mariners site’s “SAFECO Field” tab which—though including other types of amenities—foregrounds the concession stand, describing the map as having “food listings and more” and using images only of food and beverages, to the exclusion of other products and services that might reasonably constitute amenities. In typical *Simpsons* fashion, 2003 episode “Pray Anything” takes the emphasis on concessions to extremes for comedic effect, with young Lisa Simpson commenting, “Dad, it's so enlightened of you to take us to a WNBA game” only to have Homer reply, “Yeah, well, nachos are nachos.”

Sub-consumption also arises in the costs fans incur in attending events, such as air and ground transportation and hotels. The Purdue University and UC Berkeley (Cal) websites helpfully provide travel information to their fans, building this consumptive norm into their menu options. Discussion of such issues is also a staple of news coverage, and the fact that the money involved is nontrivial becomes clear with conflict over hotel room availability. Thus, in
2004, the Associated Press reported that “Three major events occurring simultaneously in San Diego have driven hotel prices up by as much as 500 percent for the coming weekend. The Comic-Con comic book and science fiction convention, the Acura Tennis Classic and the seasonal opening of the Del Mar Race Track are expected to draw more than 70,000 people to the area, in addition to summer tourists” (“News briefs from San Diego county,” 2004). This 500% increase in room rates, no small financial matter, happened because there were so many sports and speculative media fans who wanted rooms. Consumption 0.5 can also be amped up by increasing duration and not just price, as before the 2006 Super Bowl:

Hotel owners hoping to cash in on the demand for rooms during the Super Bowl say Hurricane Katrina evacuees are reducing the number available. Many hotels are raising rates and setting four-day minimum stays for the days around the Feb. 5 NFL championship game at Detroit's Ford Field. At a Howard Johnson's in suburban Southfield, room rates will be increased from $69 a day to $199. Officials say they depend on 30,000 hotel rooms being available for the Super Bowl. (“Katrina evacuees fill some hotel rooms as Detroit Super Bowl nears,” 2006)

Fans—the logic goes—need access to thousands of hotel rooms, and they will generally pay whatever it takes to get them, whether a 288% premium or a 500% one. These news representations treat this intensive spending as an entirely unremarkable fulfillment of fan desire.

Finally, traveling to attend sporting events also produces Consumption 0.5 in the form of tourist-type activity, a logic demonstrated as normative when the AP reported that one fan, asked about attending the Super Bowl in snowy Detroit, said, "I would have loved to go to a warm place and played some golf, but you go to the Super Bowl when you get a chance to go"
(Adelson, 2006a). The idea that fans might spend additional money while attending the fan event in question—perhaps in this case super- rather than sub-consumption for being above and beyond the bare minimum needed—is sufficiently within the logic of normative fandom that a few people tried to cash in on it ahead of the 2008 Super Bowl:

Fans have paid a couple of grand for their Super Bowl tickets and hundreds for the plane trip. So what's $100,000 more? Real estate companies and enterprising Arizona homeowners are hoping that some Super Bowl fans coming for the Feb. 3 game here will shell out big bucks for a weeklong stay at a swank home, complete with maid services, a luxury vehicle and in some cases, home cooking. (Myers, 2008)

To put the norm of sub-consumption in perspective in relation to the burden it places on regular fans rather than speaking solely of big spenders or aggregate effects, an intertitle in documentary Mathematically Alive indicates that when two New York Mets fans went to spring training, “in all, they spent close to $500 on gas and tolls, another $180 on hotels, and 46 hours driving, to see 1 meaningless exhibition game.”

**Consumption 1.5: A New (Licensed) Hope**

Evolution beyond Consumption 1.0 begins with the normalization of desire for licensed or franchised extensions of an object of fandom, which I classify as Consumption 1.5. This extension adds something in that these objects no longer have a close spatial, temporal, or logical relationship to the object of fandom itself—what about a superhero suggests a lunchbox, after all?—but it operates by the same logic as 1.0 and 0.5 in that it keeps the “main” object central and treats other consumption as supplementary, a (longstanding) *modification* of basic consumption rather than a revolution. That the logic of the franchise maintains the “original”
object as the core can be seen from the fact that it is understood as taking something that already works—such as a television formula that attracts valued demographics—and making there be more of it (Jenkins et al., 2013). Thus, though Derek Johnson (2013) is right to argue against seeing franchises as mindless or viral replication devoid of creativity, it is nevertheless the sameness across the various instantiations that holds franchising together as a logic and marks it as Consumption 1.5.

As this section’s title suggests, the first object of fandom to turn licensing into a high art was *Star Wars*, which Gray (2010, p. 177) terms the ”most voluminous paratextual entourage in entertainment history.” Though the unprecedented proliferation of licensed merchandise that attended the *Star Wars* franchise was the result of George Lucas’s shrewd decision to forego salary on the films in exchange for retaining licensing rights (Jenkins, 2006a), it has impacted the relationship of fandom to consumption far beyond just one business decision. Massively merchandised objects of fandom are now the default, as can be seen from the film *Kickass*, in which a teenager’s decision to become a homegrown superhero results in an immediate merchandise explosion, with his local comic book store featuring bumper stickers, hats, mugs, t-shirts, posters, a replica of the hero’s wetsuit-based costume, a cappuccino special in the coffee shop, and a comic “Coming Soon.” Indeed, there is such a surge in interest that children begin having *Kickass*-themed birthday parties, leading the henchmen of the movie’s mob-boss villain to assassinate an impersonator by accident—news the boss receives with disgust, exclaiming “They got paper plates and napkins down at the store now, too?”

Of course, licensing also means serious money. Lisa of BMU identified merchandise as, like concessions, a way to generate revenue even at events where ticket sales don’t provide much. The magnitude of the revenue involved in licensing can be seen from discussions that took
place in the business press when Disney acquired Marvel Comics:

Through the deal, Marvel gains the ability to quickly reach more markets worldwide. Disney is by far the world's top licensor of its character brands, with $30 billion in retail sales in fiscal 2008, compared with fourth-place Marvel at $5.7 billion, according to License! Global magazine. "It gives Marvel the opportunity to expand internationally and leverage the Disney retail relationships as well as their licensee relationships," said Tony Lisanti, the magazine's global editorial director.

(Nakashima, 2009)

Indeed, one might imagine that the 2012 Disney purchase of LucasFilm (and thus Star Wars), bringing together two juggernauts of merchandising, will result in a previously inconceivable deployment of the licensed good.

Though licensed merchandising is easy to critique as an act of pure greed to milk properties for all they are worth, there is a case to be made that this approach mistakes the business such companies are actually in: "When Disney might make several hundred dollars' worth of product sales off a single young consumer, compared to the child's paltry five dollars at the box office, we might be foolish to see the film as ipso facto the 'primary text'" (J. Gray, 2010, p. 38). Certainly, fan refusal to purchase licensed merchandise strikes a blow at industry, as with the PotterWar campaign described in documentary We are Wizards, in which young fans "orchestrated a worldwide boycott against all things Harry Potter. Except the books. We didn't have an argument with J.K. Rowling, so we were gonna keep buying the books like usual, but we weren't gonna go see the movies, we weren't gonna buy any of the toys, nothing," until film rights-holder Warner Brothers ceased its legal bullying of kids over their Harry Potter fan websites. Thirteen-year-old Heather Lawver, the spokeswoman, noted that “Hitting them in the
wallet really works,” as eventually PotterWar prevailed. The effectiveness of producing policy change from industry through a fan-led boycott relies of a norm in which fans do buy.

The most consistent form of licensed-good consumption constructed into the norm of fandom is clothing. When asked, “When I say ‘fan,’ what kind of person do you imagine, like what pops into your head?” Lisa from BMU replied, “Here especially, I think people decked out in [BMU] gear. I think that's the biggest thing. I think it's- I mean, obviously you have fans that don't. But the majority of the fans that come to a lot of the games are the ones that are all-obviously, always wearing their [school colors] and into it and things like that.” After going on to describe the ways BMU has demographic variety in their fans, from older donors to kids with their families, she circled back to identify wearing team clothing as what they all had in common. The display of t-shirts or replica jerseys as an explicitly available type of merchandise on organizations’ websites reaffirms this centrality, as does the inclusion, when the title of Star Wars Episode III was revealed, of “one other announcement for fans: ‘Revenge of the Sith’ T-shirts would go on sale inside Comic-Con's main hall in five minutes” (Brenzican, 2004a).

Beyond just clothes, the orbit of normative licensed merchandise consumption has a few other standard components. Fans buy licensed figurines and toys (a central plot point in The 40 Year Old Virgin, frequently discussed in news coverage of Comic-Con, and shown by season 6 Buffy the Vampire Slayer villains the Evil Trio). They also normatively acquire collectibles related to their object of fandom, like statues and autographed merchandise (as shown in SyFy.com’s featured merchandise, included as an establishing shot at a Star Trek convention in documentary The Captains, and provided for by the Mariners’ terms and conditions, which parse the legal protections buyers of autographed items can expect). Card games and trading cards are also fairly consistent (mentioned by Campfie’s Mike, included in Super Bowl news coverage,
and shown at a Xena convention in stunt-double documentary Double Dare). More frequent on the sports side is the purchase of official support merchandise: pompoms, pennants and flags, noisemakers, and/or foam fingers—and whole foam hands and foam cowboy hats and foam paws representing animal mascots and foam sticks to wave or beat together for noise.

Finally, in a generally unpaid mode of Consumption 1.5, multimedia replicates less tangibly, spreading the same content across multiple modes of delivery. By this logic, the Mariners produce a smartphone app or Star Trek releases an app to turn one’s iPad into one of the series’ PADDs (Personal Access Display Devices). The locales from which one can consume these media are distinct, but also duplicative. They provide more ways to acquire the same, basic thing as opposed to supplementing or enriching or deepening the object of fandom (as I’ll show transmedia does). Multimedia logics also animate UC Berkeley’s website providing mp3s of its fight songs, Major League Soccer having a radio service, and ESPN.com providing the same score ticker as the cable channel itself. These modes are, in Jenkins, Ford, and Green’s (2013) terms, “sticky” in that they draw users to the central object of fandom and attempt to hold them there. Through all of these instantiations of Consumption 1.5, fans acquire additional objects, primarily but not exclusively through purchase, which supplement the “main” or “real” object of fandom and generally produce additional revenue while maintaining a stable core property.

Conclusion

Ultimately, understanding the norms coalescing around fandom in the contemporary era requires attention to consumption. Importantly, though fans are being encouraged to do some kinds of consumption (the ones that benefit industry) and not others, it is important not to think of this incitement as imposing the will of industry on fans. Fans are not being “disciplined” like
unruly schoolchildren (Johnson, 2007) or manipulated (Andrejevic, 2011; McCourt & Burkart, 2007) or controlled (Felschow, 2010; R. Pearson, 2007). They engage in these forms of consumption because they fulfill their desires—even as they have a constrained set of options to choose from and their desires are themselves social. Even figures from the virulently anti-consumer tradition of sports fan studies recognize that commodities are (and must be) interpreted by their consumers and so consumption is not an automatic problem (Salazar-Sutil, 2008).

Giulianotti (2005), perhaps the most anti-consumerist scholar, notes that consumerism results in sports being recast as one leisure activity among many and that, under this sort of market logic, people come to expect a certain value for their expenditure—both of which may undermine the ability to manipulate fans into consumption he fears.

Viewing fandom through consumption shows a certain amount of continuity with pre-Internet fandom. Fan consumption has long been understood as more complex than simple buying or watching, or what I’ve termed here Consumption 1.0. The conceptualization of the fan in industry discussions, web interfaces, and representations demonstrates that contemporary fandom normatively includes both ancillary, or 0.5, sub-consumption as well as more expansive, licensed Consumption 1.5. All three modes are both constructed as essential fan desires and actively facilitated, suggesting the process of managing desire. These constructions of normative consumption tie fandom’s desire fundamentally to consumptive modes. However, what of the much deeper and broader modes of spreading the object of fandom around enabled by technological change? As I’ll show in Chapter 3, these are usefully conceptualized as Consumption 2.0, with both dramatic change and unappreciated continuity with the consumption of yore.
Figure 1
Chapter 3

Consumption 2.0: Transmedia, Reactivity, and the Specter of Excess

Unlike the minor modification of licensing or the dependency of sub-consumption, transmedia constitutes Consumption 2.0, a whole new edition, and—like Web 2.0—it is premised on interactivity. Consumption 2.0 resembles what Beer and Barrows (2010, p. 7) term “participatory consumption,” and it is this participatory aspect that I identify as the fundamental difference from former modes of consumption. Industry particularly pursues transmedia consumption “as a means of attracting certain segments of the audience—for example, young geek males who have the disposable income and time to track a complex, unfolding serial and thus might even expect such engagement” (Jenkins et al., 2013, p. 149). It is participatory because (desired) fans are understood to desire participation:

If old consumers were assumed to be passive, the new consumers are active. If old consumers were predictable and stayed where you told them to stay, then new consumers are migratory, showing declining loyalty to networks or media. If old consumers were isolated individuals, the new consumers are more socially connected. If the work of media consumers was once silent and invisible, new consumers are noisy and public. (Jenkins, 2006a, pp. 18–19)

The advent of Consumption 2.0, in addition to the established modes of 0.5, 1.0, and 1.5, produces a new norm for how one ought to consume, but what kind? Hye-Kyung Lee (2011, p. 1136), focusing on the people rather than the institutions encouraging them, takes an optimistic view, noting that “Newly developing cultural consumption practices give consumers unprecedented leverage to affect the global flow of cultural commodities.” Mark Andrejevic (2008, p. 34), by contrast, identifies this shift as a neoliberal “responsibilization” of the
consumer, “wherein viewers are invited to take on some of the ‘duties’ associated with their media consumption.”

Transmedia can, to some extent, be understood as paratextuality on steroids. Jonathan Gray (2010, p. 42) notes that "for texts that destabilize any one media platform as central, each platform serves as a paratext for the others" rather than having one primary locale merely supplemented by others as in Consumption 1.5. Moreover, the contemporary form of consumption that I term 2.0 differs from traditional forms in particular because it works by multiplication and has no scarcity model (Arvidsson, 2005; Jenkins et al., 2013). Gray (2010, p. 151) points out that by deploying "transmedia strategies" like alternate reality games (ARGs), websites, and/or spinoff novels, texts challenge their own "textual boundaries, actively inviting fans to look for clues outside of the program itself." Transmedia is an intensive consumption, distinct from previous modes like multimedia that were purely expansive. Transmedia adds new material in various locations rather than just giving new ways to consume more of the same.

However, moving past the apparent invitation to interactivity to examine how fans are asked to behave, the fan norm demonstrated by transmedia is not so much interactive as reactive. Fans are invited to respond to the options as given by the owner of the object of fandom, maintaining them firmly in a secondary, responding position: Transmedia is inherently consumptive.

To examine the consumptive structures produced by transmedia, this chapter traces the construction of what is normative for the fan across the archive of fictional and nonfictional representations of fans, the structures of official websites for media properties (films, sports franchises, etc.), and statements made by industry practitioners who produce content for fans. Through promiscuous remix of these multiple types of source, the accumulated commonalities across these disparate locations illuminate the logic of transmedia consumption in a way not
possible by examining a single one of these nodes. By zooming in and out, a rich picture emerges of the ways transmedia functions. In what follows, I first articulate the relationship of transmedia to consumption, then examine transmedia’s various instantiations as providing information, content, and contact and as facilitating immersion in the world of the object of fandom. The chapter then makes a case for seeing these forms of interactivity as what I call “reactivity,” arguing that consumption has an ongoing uneasy relationship to normativity, which industry works to manage through recruiting compliant consumption and producing “fan” as a consuming identity. Ultimately, I contend that even in a supposedly interactive era much of what normative fandom is recruited to do is consume (as opposed to other possible practices like production).

**Transmedia as Consumption**

The relationship of transmedia to consumption is relatively clear when accessing the expansive information requires buying more stuff. Tanya Krzywinska (2009, p. 396) points to transmedia as purchasing in her discussion of “industrial and technological convergence, which depends increasingly on formulating devices to create long-stay audiences/consumers who will spend money to remain in contact with their preferred world.” In this realm resides the work done by the sequel and the prequel, which as Derek Johnson (2013) points out creatively expand the story rather than simply replicate—and, I’ll add, clearly constitute consumption in the economic sense because they come at an additional cost. Paid Consumption 2.0 also animates the routine explicit mention in film and television commentary tracks that listeners should buy the DVD to gain access to particular supplementary materials like deleted scenes. A particularly direct version of this narrative is the inclusion, on the first disc of each season of *The Simpsons,*
of a greeting from creator Matt Groening that elaborates the features listeners have acquired by buying the boxed set—often explicitly framed as a great value because it provides much more than the limited material made available by other shows.

This logic also animates the offer of expansive, and expensive, access to supplementary knowledge and content through paid services such as MLB.tv (Major League Baseball) Premium, advertised at the Seattle Mariners website, which offers “every out-of-market game LIVE on your favorite devices” and MLS (Major League Soccer) Live’s “high quality HD streams” of “230+ games” providing “access on web, iPad, iPhone, Roku, and Panasonic TVs.” These services do not just expand the means by which one can consume in terms of format, but specifically emphasize the amount of content available to any given fan, and this combination makes it a form of transmedia. Transmedia expansion also operates through paid fan clubs that offer insider information, supplementary narratives, and other additions fans are understood to desire, like the O.C. Insider club described by Sharon Ross (2009), Star Wars’s Hyperspace, or Disney’s members-only D23 Expo. Importantly, this is not a question of duping fans into shelling out, but rather of matching a demand to a supply, as when Disney fansite MiceAge responded to D23 as “a schedule of members-only events that one columnist called ‘pure magic to a Disney fan’” (Rindels, 2009). This logic defines fans as those who genuinely desire more to consume—and hang the expense.

The consumptive nature of transmedia logic is less obvious when content providers do not charge for the additional content they provide. Certainly, Jenkins, Ford, and Green (2013, p. 138) argue that “Transmedia works as ‘gifts’ to their dedicated fans, rewarding their investment with highly desired content,” shifting the conversation away from a capitalist consumption exchange to a gift economy. However, some do explicitly link transmedia to consumption, as
when Steve from Campfire described his role: “As a creative director, my job is to [long pause] create a story that fulfills strategic requirements of the client and consumption requirements of my target. And when I say consumption, I was going to say entertainment requirements, but it’s not always entertainment requirements.” Consumption is indispensable to the transmedia marketing Campfire does, then—unlike the “not always” specification of entertainment.

A few scholars have also raised the question of consumption with transmedia, as with Suzanne Scott’s (2011, p. 157) contention that such industry strategies mean that “In order for fans to get the complete entertainment ‘experience,’ they must spend the bulk of their time consuming and (re)constructing the metanarrative the creators are carefully spreading across various media platforms.” Henry Jenkins (2006a, p. 96) frames the issue both as fulfilling fan desire and in terms of consumption, contending that “Reading across the media sustains a depth of experience that motivates more consumption. Redundancy burns up fan interest and causes franchises to fail. Offering new levels of insight and experience refreshes the franchise and sustains consumer loyalty.” Scott (2011, pp. 150–151) notes that there has been “conflict between those who claim that transmedia storytelling systems offer fans sophisticated webs of content to explore and enhance, and those that see these webs as precisely that: a mode of confining and regulating fannish analysis and textual production.” That is, some see the transmedia intensification of consumption as a form of entrapment, as when Gray (2010, p. 110) identifies “interviews, podcasts, DVD bonus materials, and making-of specials” as modes by which “creators try to exert control” over the meaning of their narratives.

In place of this control framing, which argues that industry deploys transmedia in a bid to shut fans up, I contend that the extension I’m calling Consumption 2.0 is better viewed as normalization. It allows pitching intensive engagement to fans such that they get what they
desire in ways that (conveniently enough) do not challenge industry interests—financial or reputational. It gives, not so that fans can’t or won’t take, but so that they don’t have to bother. It introduces ease into the process of intensive engagement in a way that shapes desire and defines fans as consumers. Though I think Scott (2011, p. 158) is right to critique the boxing in of fans under this model, she misses the important factor of the norm in her understanding of this situation as one in which “Millennial consumers making the leap from casual viewer to fan may be adept at navigating various media flows and accustomed to the type of ‘community’ that Web 2.0 social networking fosters, but they are also more likely to mistake this form of ‘mediated interactivity’ for fan participation.” To see an identification of “mediated interactivity” with fan participation as a “mistake” is to collapse the moral contention that fandom should not be equated to such behavior (with which I agree) into an empirical contention that the social meaning of fandom is not flattened into only this mode—but I argue that just such a flattening is in fact occurring in the transmedia era. The norm is changing. Though those who appreciate what fandom has traditionally been may well want to contest that shift, it is still vital to come to an understanding of what fans are normatively invited to desire.

**Transmedia as Information, Content, and Contact**

Transmedia encompasses, first, a norm in which fans follow an object of fandom beyond its evident boundaries in order to consume more information, more content, or more contact with the object’s production personnel (athletes, stars, directors). This resembles what Ross (2009) terms “organic” invitations into texts, which rely on omnivorous fans interested in getting more from their media experience. To begin with information, a central block of screen real estate at the websites of UC Berkeley (Cal), MLS, *Star Trek (Trek)*, the Mariners, and SyFy consists of an
auto-advancing slide show, sensorially affording learning about news, events, products, and services from these institutions. Though stationary, the da Vinci’s “Last Supper”-inspired picture on the front page of Battlestar Galactica’s site functions in much the same way. It has lots of information embedded within it and greets site visitors with the imperative “Explore the Photo,” which both positions information-gathering as normative and recruits participation in the process. The Mariners and MLS facilitate information consumption slightly differently when they include news feeds on their sites, but clearly have the same goal. Star Wars ups the ante on providing such things by allowing fans to put its news feed on their sites, making information even more normative—and easy to do, given that they provide the html code. The idea that what fans desire from new technologies is information was routine even from the early years of Super Bowl websites from 1996 to 2000, with Associated Press stories consistently touting how many “pages of information” and what volume of statistics such sites would provide, as apparently journalists anticipated some confusion in the general public about why anyone would want such a thing as a Super Bowl website in the first place, or at least a bit of unfamiliarity with the concept: “It used to be that a web site was a place where spiders built their houses. Now, the Super Bowl has a home there, too” (Nelson, 1996).

There are also periodic explicit appeals to transmedia texts providing a depth of knowledge. Such mentions point toward information that is more explicitly insider-y or behind-the-scenes. The idea that transmedia texts provide additional insight and enrich the consumption experience is demonstrated by an exchange between cousins H. G. “Buzz” Bissinger, the writer of the book Friday Night Lights, and Peter Berg, who directed the film based on the book and created the television show organized around the same premise. After they talk over a key point in the film’s plot during their DVD commentary, they have a semi-serious exchange:
Bissinger: And what you missed- at first they thought it was three heads [in the film’s destiny-determining three-way coin toss], ‘cause we're blathering on.

Berg: You can assume, Buzz, that what they've done is they've watched the movie.

Bissinger: Oh, right. No, my ego is such that they'll watch the commentary first.

Berg: No, they're not gonna go straight to the commentary, they're gonna watch the movie.

Bissinger: Well no, well then that's ass backwards.

Berg: And then the third or the fourth time they'll say, “Alright, let's see what Bissinger and Berg say.” They probably won't make it this far before they get bored and turn it off anyway.

The same logic that fans desire to consume intensively and get maximum information operates in commentaries for episodes of *The Simpsons*—indeed, it is intensified by a sense of responsibility to provide *enough* for fans, shown when the personnel providing commentary (mostly writers) turn to a sheet of “fun facts” to keep the flow of information going when it slackens. A similar feeling of obligation to be forthcoming shows in the generally minimalist *Dr. Horrible* site, which lacks the high-powered web design of moving graphics or an on-site store but does include an extensive “Frequently (soon to be) Asked Questions” section explaining the thought process behind this media object’s production. The information norm also drives a comprehensive “North American Soccer Almanac” at MLS.com detailing the league’s history from 1996-2011, complete with infographics.

These industry decisions share an understanding that what fans desire is the truth behind their object of fandom, and it is one in which Merrin of Campfire herself participated as a David Lynch fan:
Interviewer: In terms of your personal fandom, [are you saying that] access to information from the source was really important and so that was something that was disappointing about David Lynch?

Merrin: I think so. But I think it was also the truth. I think a lot of fans are looking for the truth and they- if a creator has a really well-thought-out mythology behind their pieces, that that's something that you can really get involved in and have conversations about, there's a really rich layer to really kind of dig into. The fact that there isn't a truth about his work helps me to kind of, like, go, "Oh well, it's my interpretation, I don't really need to get into it."

The absence of a truth behind Lynch’s work was off-putting for Merrin, and discouraged her from intensive fandom, because it didn’t satisfy her desires as a fan—which she felt “a lot of fans” shared. Much the same desire to know animates a scene in Galaxy Quest, in which teenage fan Brandon approaches Jason, the actor who played the commanding officer on a science fiction television series, for some clarifications about the story. Brandon asks, “Hey, Commander, uh, so, as I was saying [in a previous encounter]: in ‘The Quasar Dilemma,’ you used the auxiliary of Deck B- [To another fan, asking him to help unroll a schematic of the ship] Could you get this?- Deck B for Gamma override. The thing is that online blueprints indicate Deck B is independent of the guidance matrix, so we were wondering where the error lies?” Jason replies, “It's just a television show. That's all, okay." Brandon agrees, but still wants the answer, at which point Jason explodes: "There is no quantum flux. There's no auxiliary. There's no goddamn ship, you got it?” Jason’s fellow actors find this outburst unacceptable, marking the fan desire for knowledge as more normative by contrast.
At other times, what is normative to provide to fans is additional *content* to consume. Campfire’s Merrin noted that there isn’t often conflict between her organization’s marketing imperatives and fan desires “because fans love content and as long as the content is good” everything is fine. Merrin’s attitude matches the logic of the “Easter egg,” a term used explicitly by both creator/actor Felicia Day of *The Guild* and 30 Rock actor Jane Krakowski in commentaries. This category of additional content, which—like its namesake—people hunt for and find, encompasses things like the deleted scenes routinely included on DVD releases or the various unused character sketches of Lisa Simpson’s love interest included on the *Simpsons Movie* DVD. The same belief about fan desire animates the announcement at *Galaxy Quest*’s diegetic fan convention that the DVD release of the eponymous show will include both the improved/re-mastered experience of the series and the originally aired version, as this variety is understood to satisfy fan desires for completeness.

That such special features constitute an increased depth of content can be seen from this exchange in *The Big Bang Theory*:

Leonard: Should we have invited her [their new neighbor] for lunch?
Sheldon: No! We’re gonna start Season 2 of *Battlestar Galactica*.
Leonard: We already watched the Season 2 DVDs
Sheldon: Not with commentary.

It is clear that Sheldon wants to have his experience of more, enriching content uninterrupted by the vagaries of his roommate’s attempt at a social life. The most intense iteration of the Consumption 2.0 content strategy is providing additional things like webisodes, short episodes released on the Internet by shows like *Battlestar Galactica* and *Heroes* that fill narrative gaps in and between the full, aired episodes. Suzanne Scott (2007) terms this practice “Moore-ing” after
BSG show runner Ron Moore and critiques it as tying fan creativity down by a leaving no ambiguities to explore, but regardless of its intent or effects this clearly normalizes the provision of expansive and intensive content. A similar additional-content structure attends the availability of an enhanced experience of the Super Bowl on its website, offering “views from six camera angles (including the blimp)” in 1998 (Story, 1998) or “a 360-degree video camera that allowed on-line users to personally manipulate what they could see during media day” two years later (Goldberg, 2000). Fans are understood to desire to see more and know more.

Additionally, the Consumption 2.0 norm involves a desire for contact with actors, athletes, producers, and other personnel with star status. The contact discourse can be quite basic, as a desire to meet or even simply see the famous person associated with the object of fandom. Of Comic-Con, press coverage tells us that “Fans come for exclusive previews of upcoming films and a chance to see their favorite stars” (S. Cohen, 2007a), combining both information and contact. One New York Mets fan in *Mathematically Alive* appeals thus to the camera: "Tell me that's not worth it, if you can come here early enough and get a wave and talk to the Hall of Fame catcher.” At times fans are understood to desire more intensive contact, like asking questions, a staple activity in Associated Press reports about of Comic-Con, or even learning personal stories from stars, as with the revelation that "'I do remember permanently the hologram speech, because we had to reshoot it,’ Carrie Fisher, who played Princess Leia, wearily told fans at the recent Comic-Con festival in San Diego” (Brenzican, 2004b). This desire for more depth in relation to the star—and the way stars may find it tiresome—also animates a scene in *Cobb* in which a lounge singer inquires: “It's a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Cobb. I'm a big baseball fan, and I always wanted to ask you a question. With all the great players playing ball right now, how well do you think you would do against today's pitchers?” to which Ty Cobb, in
his well-known antagonistic style, replied that he’d only hit about .290 against modern players as opposed to his frequent breaking of .400 during his career because “I’m 72 fucking years old you ignorant son of a bitch.”

With slightly more intensity, fan desire for contact turns into the in-person request for an autograph (as distinct from the purchase of a pre-autographed item discussed in Chapter 2), very consistently incorporated into the discourse of fandom. The obviousness and intensity of this desire produces this exchange between stuntwoman Zoë Bell and *Double Dare* director Amanda Micheli in the documentary’s commentary:

Micheli: The *Xena* convention is amazing. You went this year, and you were *mobbed*, I heard.

Bell: Yeah, I've decided, next time I go I'm going to, like, sell my signature, 'cause I'll come out a squillionaire

Micheli: A squillionaire?

Bell: Okay, a slight exaggeration.

*The Simpsons* spoofs the tendency for huge and intense groups of autograph seekers in 1996’s “Bart the Fink” with a crowd of kids waiting outside the stage door for Krusty the Clown's autograph. Milhouse gets his belly signed in a parody of rock star breast signing. The show also suggests that celebrity contact may be valued in and of itself without regard to who the celebrity is. In “The Cartridge Family,” aired the following year, Homer is initially unimpressed with a TV commercial’s list of Mexican and Portuguese soccer players intended to hype up a match, complaining “Oh, I never heard of those people.” When the ad goes on to explain that “They’ll all be signing autographs,” however, he cheers—and attends the game. Perhaps most intimate is the desire to get a picture with the star, which involves standing next to him or her. It is common
with sports figures, as with fans trying to get a picture with not only town-hero football players but rodeo cowboy Cash in *Friday Night Lights* (TV). Indeed, contact can at times become literal in picture scenarios, as when a male fan shown in *Double Dare* hugs Zoë Bell quite tightly in his photo op with her. Then again, the norm of how fans conduct their celebrity contacts may be changing, as character Summer in *The O.C.* notes after she meets her favorite TV star, “Now I’ve gotta go show everybody my pictures of me and Grady. Thank god I had my camera phone. They are the autograph of the 21st century.”

**Transmedia Immersion and World-Building**

Enabling Consumption 2.0 can also take the form of producing a story world or facilitating immersion in the object of fandom. The immersion metaphor motivates Campfire’s “skimmer, dipper, and diver” typology of fan engagement, worth describing at length:

When we do our work, we divide our audience up into skimmers, dippers, and divers, okay? [...] Divers tend to be people that want challenges, whether that might be a puzzle to solve, or a mystery, definitely that's a challenge to beat. There's definitely a- for divers you provide an environment which they can surmount, either individually or as a team. And middle layer, dippers, are much more I think a little bit about what I would call simple immersion. It's an entertainment experience that maybe they don't have to interact with too much. It could be a single-serving session rather than multiple servings. It would be something that gives them something that's shareable, that increases their social net worth by sharing but doesn't necessarily require deep participation. And then for the top level of skimmers, that's really, I mean, it functions in a way the same way that a TV spot does, I guess, in the sense that it gives a small dose of entertainment that is minimally
disruptive. (Steve)

Everything that Campfire does relies on calibrating their materials to how much fans want to submerge, centering the norm of immersion in these industry workers’ discourse of fandom—and it was in fact, explained to me by each of them in their respective interviews.

Fandom-as-immersion is a relatively common logic, also animating repeated consumption of the same product. Thus, Xena fan Angela Huffman says in her application video for the Xena Fanatic contest—held in conjunction with a celebration of the 2005 10th anniversary of the show’s premiere—“I can watch the episodes over and over again and enjoy them like I'm watching them for the first time.” That Huffman was declared “Xena Fanatic” indicates that the judges of the contest thought fans ought to be saying such things (her socially-valued status as a United States soldier deployed overseas probably did not hurt either). Similarly, The Guild’s Felicia Day notes in a commentary that “The cool thing about Internet video is that you can do things like this [a complex scene] and you kind of assume people will watch it more than once and they can parse it and stuff.” The desire for repeated, immersive consumption of the object of fandom, then, is standard enough to “assume.” The idea of immersion also comes into play with the Mariners browser theme and the Cal ringtones and phone wallpapers, as they rely on the belief that fans will desire a team cocoon to inhabit in their digital media experience even as these objects themselves, obviously, add no depth. Additionally, inhabitation is a relevant logic to fan roleplaying, mentioned by Mike as a common extension of the kinds of properties with which Campfire works. Supernatural humorously depicts role play, also known as LARP-ing (live-action role-playing) or cosplay (costume play) as people repeatedly mistake heroes Sam and Dean Winchester for fans role-playing fictionalized versions of themselves from a diegetic novel series because it is expected that fans would role-play.
This norm of fan desire for a story world that can be entered and investigated resembles what Ross (2009, p. 9) terms “obscured” invitations to enter a text, a mode she argues “resides primarily in the narrative structure and content of the show itself through a certain ‘messiness’ that demands viewer unraveling” (original emphasis). Jason Mittell (2013) uses the term “drillable” to get at the same notion of complexity to be dismantled. This structural or content-based recruitment of unraveling is central for Campfire, with Steve noting that:

a really strong element in our kind of work are fan subcultures that embrace story worlds rather than finite stories. Fantasy is very good, because it embraces a fantasy world that lives beyond the story. And we know— all those examples, from comic books to *Star Wars* to fantasy worlds, science fiction, like that. It gets more— Horror, sometimes. Vampires are big, right? There's a big fan culture around vampires because it's a larger mythology. [. . .] once fans can embrace a story world, it certainly makes it less linear, it allows fans to explore pockets of the story world without contradiction.

This idea leads to organizations creating real-world things to reference story-world things, as with *Heroes* producing websites for diegetic organizations such as Primatech and the Yamagato Fellowship that provide interactive experiences for fans to delve into expansive versions of things they see in the text.

Other versions of world-building include producing media objects referenced in the story, as when Day noted that the makers of *The Guild* actually wanted to shoot a fake trailer for *Necrotic Fury*, this thing he's acting out. Yes. But we did not have the budget for it. Or the time to do it. But, like, our idea was to release the viral video, a fake trailer for the worst zombie movie ever, *Necrotic Fury*, and
he would star in it as the stunt guy. [. . .] He was gonna play multiple roles, like even for a woman, and it was obvious that he's obviously a stunt guy.

Producing a world around the object of fandom that fans can play in does not happen in quite the same way with sports, but neither is the idea that fans (should) desire such a thing completely absent. A staple of the Super Bowl is The NFL Experience portable interactive theme park, which celebrated its 18th anniversary in 2009 (Stacy, 2009) and seeks to give fans a full, immersive sports experience, including activities such as “recording a voice-over commentary of memorable NFL plays, scoring a touchdown while tethered to a bungee harness, and throwing passes at a target” (Tang, 2008). Certainly, the immersive sports world experience is well-known enough to be mocked in 1999 Simpsons Super Bowl episode “Sunday Cruddy Sunday” with an event that included booths for “Rosey Grier's Porta-Chapel,” “Take a Leak with NFL Greats,” “Caricatures by Aikman,” and “Catch a Pass from Dan Marino.” Thus, consuming things that expand or deepen the experience of the central fannish object is quite normative.

**Interactivity as Reactivity**

Though Consumption 2.0, like Web 2.0, is premised on being interactive, it turns out not to be. What seems to be interaction is generally reaction, such that interactivity becomes less active than passive. In one sense, both the broad availability of polls and quizzes and games and fantasy sports on organizations’ websites and mentions of them from industry workers in their discussion of fans seem to expect a fan who desires to and will do something, but these features actually normalize a concept of interactivity as “point and click and be entertained” and as a choice within pre-coded options. Fans aren’t always or inevitably passive, of course, but intensive forms of consumption recruit just that. Interactivity asks fans not to act so much as to
react to what it presents. Phenomena such as ESPN’s SportsNation poll asking which team’s superstar is most integral to its success, the “Quizzes” menu option at BSG, “or the site for Oscar Mayer, the wiener-maker sponsoring the game's halftime extravaganza, where you can take a Super Bowl trivia quiz” (Golen, 1997) show reactivity most clearly. Providing such a bare minimum of action, and literally of a choice between very limited hard-coded options, is basically not action at all—and indeed, as the mentions of polls and quizzes in the Terms of Service at both the Star Wars and Cal sites show, such options provide sites with data about their users, which I’ll suggest in Chapter 4 is actually their purpose.

However, even in less constrained interactive features, as with the availability of games at the BSG, Trek, and Star Wars sites, industry still provides reactivity. Though SyFy takes the provision of games to another level than the other sites, having a separate page with eighteen games and descriptive blurb for each, it still participates in a logic where fans straightforwardly respond to what the site gives. The structure of the game form of reactivity shows most clearly with the “Mind Reader” special feature on the Heroes Season 1 DVD, which invites fans to “Put Matt Parkman's mind-reading ability to the test. Pick a double-digit number from 1 to 100. Add the two digits together. Subtract that number from the original. Now find the hero associated with your new number. Now, concentrate on your hero.” This game works because the math problem has a finite number of solutions (multiples of nine) that can all be set to the same character. The game does not actually require fan input, but there’s an illusion that it matters which number is chosen. Though generally less transparent than this example, all games are equally pre-designed with set choices—and fans can do things, but only within those options.

A related interactive feature available at the sports sites is fantasy sports, found at ESPN, the Mariners, and MLS. On one hand, fantasy sports seems to be a means for fans to construct
their own meaning or narrative around a sport, which Halverson and Halverson (2008) argue makes it structurally comparable to fan fiction as a work of refashioning the primary object to produce new stories. When scholars can chart a shift in the ways that traditional media companies present information in response to the fantasy sports boom—they provide fantasy-specific information meaningless in terms of regular sports statistics to retain themselves as central to sports consumption even as it changes (Comeau, 2007; Dwyer, 2009; Halverson & Halverson, 2008)—it seems that fan desire for interactivity conquers all. Troy Comeau and Brendan Dwyer both chart a shift of loyalty away from teams and toward specific players, challenging the team’s traditional primacy. However, it is vital not to miss the larger picture. As Davis and Duncan (2006) argue, this activity requires a high level of sports knowledge, rooted in extensive sports consumption. Comeau (2007) identifies fantasy sports participants as much more involved than traditional fans, as they have to seek out information across sources in the interest of furthering their strategies. That fantasy sports constitutes a form of intensive and extensive transmedia consumption is clearest from the fact that Dwyer’s (2009) investigation into fantasy sports explicitly seeks to assist sport marketing in reaching consumers and cultivating their loyalty in the crowded sport marketplace.

The Old Normal, the New Normal, and the Fan Normal

Consumption 2.0—in extending past the official boundaries of the object, recruiting fans to dive in, and blurring the boundaries between the object of fandom and “real life”—would seem to replicate the practices of intensive consumption and expansive desire with which fandom has historically been associated. This has led various observers to identify fannish intensive consumption, which always was 2.0-esque, as precisely what is newly normative for all
media use. These practices used to be clearly marginalized as passive and uncritical, as discussed in Chapter 2, and their insertion into the normalization of fandom appears to recuperate such formerly excessive desire and consumption. Over ten years ago Matt Hills (2002, p. 28) argued that considering fans resistive wasn’t totally unreasonable, since they want to linger on their text rather than keep consuming new ones the way the industry desires or needs, but he also recognized that even at that early point “Fandom has begun to furnish a model of dedicated and loyal consumption [. . . ] fan consumers are no longer viewed as eccentric irritants, but rather as loyal consumers to be created, where possible, or otherwise to be courted through scheduling practices” (Hills, 2002, p. 36). As Krzywinska (2009, p. 396) notes, “While shows that encouraged this type of consumption used to be considered ‘cultish’ and marginal to mainstream popular culture, they are now becoming central.” Kristina Busse (2009a, p. 106) notes that “Some scholars posit that today all viewers are interpellated as fans, that they are invited to engage fannishly”—indeed a relatively popular position.¹

However, though I am sympathetic to Jenkins’s (2007, p. 362) caution that fan scholars should “guard against our longstanding romance with our ghettoization,” I think declaring fan consumption normative is premature and insufficiently nuanced. These new norms do indeed include things fans used to do, but when they are officially provided they become objects to be consumed or reacted to and thus structurally differ from practices initiated and controlled by fans. As Scott (2011, p. 27) notes in her analysis of the gendering of fandom, “If incorporation has been framed as a potential positive thing for fans within convergence culture, which segments of fan subculture are being made public, and which are deemed profitable, becomes significant.” Indeed, Hills (2002, p. 29) identifies an internal contradiction within fandom, for

fans both have anti-commercial beliefs and are "ideal consumers" because they want to get their hands on everything to do with the fan object. Jenkins (2006a, p. 92) notes quite briefly that "We can expect consumers to make different investments in the program than the producers do," but I wish to place much more emphasis on taking these consumer and producer investments in media seriously as separate phenomena, each to be considered in their own right. Moreover, though intensive consumption may be becoming industrially expected, this may be a case where capital “calls for subjects who must transgress the material and ideological boundaries” of normativity (Ferguson, 2003, p. 17). While—economically speaking—selling as much as possible makes the most sense, unrestrained consumerism is still somewhat suspect. The important issue, then, is “the overall construction of consumerist common sense” (Andrejevic, 2009b, p. 78)

Certainly, vestiges of the sort of distinction that framed intense desires for the object of fandom as distasteful remain in some of the comments made by industry workers, indicating that the new normal may be less distant from the old normal than it seems and certainly not isometric with traditional fan norms. There is an idea that fans will buy anything even vaguely associated with the object of fandom, such that actor Greg Grunberg of Heroes can joke in a commentary that “I’m gonna go into the chimes business, 'cause people are gonna buy chimes to try and call for the Haitian,” a character who gives a friend wind chimes she can use to contact him for help. Creative personnel on The Simpsons mention on at least four separate occasions in the commentaries that one writer, John Swartzwelder, is also a novelist whose books can be purchased by listeners—to the point that a fan wrote in to ask “Can the commentaries please stop plugging John Swartzwelder novels and recommending we all go on Amazon and buy them?” (The staff not only decline but take the opportunity to recommend the books again just to be contrary.)
Indeed, some of the wackier licensed items that industry produces in the orbit of objects of fandom seem to trade on just this assumption of unstoppable consumption. The Star Wars site offers a “Star Wars™ WorldPoints® credit card,” complete with picture of Darth Vader, in collaboration with Bank of America. The U.S. Postal Service released Marvel Comics postage stamps (Schmid, 2007). Toymaker Hasbro produced a Stan Lee action figure, which clearly serves to court fan buying rather than children’s play purposes since a six-inch plastic figurine of an 84 year old white man “wearing khaki pants, a blue windbreaker and eyeglasses” does not integrate easily into superhero scenarios, if indeed children would even recognize Lee (“Comics guru and Spidey creator Stan Lee hits the big time with 6-inch action figure,” 2007). Plus, there are fandom housewares. Bed sheets show up in Big Fan (Paul’s are NFL-themed) and The Big Bang Theory (Sheldon chooses Star Wars until he realizes “I don’t like the way Darth Vader stares at me” and decides to return them). Fever Pitch’s Boston Red Sox fan Ben not only sleeps on Sox sheets, but does so in a Red Sox shirt and corresponding boxer shorts. Ben also decorates wholly with Sox décor and keepsakes in his bedroom as well as employing Red Sox dishes and towels and New York Yankees toilet paper.

From the other side, production personnel’s resistance to telling fans about things they might rush out and buy shows lingering distrust of unruly fan desire. Commenters on Heroes and The Simpsons worry aloud about whether they can mention other media objects or products—or sometimes explicitly state that they’ve been forbidden to do so. Similarly, the director of Scott Pilgrim feels compelled to insist that the mention of male-niche cable network Spike TV and beverage Coke Zero in the film are not acts of product placement designed to produce a knee-jerk fan reaction to patronize these companies but in fact necessary to the plot. Thus, a fear or unease with fan consumptive excess remains even in the supposedly pro-fan era, showing that
the fan norm of legitimately expansive desire has in fact not been achieved.

**Producing the Consumer: Fan Compliance and Identity**

Given this ongoing dis-ease with fan desire, the articulation of fandom to an industry-beneficial norm of consumption at times requires more than producing certain modes as proper. This is, first, active management of desire into consumption, and second, a tight interconnection and mutual constitution of fandom, identity, and consumption. In the short term, managing desire and consumption takes place through managing excitement or the fan mood. Consistently in both BMU interviews and sports representations, the best thing one can do to get fans show up is to win—or, rather, as it is typically expressed through visuals of near-empty stands for down-on-their-luck teams, the biggest danger to fan attendance is *not* winning. Managing the balance of live attendance and television consumption is an ongoing and well-researched topic within the prediction-and-control tradition in sports studies (Buraimo & Simmons, 2009; Cox, 2012; Pawlowski & Anders, 2012), indicating industry’s desire for fans and anxiety around getting them.

This concern for producing a good game fans will want to attend resembles the drive to maintain suspense across the development of a speculative media narrative. As *Star Trek: Voyager* producer Kenneth Biller said in a special feature about the series’ final episode, “The audience has of course known for years that the quest of this ship was to get [back to Earth]. And I think that the audience had certain expectations about that, and certainly were rooting for the ship to get home. And so the problem that we were presented with was: ‘How do we satisfy those expectations and also surprise the audience?’”—a balance they ultimately struck when “The very first image of the two hour final movie was in fact a shot of Voyager flying over the Golden Gate
Bridge to the cheers of a huge throng and fireworks going off," which then turned out to be an alternate reality. The maintenance of interest and excitement in order to incite consumption also animates concern in commentaries over the inclusion of spoilers, at a high level in particular with *Heroes*, which recorded commentaries before later episodes had aired. In general, the goal of these actions is, as Elizabeth of BMU said in her sports context, to produce a situation in which fans will feel “That was an awesome experience and I want to come back.”

Another strategy to manage fan desire and consumption is through lowering fan productivity and raising consumption. As Simone Murray (2004, p. 10) notes, “Corporations have thus manoeuvered themselves into the paradoxical position of seeking to generate maximum emotional investment by consumers in a given content brand, but of needing to corral such emotional attachment into purely consumptive—as opposed to creative—channels.” This is a process of “disarticulating fans from storytelling practice and rearticulating them to compliant consumption” (Johnson, 2007, p. 297). Though not a strategy industry workers explicitly discuss in the way they freely elaborate how emotion management is carefully planned, it does result from their recruitment of particular desires, whether intended or not. Scott (2007, p. 212) describes the relationship between decreased production and increased consumption quite clearly, noting in a discussion of BSG that transmedia content “has the potential to become authorial and canonically validated, an alternative to the consumption of fan narratives that do similar work, thereby making fan-produced texts that seek to engage with the *BSG* canon more difficult to produce and less likely to be consumed.” Thus, without necessarily having a plan to make fans consumers-only, enhancing the consumption experience may well do just that by making the path of least resistance that much more rewarding and fulfilling desires via consumptive means.
Actively managing fan desire to produce consumption shades into the second, longer-term strategy of building loyalty or fan attachment to fan objects or characters. In this mode, companies "seek to expand consumer's [sic] emotional, social, and intellectual investments with the goal of shaping consumption patterns" (Jenkins, 2006a, p. 63) or cultivate their loyalty (Dwyer, 2009). This logic drives the inclusion in *Kickass* of a scene that director Matthew Vaughn identifies as “important, because you just have to remind the audience he's a doofus teenager” so that “the audience is gonna like him and want him to do well. You know, you gotta feel for your lead character.” Such loyalty or attachment often takes time to build, which Mike noted can be difficult to explain to marketers unfamiliar with fandom:

“Oh the *first* thing I do gets this kind of response, but I've laid the groundwork, and if I *continue* and I'm smart about it, that will grow,” like the way a TV show grows. Hopefully season two gets more and season three and season four and by season five you're a pop culture phenomenon like *True Blood*, right? That's the goal. And I think that- But brands haven't really recognized, they haven't thought about their marketing in terms of eliciting that kind of growth in, whatever, love for their brand or attention.

The slow build or the long-term relationship between fan and object has made the leap from fannish marginality to normativity. This differs from the disposable consumption of the type that means that “Modern consumer society is symbolized [. . .] by the mountains of rubbish, the garage and jumble sales, and columns of advertisements of second-hand goods for sale and the second-hand car lots” and not just “ubiquitous propaganda on behalf of new goods” (C. Campbell, 2000), and so does represent a shift in consumption norms. This recasting of fan desire into industry’s value system indeed narrows the gap between the fan normal and
contemporary norms of media use, but Mike’s comment also shows that the shift is not yet complete.

It is important to bear in mind that the desire to consume, however well it may be managed toward industry ends, does not solely impact the bottom line. It can also be a source of exclusion: "Consumer culture does not only create desire in those who can easily obtain" its products (Crawford, 2004, p. 127). As Garry Crawford notes, class exclusion isn't absolute and poorer fans will buy less or attend less often—but they will still be subject to the same norm that recruits a baseline of consumption they may be unable to meet. Jenkins (2006a, p. 23) describes the "elite consumer" of convergence media as "disproportionately white, male, middle class, and college educated," a subject to which I’ll return in Chapter 6. A similar norm obtains for sports, with Kevin Quinn (2009) arguing that in-stadium attendees are more likely to be white, educated, and of a higher income, which he relates to the high cost of attendance. Quinn also points to class stratification in which people consume which sports and notes the fact that, even when a sport fandom is shared across classes, the distinction between cheap seats and box seats generates divisions within the stadium. Class divides can also be seen, he argues, in some sports rivalries, as with that between USC and UCLA. All forms of leisure are class-stratified (Veblen, 2000 [1899]), that is, but the intensive relationship of fandom to consumption intensifies the effect.

Thus, on one level, certain identity categories are better situated with respect to the norm, but on the other this large-scale management and normalization of consumption produces “consumer” as an identity, produces identity through consumption, and produces fan identity as specifically consumptive. Advertising doesn’t create desires out of thin air, after all; it merely convinces us that what it provides will satisfy the wants we already have (C. Campbell, 2000). It is, then, a process of matching consumption to identity—and teaching consumption, even
Consumption 2.0, functions no differently. Historically, consumption got articulated to identity because production was alienating (Floyd, 2009; Marx, 1978b). However, despite this association with freedom and selfhood it’s important to recognize that consumerism is no more voluntaristic than gender (Floyd, 2009, p. 102)—and it’s similarly frequently central to people’s identities. Many acknowledge that identity is enacted through consumption (Douglas & Isherwood, 2000; Jenkins et al., 2013; Rafferty, 2011). That “fan” is an identity particularly organized around and understood in terms of consumption makes it an intensified case (Crawford, 2004; Sandvoss, 2005). Fans "draw on consumer and media goods in the construction of their self-identity" (Crawford, 2004, p. 119).

Thus, as Mike of Campfire put it, “I think that a lot of times, being a fan, especially for social fans, being a fan is about the expression of your fandom- kind of, is writing the story of who you are to the public,” which he specifically linked to things such as collections of merchandise. The close relationship of fandom and consumption shows when the presence of *stuff* is often how you can tell someone *is* a fan in representational sources. Characters in *The Guild* or *The Big Bang Theory* often have on some purchased item—a hat, belt buckle, or t-shirt—that references a media object of which they are a fan. *Fever Pitch*’s Boston Red Sox fan Ben, of the previously elaborated Sox-Central apartment, convinces his girlfriend to become interested in the Red Sox, which is visually indicated by the fact that she starts wearing t-shirts and jackets with the team logo. More than just a representational shortcut to signify fandom for quick identification, the emphasis on consumption highlights the centrality of consuming the object of fandom to the fan’s life and identity in the discourse of fandom.

The link of consumption to identity particularly shows when fan consumption is constructed as a highly embodied practice. Displaying fandom on one’s body through costuming
is consistent across cultural representations of fandom, whether having a whole wardrobe of Red Sox clothing as Ben does or iterations such as always (or nearly always) wearing something related to the object of fandom, as when a pair of “geeky best friends” competed on reality competition show “The Amazing Race” and “did extensive research on what to wear what was lightweight and would help us move the fastest [. . .]. I think it was the longest I ever went without wearing a logo on my T-shirt. If you see me on the street, I'm usually wearing a Superman, Bizarro or Batman T-shirt on a constant basis” (Lang, 2008). Being without a way to signal fandom approaches a hardship for fans under this logic. Seth in The O.C. certainly considers wearing a t-shirt to be a vital demonstration of fan belonging. When Seth learns he may be meeting with George Lucas to discuss the adaptation of his comic book to film, he has this conversation with his business partner:

Seth: And if I am in fact meeting with George Lucas, I have my Boba Fett t-shirt.
Zach: Dude, it's a little small.
Seth: I got it when I was eight. Hopefully it'll stretch.

Seth’s commitment to the shirt, even if he has to cram his eighteen-year-old body into it, even when wildly inappropriate for the type of meeting he means to wear it to, affirms the necessity of wearing clothes featuring the object of fandom for a fan. Thus, to some extent we’re told, as convention goers in Galaxy Quest are, “Don’t forget to buy a Galaxy Quest t-shirt on your way out. Thank you.”

Of course, not all desire to consume fan clothing is created equal, as suggested by a stand-up comedian featured in documentary Trekkies, who notes that he “got beat up most of my life for being a Star Trek fan. Usually by sports fans, which I think is ironic, 'cause someone that's, like, really into football will wear the uniform of the game, a jersey, and walk around town
and that's fine. Yet, if I put on my Klingon uniform to go to Safeway, I'm a big fucking geek, you know?” This commitment to fannish clothing even in the face of violence points to the deep attachment fans normatively have to wearing their fandom. When convention-goers in *Galaxy Quest* make themselves look like the members of the fictional space ship’s crew, to some extent they inhabit that position or (temporarily) become the people they admire—as evidenced by the way those dressed as the Doctor Lazarus character repeat the character’s catchphrase totemistically as a greeting to the actor who played him (much to Sir Alexander Dane’s irritation). That the object of fandom impacts who fans are or desire to be also shows in the rhetorical question asked by a roleplaying fan in *Supernatural*: “To be Sam and Dean, to wake up every morning and save the world, to have a brother who would die for you—well, who wouldn’t want that?” Doing fandom, then, according to this discourse, means taking it on, having it be a (greater or lesser) part of one’s sense of self.

Fandom’s integration into identity also shows in the intense affective attachments fans are understood to have. Ben says of his Red Sox fandom that “It’s a passion. It’s a very, very big part of my life,” to the point where he elsewhere describes giving up the game as like giving up his family. *Galaxy Quest*’s Thermians—a species of aliens who are essentially fans of the television show—demonstrate extreme reverence for the characters: repeating anything actor Jason says, whispering in awe as the rest of the crew is introduced, and generally seeing the crew as omnipotent and infallible and sure to save the day the way they always do in the show. This deification is rendered explicit by the way they describe themselves as “humbled to stand in your presence,” feeling that “standing here in your presence is the greatest honor we could ever have hoped to achieve in our lifetime,” or indeed, that “even though we had never before met, I had always considered you as a father to me.” In this way, then, it becomes clear that these
representations understand the object to be a key relationship in the fan’s life. This intertwining, then, explains why fans are shown as so proud of the mountains of stuff that they own. In documentary *Fanalysis*, a fan rattles off a list of all the things that she has. In the aforementioned *Xena* Fanatic contest, an unsuccessful finalist announces “I have a lot of merchandise of *Xena*” to support their claim to be true fanatic—and then shows it all. The proud display of one’s fandom-related belongings is central to fandom as an identity, done by fans in documentaries *Horror Fans*, *Trekkies*, and *Mathematically Alive*. In the latter, one fan announces: "If there's something that has Mets on it, I have to have it."

With a bit more intensity, this link of consumption and identity turns into fans’ personal spaces being visualized as shrine-like. A room plastered on all surfaces with the object of fandom is a common trope: Gil in *The Fan* has a space wallpapered with newspaper clippings about player Bobby Rayburn, the Giants, and baseball in general; *My Name is Bruce*’s teenage enthusiast Jeff has decorated his bedroom in much the same way with every Bruce Campbell item ever produced (including drain cleaner); and Hutch’s garage apartment in *Fanboys* has *Star Wars* curtains, action figures, lunch boxes, and what appear to be torn out pages from comic books on the wall. Such scenes visually demonstrate the tying of identity to the private sphere in contemporary American culture. Lynn Spigel (1992, pp. 12, 73) contends that beginning around 1820 the family ceased to be an economic unit for the middle class and instead became a site of renewal; over time, “The public would come to be conceived of as a place of productive labor, while the home was seen as a site of rejuvenation and consumption.” Given that consumption is already generally seen as private (Baudrillard, 2000; Sandlin & Maudlin, 2012), this relation reinforces the consumption-private-identity nexus. Indeed, if, as Ferguson (2003, p. 146) argues, race, class, gender, and sexuality are relegated to the private sphere, then these and other
identity-grounding categories can, from the other direction, be understood as essential to one’s private self, which is precisely what wall-to-wall private fandom implies as part of the discourse of fandom.

**Conclusion**

In the end, then, transmedia as Consumption 2.0 is both new and old. Like Web 2.0, it is premised on a particular interactivity, but the forms of interactivity provided often function as “point and click and be entertained” and choices within pre-coded options, such that fans don’t act but rather react to what they are presented. Transmedia is expansive because it adds new material in various locations and not just new ways to consume more of the same as fans follow an object of fandom beyond its evident boundaries in order to consume more information, more content, or more contact or immerse themselves in a story world. In the end, however, transmedia is inherently consumptive. It gestures toward interactivity, but closer analysis demonstrates that new media has actually *not* radically altered the traditional idea of passive consumers who should more or less grin and take what they’re sold. This articulation of fandom to consumption is clearest when accessing the expansive information requires buying more stuff, but even free additional content has a logic recruiting fan *desire for more* into consumptive activity. Contemporary industry approaches to fans undoubtedly recruit and desire fan desire, but are actually a recruitment of *reaction*, which acts to manage fan desire in a way that troubles ideas that fans are newly empowered by being courted by industry as the ideal consumer in the post-web era.
Chapter 4
Fandom and/as Labor

Although as I showed in Chapter 3 some of the times when industry invites fans to interact maintain assumptions about passive consumption, at other times industry does indeed call on fans to do things. There has been a great deal of excitement around participation as a democratization of the means of media production, but in this chapter I argue that this interpretation pays insufficient attention to ongoing structural inequalities of capitalism, contending that what fans are being recruited to do is labor from which industry reaps the profits. In other areas of media studies, a labor framing has been applied to user-generated content, but fans have not often been approached this way. Partially, this disjuncture comes from the fact that fan activity is both by all appearances freely chosen and understood as pleasure, neither of which is typically associated with work. However, fan production is big business, with financial benefits flowing only to industry in a way reminiscent of earlier capitalist accumulation regimes, making a labor framing appropriate.

In this chapter, I make a case for considering fan activity as work and then trace the forms it takes in the contemporary discursive construction of fandom: the work of watching associated with Dallas Smythe’s (1977) audience commodity; promotional labor; labor that produces content for industry; and lovebor, the work of loving. The analysis weaves together evidence from across the archive of fictional and nonfictional representations of fans, the policies and structures of official websites for media properties (films, sports franchises, etc.), and statements made by industry workers who produce content for fans. By conducting the inquiry in multiple discursive registers and at multiple scales simultaneously, a rich picture emerges of how

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1 See, for example, Andrejevic, 2009a; Fuchs, 2012a; Hesmondhalgh, 2010; Terranova, 2000.
fandom is produced as a site of labor. Through my deliberate disregard of boundaries among sources, the commonalities across these disparate locations rise to the surface, illuminating the logic of fan work in a way not possible with an examination of a single one of these nodes in isolation.

From “Participation” to “Work”: Taking Fan Activity Seriously as Labor

Many acknowledge that fans are invited to engage and be productive in the Internet era. Sharon Ross’s Beyond the Box can be understood as a book about fan productivity, elaborating a theory of “tele-participation” and arguing that “The fact that industry professionals seem to be seeking tele-participation and extension of the TV text suggests that the tele-participating viewer is becoming a prototype” (S. M. Ross, 2009, p. 15). Ross taxonomizes the ways industry invites participation, with attention to “the ways in which the television industry is managing viewers’ desire to tele-participate, and indeed to some degree creating a desire to tele-participate” (S. M. Ross, 2009, p. 261, original emphasis). Scholars often frame the shift to productivity as normative and encouraged as a dedifferentiation of the roles of producer and consumer, variously explained as “blurred” “eroded,” or just “not separate” any longer (Hadas, 2009; Jenkins, 2006a; R. Pearson, 2010). Even the most pro-industry treatments of the subject acknowledge that these participatory activities produce value for media companies (Baird Stribling, 2013; Jenkins et al., 2013), and though Sharon Ross (2009, p. 25) does refer to such participation as “pleasurable work,” she does not employ a sustained labor framing.

As Hamilton and Heflin (2011, p. 1051) note, "utopian promises of electronic media from the telegraph to the internet as causes of social change have been well-documented and critiqued," but there remains enthusiasm about the ways in which technological change has made
the means of production of media available to many more people. In 2007, Yochai Benkler noted that around a billion people globally had gained access to media production, a figure that has surely grown in the interim with over 2 billion people on the Internet and 6 billion with cellular phones worldwide (United Nations International Telecommunications Union, 2012). Through the rise of the Internet and cheap computing capacity, everyday people, formerly consumers or users, can now produce—and, perhaps more importantly, distribute—their own media objects (Fisher, 2012; Murray, 2004). The optimistic view, espoused by authors like Benkler and Chris Anderson, contends that technology enables the production of things that couldn't economically be done before, like niche content (C. Anderson, 2008), and production by people who couldn't produce before (Benkler, 2007). The expansion of production to new people is particularly exciting in the case of socially disadvantaged groups such as “immigrants, girls, youths, and people of color” (Nakamura, 2008, p. 47).

The change in media production is even, as Leora Hadas’s (2009, sec. 3.2) description of arguments about an “Internet by and for the people” suggests, figured as democratizing (Andrejevic, 2011; Hamilton & Heflin, 2011). From this logic we get contentions like Benkler’s (2007, p. 1) that it shouldn’t be “passé” or “naïve” to talk about an “Internet revolution.” One obvious example of how technology enables fans to resist industry imperatives comes with so-called “piracy,” in which fan power to appropriate, remix, and distribute copyrighted content seriously challenges industry claims to control (Boyle, 2008; H.-K. Lee, 2011), though James Boyle (2008, p. 77) snarks, “I see no high-minded principle vindicated by middle-class kids getting access to music they do not want to pay for. It is difficult to take seriously the sanctimonious preening of those who cast each junior downloader of corporate rock as a Ché Guevara, fighting heroically to bring about a new creative landscape in music.”
With respect to fans in particular, the broad availability of the means of media production is understood to reposition them as normative audience members, as Hadas (2009, sec. 3.4) notes, "In theory, the participatory logic of the Web 2.0 ethos is the same one that has been driving fandom for as long as the concept has existed". This view, as described and critiqued by Mark Andrejevic (2008, p. 40), contends that with this new status, fans can mount a “progressive challenge to a nonparticipatory medium.” Others contend that “People take media into their own hands” (Jenkins, 2006a, p. 17). Scholars adopting the media democracy stance understand recent technological changes as resulting in a shift of power to the people formerly known as the audience (Jenkins, 2006a; Murray, 2004). Fans, under this model, have “influence” (Baym, 2007); they hold media makers “accountable” (Andrejevic, 2008). Henry Jenkins (2006a, p. 24) describes fans as “demanding the right to participate within the culture,” and he identifies this battle for control of media as one fans are winning: "If the corporate media couldn’t crush this vernacular culture during the age when mass media power went largely unchallenged, it is hard to believe that legal threats are going to be an adequate response to a moment when new digital tools and new networks of distribution have expanded the power of ordinary people to participate in their culture" (Jenkins, 2006a, pp. 157–8).

However, I’d like to suggest a different framing of this shift in the means of production of media, viewing it instead as labor. The tendency toward seeing participation as inherently good or as democratizing works to shut down close analysis of fan activity—good is good, democracy is good, and there’s nothing else to say. The lens of labor, however, opens up the question of what fan productive activity is and means. Labor, unlike "goodness" or "democracy," can be many things. If fans are a vital part of the new economy, we have to take the economy part as seriously as the vital part. A labor framework makes possible key questions such as: Who
benefits from these fan activities, and in what ways? Though Jenkins, Ford, and Green (2013, p. 58) “feel it is crucial to acknowledge the concerns of corporate exploitation of fan labor,” they mention labor only briefly, as they ultimately believe “that the emerging system places greater power in the hands of the audience when compared to the older broadcast paradigm.” However, I contend that this view prematurely closes down the question: “Better” does not mean that there is no longer inequality, nor that we should abdicate responsibility for analysis.

Other media studies scholarship has taken audience activity seriously as labor. One of the first to make sense of user activity on the Internet as labor was Tiziana Terranova (2000, p. 37), who contended that “free labor is the moment where this knowledgeable consumption of culture is translated into productive activities that are pleasurably embraced and at the same time shamelessly exploited.” In this tradition, Andrejevic has described audience discussion at the Television Without Pity web site (Andrejevic, 2008) and YouTube use (Andrejevic, 2009a) as forms of labor from which industry extracts value and which it exploits. Others have made similar arguments about engagement with social networking sites (Fisher, 2012; Fuchs, 2012b). John Campbell (2011) adds an additional valence to these concerns in his discussion of commercial women’s web portal iVillage as a site where user labor produces both content and community. The various approaches taken in this body of work conceptualize the activities media users do as labor, and the types of work in their examples structurally resemble what fans do, such that I have found it useful to draw on for reframing fan practices.

However, the labor approach has not been common in fan studies thus far. There are good reasons for this disinclination, such as the absence in fan production of the alienation associated with work and fandom’s traditional articulation to a gift economy, which I’ll pick up in Chapter 5. The perspective that fan activity can, should, or even must be considered as labor is
currently emerging from a small group of early-career scholars. The novelty of the topic can be seen from the fact that *Transformative Works and Cultures*, in some sense the fan studies journal, has a special issue on “Fandom and/as Labor” slated for March 2014. The most prominent of the authors doing labor-focused analysis is Abigail De Kosnik (2009, 2012, 2013), who notes that: “We are at a ripe moment for establishing the fact that fandom is a form of free labor and for calling upon fans, scholars, and the corporations that benefit from fan activity to seriously consider the question of whether fans should be compensated for their work” (De Kosnik, 2012, p. 99). For her part, Alexis Lothian (2009) identifies industry moves to invite fan participation as stealing fannish labor the way fans have traditionally stolen industry’s intellectual property. Julie Levin Russo (2009, 2010) speaks of harnessing fan video production for promotional ends. All identify the financial benefits as flowing disproportionately to industry.

Fans, in making user-generated content, produce surplus value: They add value to the media property without receiving equivalent monetary value in return, producing a net benefit to industry. Put this way, it makes sense to view the recruitment of fan work as exploitation. There is a great deal of disagreement over what constitutes exploitation in a technical Marxist sense. The definition I use returns to *Capital* (Marx, 1978a) to define exploitation as the extraction of surplus value from workers—making more money from their labor than you pay them, a usage shared by Brown and Quan-Haase (2012) and Nicole Cohen (2012). Indeed, as Christian Fuchs (2010, 2012b) points out, as pay goes to zero, as generally occurs with fan production, the rate of exploitation goes to infinity.

Several scholars describe invitations to productivity extended to contemporary web users as “outsourcing” (Banks & Humphreys, 2008; Fisher, 2012; Fuchs, 2012a), and the links to this

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2 I am one of the co-editors of the issue, hence using the same phrase as the title of this chapter.
well-known labor-cost-reduction strategy should be taken seriously. Industry, perhaps unsurprisingly, does not use the term “outsourcing” for its invitations to productivity, but Ayhan Aytes (2012) emphasizes that a term that is used, “crowdsourcing,” also constitutes a form of outsourcing. From another angle, Williams, Williams, and Haslam (1989) note that while labor doesn’t contribute much to the overall input of production, it constitutes a much larger chunk in relation to profit. In the contemporary era of financialization, in which shareholder value has overtaken seemingly any other measure of a business, efforts to keep labor costs down are therefore perhaps to be expected. The shift in production that employs fan work has been technologically enabled by “the ability of the internet not just to unite far-flung viewers but to make the fruits of their labor readily accessible to the mainstream—and to producers themselves” (Andrejevic, 2008, p. 25). Increased, technologically-enabled visibility of fan practices that in many instances preexisted contemporary media technologies provides the conditions for industry to try to "mobilize media innovations to channel ever more surplus productivity into profit" (Russo, 2010, p. 260).

Thus, an activity that is invited by industry or encouraged by industry or that takes place at official industry sites or benefits the industry in any way is always exploitation in the Marxist sense of surplus value extraction. Accordingly, just because fans have access to the means of production does not mean they control them. Fan value creation—in terms of meaning, loyalty, commitment, and promotion—is not new, but industry recognition and encouragement, as well as the contemporary expansion of monetization, are. Russo (2010, p. 182) notes that ”fan production has no doubt always held indirect economic value for corporations as a form of promotion and a stimulus to consumption, but, until relatively recently, this phenomenon was rarely considered openly outside the science fiction niche.” Through various means, fan
valuation is increasingly being articulated to, translated into, or becoming exchangeable for market value—as, indeed, all nonmarket values are coming to be under neoliberalism (W. Brown, 2003). Thus, here I examine the various contemporary types of work done by speculative media and sports fans, articulating how fan labor is produced as normative.

Apparent Commodity Work: Continuities and Changes

As originally pointed out by Smythe (1977), one way that audiences work is by watching the ads that support their “free” media. This kind of labor generates direct monetary value for industry through ad sales as an “audience commodity,” in Smythe’s terminology. More recently, audience commodity work has been supplemented by the data trade in which knowledge about user activity has value, turning audiences into a data commodity. Additionally, from the baseline Smythe established, the contemporary era has seen an expansion to add the work of being watched—making one’s desires visible to industry. Fans are also called upon to make their own “free lunch”—the incitement that Smythe argues gets audiences to do the work of watching ads. In the next four sections, I will parse out how each of these forms of labor functions in the contemporary fan context.

The Audience Commodity

Despite rhetoric about a new era of audience power, the anti-agential and indeed dehumanizing logic of buying and selling people’s attention—which Jenkins, Ford, and Green (2013, p. 1) describe as “eyeballs in front of a screen (in television terms), butts in seats (in film or sports terms), or whatever other body parts media companies and brands hope to grab next”—is still very much in force. Indeed, Jonathan Beller (2011, p. 125) suggests that it may have even been intensified: “The cinematic century posited that looking could be treated as value-producing
labor; the digital age presupposes it.” Certainly, having access to a supply of such ad-watching workers is worth a great deal of money, as with the more than $545 million (93%) drop in the value of MySpace as users abandoned it en masse (B. Brown & Quan-Haase, 2012).

The ongoing relevance of the audience commodity emerges, first, from the fact that industry workers use that terminology in making sense of fan processes. The language of audience commodification could be as simple as Mike of Campfire’s contention that, as much as their marketing work acts to produce rich, interactive experiences, “Ultimately a lot of those things are leading to, yes we want to engage them with the story but we want them to tune in,” defining eyeballs as the bottom line. However, audience commodity logic also appears in other ways, as when Mike further specified that to some extent they have freedom as marketers precisely because they themselves aren’t producing an audience commodity:

I think that if we were hired by a network, say, to create a multiplatform or a transmedia experience that was gonna be seen more as programming, and they were going to sell advertising against it and then they were gonna sell the rights to foreign territories to that, then there would be- Then we'd start to have [geographical intellectual property controls], right? Like that BBCi player not working in the United States and things like that.

Steve at Campfire defines fans as an audience commodity even more explicitly, contending that in the contemporary structure of audiencing, “A movie starts or a TV show starts, you know, brands emerge and a Tumblr community starts immediately, and new technologies are creating fanbases around themselves. Sometimes the fanbase is their product” (original emphasis). In the Season 6 DVD extra “Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Television with a Bite,” WB network executive Gail Berman makes the most direct statement of all, describing the way "The show had made an
enormous impact on the WB. It increased the revenue of how much the WB could charge for a 30 second commercial spot.” These latter two statements articulate exactly the logic of the audience commodity—they’re your product, and you gauge their value in advertising dollars.

Accordingly, industry workers strive to produce the best audience commodity possible, whether through the quantity of viewers gathered or through their specific qualities. Both of these discourses of audience quality control arise in the contemporary concept of fandom. Steve from Campfire argued that “If a franchise doesn't get in new audiences it's kind of going to die away with that small hardcore,” pointing to the quantity issue. A similar sentiment was expressed in the narration to “Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Television with a Bite,” which says, “Every week more viewers were getting hooked on watching believable characters deal with supernatural situations. But the show's steadily growing fan base couldn’t compete with the numbers generated by the major networks. The cast worried that they might not be back for a second season.” Both of these examples demonstrate a cause and effect wherein only sufficient eyeballs on one’s media product enable it to continue. The logic also runs the other way, as expressed by David Germain (2008) of the Associated Press when he reported that “Cast and crew are game for more ‘X-Files’ movies if fans still believe strongly enough to convince distributor 20th Century Fox that the audience is there”—a media property can be not just continued but started back up if the audience passes muster, as demonstrated by revivals of shows like Family Guy and Arrested Development after they went off the air due to low ratings.

Alternately, rather than getting simply a bigger audience, industry at times desires a broader audience rather than having only niche appeal. Thus, when character Seth Cohen in The O.C. meets with the publisher of his graphic novel, Atomic County, set in a fictionalized version of Orange County, CA (but with superpowers), a marketing specialist advises him to keep this
need in mind: “Overall, we're concerned about the universality of Atomic County. We're a little worried- Kids in the heartland, they aren't gonna get this world.” Likewise, Campfire’s Merrin described the “balancing act” of her work: “Because sometimes there are clients that do really want to engage the fans, but they want to make sure that they're presenting the piece of entertainment in a really open way, so [inaudible] get that broader audience [. . .] You don’t want to be so hardcore, insular that you're going to be turning off people who wouldn't identify as being, like, a genre fan.” While Merrin is making a point about inclusivity, her statement also gestures toward the ongoing stigma around being a fan that I’ll discuss in Chapters 6 and 7.

Closely related to the fear of being too niche is the concern for ratings and demographics. Thus, “Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Television with a Bite” shows industry logics when the voiceover proclaims that “Although Buffy wasn't topping the ratings, the upstart WB network was delighted by the young audience the series was drawing.” Industry values the work of watching ads in aggregate, with the demographics of the laborers determining the price (Fisher, 2012; M. Lee, 2011). Often these are characteristics like age or income, but Eleanor Baird Stribling (2013, n.p.) argues that advertisers also have an interest in “audiences whose enthusiasm is believed to translate to more awareness of and receptivity to product placement and commercials. How much more ‘engaged’ and receptive this new audience is than the older, bigger one was considered crucial in setting a price.” Though the characteristic to be valued differs across these instances, the logic that some fan workers have more value than others remains. The fundamental position of ratings in cultural common sense around audience work shows in the way that it, like broadness of the audience, shows up in the media objects themselves, as when Krusty the Clown complains in The Simpsons episode “The Itchy and Scratchy and Poochie Show” (1997) that “Your ‘Itchy and Scratchy’ cartoons are stinking up my

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ratings!” Krusty then shows a chart and exclaims, “That crater is where your lousy cartoon crash-landed. It’s ratings poison!” This anxiety around losing attention during Krusty’s broadcast, precisely measured, (re)produces the quantification and qualification of audiences as normative and unremarkable, showing the pervasiveness of the audience commodity.

**The Data Commodity**

In the Internet era, the audience commodity undergoes some modification and expansion. As opposed to laborious and contested ways of measuring the audience like Nielsen ratings, with digital media audience members shed data constantly, like skin cells (Andrejevic, 2009a; Fisher, 2012; Fuchs, 2012a). As Andrejevic (2012, p. 149) puts it, “If the ability to track online behavior started out as somewhat serendipitous—the by-product of the convenience offered by a strand of code that allowed websites to remember previous visitors, now monitoring is being designed into the system,” which he describes as “one of the dominant business models for the online economy.” Giving up one’s data is the cost of using online services for which users do not have to pay (S. M. Ross, 2009; Scholz, 2012), just as the heir to watching ads was the cost of free television in an earlier era.

The sports side of the industry has, of course, been conspicuously absent from my discussion of audience labor thus far. This lack arises in large part from the different position that sports organizations have in relation to audience commodification, as they generally don’t sell media audiences to advertisers, but rather to networks, such that these concepts do not appear in the same ways as formulated for scripted programming. However, the sports industry nevertheless has an interest in commodifying its audience, and both sports and speculative media organizations participate in the data trade through their websites. Data commodity audience work is normalized, first, by the default to providing data at the various websites, facilitated by the fact
that they are based in the United States where such collection is legal.\textsuperscript{3} The Seattle Mariners site, for example, notifies users in its Privacy Policy that it employs “automatic methods” to collect data, specifying that:

Examples of the information we collect and analyze using such methods include, without limitation, the Internet protocol (IP) address used to connect your computer to the Internet; e-mail address; login name and password; operating system type, version and computer platform; purchase history, which we may aggregate with similar information from other customers; the full Uniform Resource Locator (URL) clickstream to, on, and from our Website, including date and time; cookie information; and products you viewed or searched for. We may also use software tools to measure and collect session information, including page response times, download errors, length of visits to certain pages, page interaction information (such as scrolling, clicks, and mouse-overs) and methods used to browse away from the page.

Automatic collection of aggregate, anonymous data (AA data) about user behavior is standard across the web sites in the archive, positioning the capacity to turn users into data as fundamental to contemporary media logics on the web.

Additionally, sites reserve the right to collect “personally identifiable information” which they may or may not aggregate with the AA data. Major League Soccer’s site notes that “In consideration for our granting you access to these features of the Site and Services, you hereby expressly agree to provide true, accurate, current and complete information about yourself as requested and as necessary for our provision of, and/or your registration for the use of, those

\textsuperscript{3} In the European Union, by contrast, sites may not collect data unless users opt in (Fuchs, 2012c).
features of the Site and Services.” The sites thus work in various ways to ensure that such information can be collected, including also the need to opt out rather than opting in. As Fuchs (2012b, p. 149) notes, "Opt-in privacy policies are typically favored by consumer and data protectionists, whereas companies and marketing associations prefer opt-out and self-regulation advertising policies in order to maximize profits." Indeed, even if users choose to opt out, they are warned, as at the Battlestar Galactica (BSG) site, that “If you prefer, you can set your browser to refuse cookies or to alert you when cookies are being sent, but it is possible that some parts of the Site will not function properly if you do so.” Both default collection and these sorts of appeals to getting the full experience of the site normalize doing data commodity audience labor.

All these means by which data can be collected and all the difficulty in refusing the collection demonstrate that industry values it as a form of audience commodification. Industry uses the data, first, to sell advertising on their sites in a new version of the old audience commodity (Andrejevic, 2009a; A. Ross, 2012). Thus, as described by ESPN, sites use data to “provide you with advertising based on your activity on our sites and applications and on third-party sites and applications”—and knowing the audience in order to sell it to advertisers is precisely what Smythe described. However, the web allows advanced audience commodification, wherein data itself has value independent of the provision of a specific ad and can be sold in its own right as market research (Andrejevic, 2012; A. Ross, 2012). BSG, like other sites, says that they “reserve the right to share Personal Data with our affiliates.” Data’s value shows most clearly in statements such as this one from CalBears.com that “The Site or CSTV [College Sports TV] Online, Inc. may be sold along with its assets, or other transactions may occur in which your personally identifiable information is one of the business assets.
transferred.” That data constitutes a valuable asset was clear when a demand for records of user behavior was part of Viacom’s 2007 lawsuit against YouTube (Andrejevic, 2009a). User data as a “business asset” operates within an audience-commodity logic, but as a new, much-magnified manifestation that has been technologically enabled.

**The Work of Being Watched**

However, the audience work of Smythe's vision has also been amped up considerably in the Internet era in another way—what fans have to do. Before, audiences didn’t need to participate in being sold as a commodity, but now, Andrejevic (2009b) points out, audiences—like reality TV stars—are called upon to do the work of being watched. Audiences are asked to actively make their preferences knowable and visible (Andrejevic, 2008, 2011). Interactivity, in which fans can act rather than merely be tracked, often furthers the rendering of an audience commodity rather than moving fans into a new role as collaborators, much as we saw in Chapter 3 for a different purpose. One key aspect of making themselves visible is that audience segmentation into markets has been “outsourced” to audiences themselves (Fisher, 2012). Fans are, in a general sense, asked to participate in the work of being watched by being invited to make their feelings known. Under this logic, Lee McGuigan (2012) refers to feedback as something industry “harvests.” At times, fans are generally recruited, as in “Syfy wants to know what you think! Take part in surveys to share your opinions.” However, much more commonly fans are invited to connect through social media. The basic invitation to participate takes the form of a website button to “like” or “become a fan” on Facebook or “follow” on Twitter. More intensively, fans have the option to use their Facebook account instead of registering for the ESPN site or to add the Mariners to their Google+ circles, both of which give some access to the data held by the social networking sites, rendering fans considerably more visible to industry.
When StarTrek.com uses Facebook as the means for their entertainment-poll about the show’s aliens, then, its invitation to “Log in to see what your friends like” will also inevitably have the effect of “Log in so we can see what you like.”

The industry workers I interviewed frame the value of social media precisely in terms of visibility. Elizabeth of the athletics department at BMU, when asked what she meant by active fans, indicated that “Social media has allowed us to kind of see, to hear more of those active fans” (original emphasis). Indeed, the fundamental expectation of social media visibility shows when its absence causes concern. Thus, Merrin from Campfire described a challenging situation where a client had a greater expectation of transparency than could be provided:

I think the client was concerned because they weren't seeing as much activity on their Facebook page as they wanted. They didn't see that visibility. But that was never where the conversation was meant to take place. We always wanted the conversations to be taking- taking place in the established communities. So from a client perspective it probably would have served us better to host a forum on our website as well, just to help so they could see stuff, because they weren't digging around in the different communities necessarily. And they were looking to their Facebook page to be where this conversation was going to take place, but that's where the broad audience was engaging with it rather than the niche audiences that we were tasked to engage with.

Location-based invitations to participate amplify the encouragement of fans to render themselves visible even farther into quasi-surveillance, as in the Mariners’ invitation to “Check in at the Ballpark.” In much the same way, Elizabeth at BMU was excited about the success of one engagement strategy: “We did a stripe the stadium promotion” where they asked fans in
alternating sections to wear different colors, “And then we did a fan cam, so they actually took a picture of everybody in the stadium and they could actually go back after the game and prove they were there by tagging themselves, and we did some giveaways on there” (original emphasis). In this way, “Tell us who you are” (demographics) becomes “Tell us what you like” (psychographics) and even at times “Tell us where you are” (geographics).

The work of being watched also raises the stakes on what constitutes approval—with increased visibility, it becomes possible to go beyond just quantitative ratings as a measure of making a good product to have one’s specific creative choices qualitatively validated. This unexpected mode of deploying increased fan visibility, as with the more basic uses of the audience commodity above, seems to concern only speculative media industry workers. However, these industry workers’ consistent habit of commenting on how much fans liked things only makes sense in light of the work of being watched. Over and over in the supplemental DVD materials for Heroes, Kickass, The O.C., Scott Pilgrim, The Simpsons, and Superbad, the industry workers describing the production process mention how much fans like various aspects of their products. Out of such attention to fans making their desires known we get an exchange like that between producer Adam Arkush and actor Adrian Pasdar in the commentary for Heroes episode “The Second Coming” from the show’s third season:

    Arkush: Boy, the reaction when Malcolm [McDowell, the actor who played the character Mr. Linderman] comes back. It’s just fantastic.
    Pasdar: That was unexpected at Comic Con, wasn't it?
    Arkush: Yes, they just went “Whoa!” Were so surprised.
    Pasdar: They loved it. What's not to love?

At times, the self-congratulation is even more readily apparent. Thus, Kickass director Matthew
Vaughn commented that “I’ve learned this, the braver we've been with this film the better it's become and the more people've liked it.” The idea that fan preferences should be visible and that visibility has value is thus evidently well integrated in industry logics.

**Making Your Own Free Lunch**

Finally, to think in terms of Smythe's (1977, p. 5) identification of the programming content of television as a “free lunch” that induces audiences to show up and do the work of watching ads, in the contemporary era industry often asks fans to make their own free lunch. They do the work of watching and being watched, but also, through their extratextual fan activity, they produce the very incitement to participate that encourages them to show up and do that other work. As Andrejevic (2008, p. 28) puts it, “Interactivity, in short, allows viewers to take on the work of finding ways to make a show more interesting.” Free lunch production often takes the form of customizing or reworking mass-mediated content to make it suit their desires better (De Kosnik, 2012, 2013; Jenkins et al., 2013). Participating in fandom, then, can make shows more fun to watch, or even keep people watching despite frustration.

Free lunch logic gives rise to invitations to talk to other fans, engage with materials, or vote for favorite episodes or players in order to heighten the experience of the media object. In this vein, Steve contends that in the work Campfire does they very much focus on the story world, and bring the story world to life through elements [. . .] So that's definitely a very strong characteristic of some of our more successful work. There's definitely a strong element, I think challenges-creating challenges and decision-point opportunities. To give the- I was going to say the semblance of free will but I don't think it's the semblance of free will, but in the same way that the game design has multiple avenues to explore, a lot of our
programs have multiple avenues to explore

His contention that their work “gives the semblance of free will,” though not intended as sinister and ultimately walked back, usefully demonstrates the nature of this kind of interactivity: playing with the provided toys in a way that participants surely find fun and engaging—within a set of real constraints. A similar set of beliefs arises in *Harry Potter* fan and fan-site runner Melissa Anelli’s characterization of what she does in the documentary *We Are Wizards*. Anelli, both a fan and someone who has fans, describes her role as “giving the fans the stuff to obsess about, the stuff to do, the way in which they can most enjoy being a fan during this specific time in *Harry Potter* history.” This moment both a) frames the idea that fan work makes the object of fandom fun as something fans themselves and b) makes it more normative by being mentioned by “real fans”—albeit as mediated by filmmakers. Sharon Ross (2009) similarly notes that, when shows have complex structures, fan action to collect and organize the necessary narrative information facilitates continued engagement with these texts—though she does not call it work.

In general, the invitation to make one’s own free lunch aims at making participation in audience and data commodity labor more enjoyable. Such work, in giving fans more to do, extends the “shelf life” of a media product (De Kosnik, 2012; Postigo, 2003). Free lunch production animates some of the web design at Syfy.com, which includes a forum for each and every show the network has, past and present. The page has some sort of question or imperative verb inciting participation for each forum, as in “Stargate Universe: When a band of soldiers, scientists and civilians find themselves on an unmarked path headed toward the unknown, what do you think they’ll encounter? Discuss it here in the forum.” Major League Soccer similarly has masses of such invitations to participate, in their case things like scavenger hunts, predictions of game outcomes, or tailgate recipe contests. These sorts of participation are common and salient
enough that the Associated Press mentions fans voting for the winners of horror media awards and the Superbowl MVP as an unremarkable part of their coverage of those events. Free lunch logic has become thoroughly embedded in the contemporary mediascape.

Finally, particular to sports, fans are encouraged to participate and make being a fan interesting because fans are part of the normative composition of a sports experience. As Garry Crawford (2004, p. 37) notes, “Sports supporters play an important role in creating the atmosphere, spectacle and entertainment of the ‘live’ sports venue,” such that it's fan activity, in part, that makes sports audiencing worthwhile. My interviews with the sports marketing practitioners involved repeated mentions of the fact that the presence of a bloc of wealthy, older donors at BMU events who did not participate in being “loud” was a challenge to the sort of atmosphere they wanted fans to produce. Elizabeth explained, “We just want to create this environment that you don’t want [to miss]- [don’t] not want to be a part of.” The essential role of fan atmosphere production for sporting events can be seen from how fans appear in the fictional representations—they are always there, even in sports media focused on the experience of players. Fans often exist only as noise, disarticulated from any visual of actual people cheering either by not being shown or by there being far more noise than could be generated by the number of people shown. The non-diegetic nature of the sound suggests how much fan participation is believed to be an essential part of what it means to be at a game. Moreover, fans are always there even when irrelevant to the plot, no matter whether it’s a handful at a driveway game of fictional sport BASEketball or a kids’ soccer or hockey game, or a huge crowd at a major sporting event. This tendency constructs fan free lunch labor as integral to sports.

**Promotional Labor: Buzz, Sharing, and Free Advertising**
In addition to laboring as the audience commodity, fans do promotional, word-of-mouth work (Andrejevic, 2009a; De Kosnik, 2012, 2013), including the production and circulation of promotional content (Reinhard, 2011; Russo, 2010). Indeed, Jenkins, Ford, and Green’s (2013) *Spreadable Media* is in some sense a book entirely *about* promotional labor (though they do not employ a labor analysis). When they define “spreadability,” they catalogue the various encouragements and discouragements of circulation: “the technical resources that make it easier to circulate some kind of content than others, the economic structures that support or restrict circulation, the attributes of a media text that might appeal to a community’s motivation for sharing material, and the social networks that link people through the exchange of meaningful bytes” (Jenkins et al., 2013, p. 4). Promotional labor can thus be seen as a way to turn the fact that users now have access to the means of media distribution (Bolin, 2012; Fisher, 2012; Wittel, 2012) to industry’s ends.

Promotional work consists, first, of generating interest, or, to use the buzzword, “buzz,” which many have argued is a vital way users act in the contemporary era. One route to buzz is the dissemination of information about media objects. As BMU’s Elizabeth put it, “In marketing we realize no press is bad press really, because that means they're talking about you, which is good.” Getting the word out has value all by itself. Related to valuing any mention, as Merrin from Campfire noted, the fan conversation influences how the press approaches media objects. Moreover, Mike at Campfire explained the ways in which fan promotional labor, in making information available, sets up actual purchasing: He described the way he used to read reviews of new music in fan-produced zines in order to decide which albums to buy, which he described as structurally identical to how blogs work today.

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4 See, for example, Bechmann, 2012; De Kosnik, 2012, 2013; Jenkins, 2013; McCracken, 2013.
In the “Frequently (soon to be) Asked Questions” section of the Dr. Horrible’s Singalong Blog site, creator Joss Whedon explains the means and value of fan promotional labor in some depth as the answer to the question “What can WE do to help this musical extravaganza?"

What you always do, peeps! What you’re already doing. Spread the word. Rock some banners, widgets, diggs… let people know who wouldn’t ordinarily know. It wouldn’t hurt if this really was an event. Good for the business, good for the community – communitIES: Hollywood, internet, artists around the world, comic-book fans, musical fans (and even the rather vocal community of people who hate both but will still dig on this). Proving we can turn Dr Horrible into a viable economic proposition as well as an awesome goof will only inspire more people to lay themselves out in the same way. It’s time for the dissemination of the artistic process. Create more for less. You are the ones that can make that happen. Wow. I had no idea how important you guys were. I’m a little afraid of you.

Whedon’s lengthy explanation makes it clear that fan promotional labor can have huge effects and is often vital to the success of media objects—a necessity greatly increased in the case of Dr. Horrible as web video produced outside the Hollywood production system and without its promotional capacities. Similarly, AP stories consistently describe Comic Con as a place to go to generate buzz for one’s media object through telling fans about it or showing them some parts of it. News sources also routinely explain discussion on social media sites as buzz or a way that interest in a film or television show builds through networks of followers, further normalizing the logic of promotional labor.

Alternately, fan work creates value when it distributes promotional content. Fan
distribution animates Campfire’s work, wherein they produce marketing content that they hope fans will like enough to share around. It also appears, however, in surprising places, such as *BSG*’s website, which has a widget that you can use to put videos of the show on your own site, defying the logic of intellectual property protectivism in the interest of content-based promotion—though of course fans don’t really “take” the videos unless they crack the Flash encoding on them. StarTrek.com even has a heading for “Viral Distribution” in their Terms of Use, stating that “We may expressly authorize you to redistribute certain Content for personal, non-commercial use. We will identify the Content that you are authorized to redistribute and describe ways you may redistribute it (such as via email, blogs, or embedded players, or by producing Mash-Ups).” The practice of giving fans access or content specifically so they can re-transmit it—or be the carrier wave, as Steve of Campfire put it—underscores how fan promotional labor has become integrated into media industry norms.

The cases of fan trouble where fan activity does not create the desired/expected value or even destroys some value make it clear that these forms of fan activity constitute labor because they produce value. Mike, for example, expressed concern about alienating fans when clients insist that Campfire make certain ways of interacting with promotional materials obligatory. Fan anti-promotion can particularly occur at Comic Con, as when Peter Mitchell (2009) of the Australian Associated Press contends that “Comic-Con, in the Twitter age, can be a make or break stop. If the nerds aren't impressed by a studio's new $US200 million ($A246 million) sci-fi film, it will be beaten up by blogs so badly during Comic-Con that when it eventually lands in theatres it is dead on arrival.” The concern for the destructive capacity of fan antipathy also appears as a fear of sports audiences, with the AP’s Suzanne Vranica (2008) contending that “Today, fallout from an ill-conceived ad can be magnified by the growing number of polls that
survey the public about ads and Web sites that critique commercials. That heightened scrutiny causes some advertisers to think twice about taking the Super Bowl plunge.”

Beyond buzz, fans work to convince others to like or participate with respect to the show (Andrejevic, 2009a; Baird Stribling, 2013; S. M. Ross, 2009), which I classify as a more intensive form of promotional labor. As Campfire’s Steve put it,

After that level of education there is participation, which is a deeper engagement, which usually includes sharing, ideally. Because at that point then you want to turn your participants into evangelists. If you can convert fans—Fans like to evangelize, but sometimes they often lack the tools or lack the network or the system to do so. So enabling fans to evangelize is definitely the next layer.

Indeed, Steve spoke repeatedly of fans as evangelists, and the sentiment of fans loving something so much they want to bring other people to it was echoed by his colleague Mike. The news coverage of Comic Con also takes the position that fans act usefully as promotional laborers, as when fannish web guru Harry Knowles says, “Because of the ‘Net and the permissive editorial nature of it, we can champion films before they’ve ever been picked up for distribution and get people excited about them way in advance” (Rowe, 2007). Thus, the work fans do to promote industry content is clearly understood as quite productive.

Fan promotional labor clearly sometimes substitutes for paid labor, whether by directly replacing workers or because industry gets work for free that it would otherwise have to pay for. Certainly, the work fans do has substantial monetary value: When fans responded to a cease-and-desist letter from Universal Pictures over their promotional activities around the film Serenity, Jenkins (2013) notes that after “counting all the time and labor (not to mention their own money) put into supporting the film’s release,” fans “sent Universal an ‘invoice’ for more than $2
million, as represented by their 28,000 ‘billable hours.’” Steve at Campfire noted that “All our work is aimed, designed to be carried by fans, fans are the carrier wave as they do [inaudible]. If we create a world that fans didn't enjoy it would wither on the vine and die, right? There's no budget to throw $5 million into media. So our business model is based around creating things that fans enjoy,” and the idea that their business model relies on fans doing the distribution because Campfire can’t pay for a lot of media is telling. Indeed, in discussing Disney’s proprietary Comic Con-like event, Michelle Rindels (2009) of the AP notes more explicitly that “Over the long run, strengthening the relationship between the company and its fans online can create self-perpetuating marketing, where eager fans can promote Disney products online without the company incurring further costs.” A similar sentiment shows up with respect to sports audiences, as in one discussion of an online repository of Super Bowl advertisements: “Although Ifilm has never acquired rights from advertisers since it began carrying Super Bowl ads in 2002, no one has ever complained, said Roger Jackson, Ifilm’s vice president for content and programming. ‘The reality is they love the notion that their ads get recycled for no additional charge,’ he said” (“Super Bowl ads coming online,” 2006).

However, using fans in place of paid promotion, though expected and sought, is rarely simple. As Merrin from Campfire put it,

> It's almost like, I feel like there was probably a point at which everyone was going- it's just like social media with all clients, they go "Oh my god, free media! This is great! This is fantastic! They're going to do all the work for us, we don’t have to buy, you know, TV commercials" la la la. They think they're going to save money, they think they're going to get something for nothing. And then they kind of started figuring out, "Oh well actually they have a mind of their own, and
they're going to say what they want and do what they want, and we can't control them, and it's not really free media." It's kind of a different- it's a problem, a different communication problem.

Campfire conceptualizes itself as using “earned media” rather than “paid media”—their model relies on the content they produce being good enough that fans want to circulate it. Related to earning distribution, some conceptualize the work fans do as something “money can’t buy.” Heroes executive producer and creator Tim Kring noted in the “Making Of” special feature on the first season DVD that Comic Con “is the fan base, this is the one that keeps the show really on the air, and you know they're the ones that tell their friends and go online and chat rooms, and they create a kind of buzz and sort of viral quality to promotion of the show that you can't buy any other way.” The sentiment was echoed in AP writer Sandy Cohen’s (2008a) assessment that “The annual convention, now in its 38th year, draws the most avid fans around[,] the kind who will blog about what's cool and generate online attention that money can't buy.” Thus, fan promotional labor, though relatively easily related to monetary value, is not equivalent.

**Content Labor from Paratexts to Collaborations**

Third, fan work contributes to producing the media objects themselves. In one sense, producing paratextual content around a film or team influences its meaning (J. Gray, 2010). In another sense, producing content creates objects more directly through practices like video game modding, which generates additional levels or scenarios for a game.⁵ Fans are invited to produce content so that industry does not have to do as much labor in-house or so that the object of fandom is more expansive than would otherwise be possible (Banks & Humphreys, 2008; 

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⁵ Authors who discuss modding include: Deuze, 2007; Fuchs, 2010; Jenkins, 2006a; Postigo, 2003.
Jenkins et al., 2013; Postigo, 2009). Jenkins, Ford and Green (2013) note that such audience production in place of industry work dates back at least to the curated retrospectives 19th century newspapers would sometimes run based on women’s scrapbooking, but digital production has clearly made such activity easier.

To begin with user-generated content, theorizing its value takes us back to Marx himself, who pointed out that the worker puts the value into a product (Marx, 1978a, 1978b) but value is alienated such that it seems to be a property of the object (Marx, 1978b). Accordingly, user-generated content gets its value from the fans’ labor—and not solely, as certain prohibitionist intellectual property regimes maintain, from the "raw material" of industry content being remixed (which itself of course gets its value from the labor that went into it). Campfire’s Mike distinguishes the value that fans add when they do content labor as a great improvement over more standard modes of marketing:

Like, a lot of people, a lot of marketers give out tsatskes, they call them, right? T-shirts and this and that, and I think for us it's like, I'm not interested in that. But we've done things like create that I would call props. And props, in the sense of a movie, are really just devices to help tell a story. And I always look at physical objects when we create them as props to allow fans to tell a story that's- in many ways, they're already telling, but the prop helps shape the story better or is something fun, a fun way for them to tell a story that they are already loving and engaged with.

The idea that fans will produce content proves so normative or standard that the majority of the websites discuss it in their terms of service—even if those websites do not actually have affordances that allow submissions. The Major League Soccer site, which does not have a means
for fans to submit creative works or even discuss with each other, just mentions that users might be able to contribute and should do so responsibly. More often, as at the BSG site and Star Wars (which do afford the on-site production of content), Star Trek (which affords discussion but not submissions of creative production), and UC Berkeley (Cal), ESPN, and the Mariners (which have no affordances for fan participation), the TOS discussion of content labor takes the form of an assertion that submitting one’s content grants a license to the site. The specification of what exactly such a license entails, as Russo (2010, p. 149) puts it in discussing BSG, contains "a remarkable catalogue of verbs enumerating everything that can or conceivably could be done to a media object," as in this example, also voluminous in nouns and adjectives, from ESPN.com:

You hereby grant us and our licensees, distributors, agents, representatives and other authorized users, a perpetual, non-exclusive, irrevocable, fully-paid, royalty-free, sub- licensable and transferable (in whole or part) worldwide license under all copyrights, trademarks, patents, trade secrets, privacy and publicity rights and other intellectual property rights you own or control to use, reproduce, transmit, display, exhibit, distribute, index, comment on, modify (including removing lyrics and music from any Submission or substituting the lyrics and music in any Submission with music and lyrics selected by us), create derivative works based upon, perform and otherwise exploit such Submissions, in whole or in part, in all media formats and channels now known or hereafter devised (including on WDIG [Walt Disney Internet Group] Sites, on third party web sites, on our broadcast and cable networks and stations, on our broadband and wireless platforms, products and services, on physical media, and in theatrical release) for any and all purposes including entertainment, news, advertising, promotional, marketing, publicity,
trade or commercial purposes, all without further notice to you, with or without attribution, and without the requirement of any permission from or payment to you or to any other person or entity.

Alternately or sometimes simultaneously, several sites also have disclaimers forbidding fans from making derivative works (Cal, the Mariners, *Star Wars*). Cal’s statement runs: “Website users shall not reproduce, prepare derivative works based upon, distribute, perform or display the Materials without first obtaining the written permission of CSTVO [College Sports TV Online].” Both of these TOS standards, then, operate from an assumption that fans produce content.

There is, in particular, a widespread idea that fans make films. Thus, the *Star Wars* Atomfilms contest is a major and longstanding institution (with extensive rules governing the use of *Star Wars* intellectual property), easily located on the StarWars.com site, judged by *Star Wars* creator George Lucas himself (whether any of this will continue after the October 2012 purchase of Lucasfilm by Disney remains to be seen). Fan content labor through filmmaking also consistently appears in the documentaries about fans. *Horror Fans* includes a segment showing a group of men dressed somewhat like the Ghostbusters who introduce themselves in character and then promote their fan film, followed by a clip from the film. Immediately before this scene, the head of horror magazine *Rue Morgue* says, “I think that horror fans are by and large very interesting people because they respond creatively to the genre in a way that I think science fiction fans, and anime fans, and other types of genre-specific fans don't.” Of course, “other types of genre-specific fans” do indeed “respond creatively” to their own genres: *Trekkies 2* also includes a long scene about making of a fan film. Such representations (re)produce fan filmmaking as obvious and normative.

Fan content labor is often understood as a route for fans to become professional media
makers. Thus, the AP tells the story of Shane Felux, who leveraged his fan films "Star Wars Revelations" and "Pitching George Lucas" to produce "‘Trenches,’ his 10-episode, short-form, sci-fi thriller coming to ABC.com and YouTube" (Littlejohn, 2008b). The article quotes Felux as “hoping that the industry raises its head to what the little guy can do and say, ‘All right, we'll give the little guy a shot.' So my shot happened.” Similarly, character Eric in Fanboys is both a Star Wars fan and an aspiring comic book artist. Not entirely resigned to his life as a used car salesman, he continues to draw alone at night in his office. The frequency with which in DVD special features media makers include instructional tips for fans to learn how to make their own television or film also shows the logic of fan professionalization. However, these gestures toward education rely on a logic of fan labor being not already equal in quality or status to professional work. This attitude sees amateurs “as adorable for aspiring to be just like the pros that have already made it," imagines them to be less talented, and scapegoats them as “the reason artists suffer” (Brabham, 2012, p. 404)—even if, as Daren Brabham points out, those supposed amateurs may well actually be trained and paid professionals elsewhere in their working life.6

On the other hand, fan content labor creates the value of the "original" or official media property—through the work done by fans around it. First, if we think of meaning as semantic value, Jonathan Gray (2010) points out that paratexts produce much of the meaning of texts. Thus, Merrin of Campfire notes, “I think the most important thing was to provide things that people could build conversations around and use to kind of draw their own conclusions about the meaning and kind of build out their own interpretations of the world”—indicating how they set fans loose to create meaning through their own content production. Certainly, fan character Paul Aufiero in Big Fan actively works to shape the meaning of the text of his beloved New York

6 For a discussion of industry workers treating fans as inferior producers lacking knowledge, see Russo’s (2010) analysis of The L Word's "You Write It" contest.
Giants through his paratextual activity of calling in daily to a sports talk radio station. Paul’s work, which he spends all day at his paid job preparing to do, interprets team or player failures as insignificant and successes as substantial to produce a meaning he desires.

However, the semantic value of meaning ties deeply to economic value. The Seattle Mariners value fan paratextual activity (tweeting support for players during the Major League Baseball All-Stars voting) enough that their website invites fans to “Vote Mariners” no fewer than 21 times. Fan content production’s relationship to value can also be seen from the ways in which the industry practitioners were concerned about the potential destruction of value through fan content labor. Elizabeth said of BMU’s athletics department Facebook page that fans “can post to things that we post, so they can put a comment to anything that we post but we don't actually allow anybody anymore [to post independently]; they shut that off. Because of, you know, we get the occasional person that just wants to vent and be negative.” James at BMU agreed about the potential trouble with fan content production: “Everyone's go- I mean, on the spot, if an event's going bad, they're sitting on their phone or whatever, you know, bl[ogging], you know, talking about it.” Steve at Campfire describes the tension, in which fan activity “can be a little scary to brands because they lose control. But at the same time, they do appreciate- some of those shows they appreciate the fan base and what they do” (original emphasis). He used the example of fan production in which “a fan will take the DVDs and then cut every swear word that's in The Sopranos and put it up online,” saying that “It's something that HBO could never endorse, something which they could never do themselves. They love that fans do them, they have to be seen to take them down but at the same time they love that they go up. So it's almost kind of often it's about kind of placid discouragement, if that makes sense” (original emphasis). That HBO loves the engagement but not the means points to the ways that fan content labor
focusing only on the titillation factor of blue language endangers the value of *The Sopranos* as quality TV.

However, fans also routinely *add* value through their content labor. As Merrin from Campfire put it, “They *are* highly influential, and, you know, you can definitely see that traditional entertainment journalists or whatever have less sway than they used to, probably. Everyone's review means something, there's Rotten Tomatoes. Like, all of these different things are like bubbling up to make the average fan far more influential and important than they used to be” (original emphasis). Related to fan *conversations* shaping the value of media objects, at times fans literally create the object *itself* and enable it to have value, as in the many contributions of fans to web series *The Guild*, discussed by the actors, directors, and producers in their DVD commentaries. Fans produced the show’s second season opening credits, appeared as unpaid extras, did translations, and sent in humorous videos applying to join the diegetic role-playing game guild as freely provided content to be included in an upcoming episode. Similar recruitment of video to be included in the official media object occurred with respect to Nickelodeon show *iCarly* (S. M. Ross, 2009) and *Dr. Horrible* (Jenkins, 2013; Leaver, 2013). Through these various instantiations, then, fan content labor is evidently understood to be common and usually useful though sometimes troublesome to industry.

**Lovebor: The Work of (Showing) Love**

Finally, fans are recruited to do lovebor, the work of loving the object of fandom and showing that love. I coin the term lovebor here, though neither elegant nor euphonious, because
there are as many definitions of “affective labor” as scholars who use the term,\(^7\) plus “emotional labor” (Hochschild, 1983), “labor of devotion” (J. E. Campbell, 2011), and “affective economics” (Jenkins, 2006a), none of which quite gets at the reciprocal relationship between work and love I identify in fandom. In the tradition of taking seriously women’s reproductive labor as work and not just love (Arber & Ginn, 1995; England & Folbre, 1999; Hochschild, 1989), lovebor highlights that love is in fact a form of work rather than a “free” outpouring of feelings. The equal emphasis on work and love resists defining work that involves affect as “natural,” which has historically been a way to devalue such work’s skills (England & Folbre, 1999; Nussbaum, 1998) as well as to justify not paying for such work in order to “protect” it from being demeaned by commodification—usually expressed around sex and sex work (Nussbaum, 1998; Schaeffer, 2012; Zelizer, 2000).

The affective attachments I call lovebor produce value for industry (Banks & Humphreys, 2008; De Kosnik, 2012). As Jenkins, Ford, and Green (2013, pp. 104–5) note, “Fans appreciate media properties, in the sense that they like them and thus make them a site of emotional investments. Fans might then ‘appreciate’ the material in an economic sense as well, increasing these artifacts’ potential value by expanding their shelf life and opening them up to new potential markets.” Lovebor also demarcates the way that love itself has value. Adam Arvidsson (2005, p. 237) refers to attachment to a brand as generating an “ethical surplus”—and (taking the next analytic step) under capital surpluses are ripe for extraction. As Sharon Ross (2009, p. 96) puts it, albeit without the same critical frame I am applying, “The emotion that swirls through the aesthetics of multiplicity needs to be tapped and tamed, and then encouraged further.” Given the existence of such a surplus ripe for mining, then, we have to look at the

\(^7\) See, for example, the differences between: Federici, 2011; Gregg, 2011; Hardt, 1999; McRobbie, 2011.
production and extraction of love (Federici, 2011; Hardt, 1999; Postigo, 2009).

Though lovebor does produce value, it does not do so quantifiably. Thus, Mike from Campfire noted that:

Marketers'll go, like, "Engagement's bullshit 'cause I can't quantify it," you know what I mean? And so there's like, there's a lot of discussions here but I think- I think it's interesting that a lot of people are starting to go with their gut and realize, like, "But there's something there. We can't quantify it now," and a lot of people struggle to understand it, but they recognize there's a difference there in what's happening.

Mike and his colleague Steve both spoke of sometimes trying to manage the love that fans have. As Steve put it, “Sometimes advertising is about taking a product that people hate and making them love that product. That's a much steeper challenge for us to do than working with fans that already love a property to celebrate and harness that.” In these various instances Campfire understands that love has value, and they are prepared to create it to get that value if called to do so.

The lovebor done by fans takes several related forms. First, fans work by loving and showing love generally. One form of lovebor is the standing, yelling, and singing that the sports workers at BMU mentioned across the board as something they worked hard to get fans to produce and lamented when it was absent, as when Lisa identified baseball as “more of a chill sport,” but said she can manage the affective climate and generate active demonstrations of love because “They will get up on their feet for- if I'm tossing out shirts or things like that.” Lovebor animates the norm shown in the pictures available for fan use at the Mariners website, wherein stadium shots are common and fans are always shown standing and cheering. Indeed, the
normativity of the idea that fans’ love of their team will lead them to cheer or stand means they appear doing so even when not at the stadium producing the free lunch described above. That is, fan work to show their love of their team happens when watching games on television in *Game 6* and *Big Fan* as well as disarticulated from economics by not being at a sport one has to pay to watch, like children’s games, high school games, or other nonprofessional events.

Related to this general work of showing love is the work of showing one’s love on one’s body. Here we get the near-ubiquitous use of face or body paint at sporting events in representation and industry practitioner beliefs as well as the idea that fans get tattoos of their object of fandom. The extensive work fans do to make costumes (as distinct from consumption if they buy them), intensifies love work in terms of time invested (though not pain, clearly). Actor Bruce Campbell gestures toward the link of work and love in costuming when he asks in his documentary *Fanalysis*, “Why are they fans to the extent that they'll spend 40 weeks making a costume that's gonna walk across the stage for 4 seconds?” The work that goes into homemade costumes appears in discussion of both types of fans. Associated Press writer Sandy Cohen (2007a) describes what went into one Comic Con outfit:

> Wayne Sullivan traveled all the way from Albuquerque to show off his beloved Batman suit. The 43-year-old university staffer said he spent “a couple years” getting the outfit just right. He refurbished the rubberized pants himself and ordered a custom-made cowl from Australia. He carried a golden grappling gun (really a "cut and painted Nerf gun") and hand-cut pointy bats to throw at villains.

Though more often associated with the speculative media genre, sports fans do the love work of making homemade costumes as well. As Andrea Adelson (2006b) reported in her Superbowl coverage, “One [Pittsburgh Steelers] fan made an interesting fashion statement. She had a top
and skirt made with Terrible Towels,” the quintessential material expression of Steelers fandom. Importantly, all of these modes of doing the work of loving the object of one’s fandom have a fuzzy and attenuated—but real—relationship to the economics of speculative media or sports in a way similar to Consumption 0.5.

Fans also do work to make other types of things that have no clear route to monetization. Homemade signs supporting one’s team are a staple of sports films and television shows. Indeed it seems impossible to have a crowd of people watching a sporting event and have them not have made signs to cheer on a player or the team or to deride the opponent. Homemade player t-shirts or jerseys work in the same vein, and they appear in television show Friday Night Lights and film Invincible. Beyond sports, character Hutch of Fanboys has made a copy of Star Wars robot R2-D2 to attach to his van, mimicking the use of the robots as rear-seated copilots in the series’ X-wing fighting ships. Similarly, fans engaging in live-action roleplaying in Supernatural have made a cardboard version of the ghost detector used by their heroes. Though these forms of production are undeniably work, they are not clearly articulated to economic value, even though the love fans have for the object of fandom evidently motivates buying as well as promotional or content labor or showing up to be the audience commodity. Though Russo (2010, p. 183) correctly notes that "As commodities themselves become increasingly immaterial, the affective labor of desire, identification, and meaning-making accrues greater economic value,” the way in which lovebor becomes economic value is quite indeterminate, making it a very different sort of labor, but one that, as I’ll discuss in Chapter 5, lies at the crux of the tension over seeing fan work as labor.

Conclusion

Fans are assumed and actively recruited to do several kinds of labor in the contemporary era.
They’re asked to work by watching the ads that support their “free” media, generating direct monetary value for industry through ad sales. Fans also produce value by means of the data trade in which knowledge about user activity has value. They are expected and invited to work to make themselves seen and known as well as produce the very incitement to participate supposed to get them to show up to do all the other work. Additionally, fans normatively do promotional, word-of-mouth work. Fan work contributes to producing the media objects themselves, whether paratextually or more directly through adding on more content such that industry does not have to do as much labor in-house or to make the object of fandom more expansive than it would otherwise be. Last but not least, fans are assumed and encouraged to do lovebor—the work of loving and demonstrating love that generates value for industry.
Chapter 5

Enclosing Fandom: Labors of Love, Exploitation, and Consent

It is difficult to think of fan activities and labor in the same register. Fans freely engage in these activities—or, at least, they are not coerced by the intractable need to earn a living. People enjoy doing it. Thus, it seems as if it isn’t really labor and fans don’t require payment because enjoyment is enough, or because they reject capitalist logics. In this primarily theoretical chapter, I contend that such arguments are insufficiently structural, inattentive to both the unequal playing field on which fans make such choices and the ways in which fandom on industry’s terms fundamentally differs from fandom by and for fans. I first describe both the media industry labor context and fan culture gift economies as the background against which fan labor should be analyzed, arguing that the confluence of labor-cost reduction on industry’s part and rejection of capitalist projects by many fans has produced a perfect storm situation for exploiting fan labor. Ultimately, given these circumstances, I contend that fan willingness to participate should be carefully scrutinized to assess whether they can be said to meaningfully consent to these forms of labor and value extraction, articulating a theory of the contemporary industry embrace of fandom as a form of enclosure of the commons that turns fans into a workforce for industry ends.

Fan Labor in Context: Playbor and Precarity

Fan productivity should be considered, first, against the overall casualization of labor or rise of precarity in recent years. Labor scholars have noted that, looking at the whole of capitalism across space and time, Fordism and its stable, career-long employment is the exception rather than the rule (de Peuter, 2011; Neilson & Rossiter, 2008; A. Ross, 2012). Yet,
cobbling together enough work to live on from various sources was formerly contained to marginalized bodies such as the working poor, (disproportionately) people of color, and people in the global South. After World War II, skilled, white, primarily male, middle class workers had decades of relative security that has only recently eroded—perhaps predictably producing white male resentment (Rodino-Colocino, 2012) as similar shifts in other sectors did in the 1980s (manufacturing; Savran, 1998) and 1990s (sports; Kusz, 2001). Certainly, with the rise of precarity and flexibility, women have come to the fore as “ideal” workers precisely because such adaptation has long been required of them (McRobbie, 2011; A. Ross, 2012). Temporary and contract work without benefits has progressively become a new norm for all workers (Sennett, 2007) who are increasingly understood as entrepreneurs of the self (Ouellette & Hay, 2008; Ouellette & Wilson, 2011).

These broader shifts in official or industrial production also affect media labor practices in particular. Hollywood has traditionally had, as Amanda Lotz (2007, p. 98) puts it, "an unusual level of unionization, with almost all work in the mainstream creative industries relying upon a collectivized agency to negotiate basic fee scales for work and residual payments on content." Though some work has long been project based, precarity now encroaches on parts of media labor that used to be protected from it. However, Nicole Cohen (2012, p. 143) notes that this growing precarity is dissimulated: “The portfolio nature of careers is more often described as an inherent trait of cultural workers themselves and less often as a coping strategy to deal with work made intermittent and precarious.” Additionally, there has been a marked increase in what used to be called "runaway production" and is now maybe just "production," with cable TV series, especially, increasingly producing in Canada and films increasingly being made in New Zealand. In the same period, there has been an intensive deployment of unscripted series. Both of these
production strategies employ writers, actors, directors, and other personnel in ways that skirt the terms of union contracts in order to lower labor costs (Lotz, 2007, pp. 99, 100, 222). At the same time, technologically-enabled transmedia extension has upended professional labor as it has incited fans. For instance, one major issue in the 2007 Writers' Guild of America strike was an insistence that web content was creative work, eligible to be paid at creative rates, rather than promotional work that creators were obligated to participate in for free (J. Gray, 2010; Leaver, 2013; Russo, 2010).

These efforts to decrease industry’s labor costs have significant implications for fan labor. The kinds of paratexts or pieces of ancillary content that were at stake in the WGA strike are the sorts generated by what I identified in Chapter 4 as promotional and content labor, and turning to fans rather than paid staff for such work thus looks increasingly good for the bottom line. Julie Levin Russo (2010, pp. 212–3) notes that, "Setting aside the massive scale of the television industry, the activities of paid and unpaid creative workers are not functionally different." Even against the baseline of declining labor strength in Hollywood, fan work is a bargain for industry, and logically, being replaced by unpaid labor undermines paid professionals’ employment security far more than just not knowing when next they will be hired. Andrew Ross (2012, p. 23) notes that “The labor infractions in these old media sectors are conspicuous because they take place against the still heavily unionized backdrop of the entertainment industries,” whereas “in the world of new media, where unions have no foothold whatsoever, the blurring of the lines between work and leisure and the widespread exploitation of amateur or user input has been normative from the outset.” At a time when industry quite evidently seeks to avoid using workers paid at guild rates, unpaid, freely given fan labor provides one viable alternative mode of production.
Official producers get paid—however much they may have to fight to secure it—while prosumers¹/produsers²/playborers³ do not. Un- or underpaid labor is “over-exploited by capital in the sense that such jobs would cost much more capital if they were performed by regularly employed wage labour” (Fuchs, 2010, p. 143). Relying on fan work not only acquires loyalty or attachment which money perhaps cannot buy (J. E. Campbell, 2011; Hamilton & Heflin, 2011) but also, and more insidiously, cuts costs associated with paid labor (Brabham, 2012; Dyer-Witheford & de Peuter, 2009), a point which analyses of user-generated content acknowledge but has hardly been considered in the specific context of fans. Importantly, though Marxism argues that capitalism exploits all workers, it does not do so equally or in the same way, such that fan production has to be taken seriously as a distinct phenomenon. Indeed, fans may be particularly precarious in relation to creative work because high-skill workers like creative professionals tend to receive as compensation more of the value they produce than people who do work it’s imagined that anyone could do because they cost more to produce and are in short supply and high demand. This unequal exploitation bodes ill against the background of the expansion of the means of production to increasing numbers of people and the well-attested “anyone can write” ethos of fandom (Green et al., 1998; Jenkins, 2006c; Yang & Bao, 2012). Moreover, such “more easily replaceable,” “low-skill” workers are also—for a variety of structural reasons—more likely to be from socially devalued categories (women, people of color, immigrants), another key aspect to the distribution of exploitation.

Fan labor also dovetails with contemporary labor practice through the rise of pleasurable work as a widespread or even normative phenomenon. By contrast to historical norms of strict

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¹ “Prosumer” is a portmanteau of “producer” and “consumer” popularized by Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010).
² “Produser” combines “producer” and “user” and was popularized by Axel Bruns (2008).
³ “Playbor” is the intermingling of “play” and “labor” (Kücklich, 2005).
managerial control, contemporary white-collar labor often provides more autonomy, with such choice frequently articulated to freedom (Gregg, 2011; Meng & Wu, 2013). Melissa Gregg (2011, pp. 5–6) demonstrates that work can be a source of enjoyment and “these pleasures and intimacies underwrite professional workers’ willingness to engage in work outside paid hours.” This willingness arises in particular by contrast to the traditional “identification of leisure with life, work with drudgery” (Meehan, 2000, p. 76), such that conversely non-drudgery does not “feel” like work. Indeed, Eran Fisher (2012, p. 173) argues that non-alienated work, because it does not prevent the "possibility to express oneself, to control one's production process, to objectify one's essence and connect and communicate with others," facilitates a higher level of exploitation, and a lack of alienation has frequently been noted as common in, if not endemic to, contemporary labor (N. S. Cohen, 2012; Postigo, 2009). Certainly, in Banks and Humphreys’ (2008) case study, the language of labor only appeared when the video game modders’ free labor became drudgery.

Because of the heretofore rigid separation of leisure/pleasure from labor/drudgery, pleasurable labor often does not register as labor at all. Moreover, even when it does, as with Hector Postigo’s (2009, p. 465) analysis of AOL volunteers, there remains “a tension between a discourse of passion or love for one’s work and needing the discourse of labor to legitimate [creative labor’s] demands for fair treatment in an admittedly exploitative relationship.” The idea that people will sacrifice material comfort for things they love, whether an artistic (N. S. Cohen, 2012; Lloyd, 2006) or academic (A. Ross, 2000) calling or their personal relationships (England & Folbre, 1999; A. Ross, 2012) intensifies the exploitation. There is a willingness to accept drudgery out of those emotional ties, reflecting our collective “training in the habit of embracing nonmonetary rewards—mental or creative gratification—as compensation for work” (A. Ross,
Lovebor thus helpfully explains this process, since it ties together love as work and working out of love, allowing us to see that it is in fact work even when it does not seem so (N. S. Cohen, 2012; Kücklich, 2005). The colloquial sense of exploitation as hurting people, forcing them, taking things away, etc. is often absent from these relations of media production, then, even as they nevertheless include value extraction. The great complication of fan/audience/user labor in the contemporary mediascape is that these things are both true at once. As Carole Vance (1984) famously noted about sexuality, fandom is at once a site of pleasure and danger. The work is “simultaneously voluntarily given and unwaged,” “pleasurably embraced and at the same time shamelessly exploited” (Terranova, 2000, pp. 33, 37), and the phenomenon fundamentally cannot be understood without acknowledging both. Göran Bolin (2012, p. 801) warns against “confus[ing] the statistical aggregate (the audience commodity) with the social subjects who watch (or read or listen to) the specific media texts”—the aggregate of fan actions is exploited, but as social subjects they pleasurably interact with texts. The same physical person may be included in each category but, through “being involved in two kinds of production-consumption circuits,” they have “different functions in each” (Bolin, 2012, p. 798) and therefore signify something quite different. As Bolin (2012, p. 808) elaborates, “This economic subject represents our digital self (rather than our social or psychological self). This also leads us to accept being surveilled” in what I’ve termed data commodity work.

Through these modes, then, pleasurable fan activity can coexist surprisingly comfortably with exploitative extraction of value from fan labor. Though there may be resistance to viewing fan production as labor because fans are not employees of media companies, the fact that “actual,” paid employment can be described in identical terms to forms of playbor carried out in
leisure time demonstrates that insight from labor analysis helpfully illuminates fan work. Thus, it is useful to attend to how "always on" connectivity colonizes leisure hours with work and with play hard to distinguish from work (Deuze, 2007; Driscoll & Gregg, 2011), adds a second shift of playbour (Kücklich, 2005) to ever-expanding groups of people and either adds a third shift for the women already doing Arlie Hochschild's (1989) second shift as caretakers or excludes them from participation altogether in the rapidly developing new norm of media interaction (Ouellette & Wilson, 2011).

The Gift Economy, Lovebour, and the Common Sense Test

However, the labor framing produces some trouble from the fan side. Despite the fact that technically, theoretically, all fan work is always exploitation in the sense of surplus value extraction, and though labor scholars have emphasized the existence of pleasurable labor, “work” doesn't actually match anyone's experience of being a fan. People make stuff, freely, because they love the object of their fandom. Accordingly, framing this activity as labor exploitation tends not to pass the common-sense test. To modify the open source software saying "Free as in free speech, not as in free beer"—fan work is "For free as in a gift, not for free as in without pay." Or, in Abigail De Kosnik’s (2013) framing, “‘Free’ fan labor (fan works distributed for no payment) means ‘free’ fan labor (fans may revise, rework, remake, and otherwise remix mass-culture texts without dreading legal action or other interference from copyright holders). Many, perhaps even most, fans who engage in this type of production look upon this deal very favorably.”

Fan activity may not be experienced as exploitative, first, because at times fans seek such work and its relationship to industry to inaugurate or further careers as professional, paid
workers (Christian, 2011; Jenkins, 2006a; Lotz, 2007)—a teleology normalized in
representations and industry statements. Fandom, then, can serve as a training ground for new
talent (Deuze, 2007; Jenkins, 2006a). Of course, as many have noted, not everyone can have a
deliberate, intentional relationship with industry with the goal of joining it using one's fan work
as a "calling card" (Jenkins, 2006a). Indeed, the potential for incorporation is deeply gendered:
Game modders and documentary and/or satire fan filmmakers are candidates for incorporation
(De Kosnik, 2009; Jenkins, 2006a; Scott, 2011)—and often deliberately produce with that
intention (Busse, 2009a; Scott, 2011)—and fan film, at least, is a genre dominated by men (De
Kosnik, 2009; Jenkins, 2006a; Walliss, 2010).4 On the other hand, vidding, or editing pieces
from televisual texts to music to tell a new story (Coppa, 2008, 2009; Scott, 2011) and fan fiction
(Derecho, 2006; Hellekson, 2009) are understood as dominated by women—or even as
distinctively female ways of seeing (Coppa, 2008, 2009; Derecho, 2006; Jenkins, 2006c)—and
these laborers are both not courted by industry in the same way and tend to be less interested in
joining it (Busse, 2009a; De Kosnik, 2009). However, beyond those (relatively uncommon) cases
of intentional industry participation, the exploitation in the fan-industry relationship is disguised
and intensified by characteristics of fan culture.

Fans have often explicitly distanced their use value from exchange value—rejecting
mainstream values through popular cultural capital (Fiske, 1992) or out of a fear of legal censure
(Hellekson, 2009; Scott, 2011). One key sign of the disarticulation is the way in which fan
valuation often differs substantially from the market valuation of the objects in question—i.e.
fans value things more than they’d otherwise be worth (Hellekson, 2009; Hills, 2002). Moreover,

4 Given the heavily male composition of the population of “hardcore” gamers from which
modders are drawn, modding is likely also male-dominated as a production practice, but I have
found no studies that assess gender in modding.
as De Kosnik (2012, p. 103) has noted, “The frustration and antagonism that fans frequently feel toward official producers have largely prevented fans from regarding themselves as part of the same capitalist system within which official producers operate.” Moreover, “because fans generally conceive of their activities as ‘resistive’ to consumerism, they refuse to consider that their works might constitute either promotional materials or ancillary products that increase the value of the objects of fandom and therefore might be deserving of compensation, either from official producers or from other consumers” (De Kosnik, 2012, p. 105). Certainly, as Nele Noppe (2011, sec. 4.1) contends, “Fans work within a gift economy not just because the commercial economy has been inaccessible to them up to now, but also because they simply prefer the gift economy and dislike various aspects of the commercial system of cultural production.”

Alternatively, fan activity differs from commerce not from rejection but because it simply operates from other concerns: valuing community (Banks & Humphreys, 2008; Driscoll & Gregg, 2011), desire for recognition (Lothian, 2009; Tushnet, 2007b), the joy of the hobby (H.-K. Lee, 2011; Scott, 2011), or uncontrollable desire to create (Boyle, 2003; Tushnet, 2009).

Of course, it’s important not to reenact the normalization of capitalist values that has led to devaluing fans as foolish people freely giving away things they could (and should) be selling. Rebecca Tushnet (2007b, p. 138) contends that copyright misunderstands fan motivations because “Putting marketplace production ahead of other sources of creativity [. . . ] has unduly dominated our ideas,” whereas other factors matter more. More bluntly, David Hesmondhalgh (2010, p. 278) argues that, “Without denying for a moment the fundamental importance of a living wage, it seems dangerous to think of wages as the only meaningful form of reward.” Williams and Nadin (2012, p. 2) similarly note a drive to formalize all economic activity: “Throughout much of the 20th century,” there was a “near universal belief that there would be an
inevitable, natural, and unstoppable universal shift of work from the informal to the formal economy. Informal economic activities were consequently represented as a leftover from an earlier mode of production and their continuing presence taken as a sign of ‘under-development,’ ‘traditionalism,’ and ‘backwardness.’” Thus, it’s important to recognize the validity of fans’ nonmarket reasons for production even while critiquing the uneven distribution of market reward.

The alternative fan value system has generally been described as a gift economy. Participants in such an economy use gift-giving—as opposed to, say, market exchange—as the means by which they circulate goods and services. This economy is not just all a friendly, voluntary thing in the way that “gifts” would seem to be under our colloquial understanding of them as freely chosen expressions of affection, but actually quite structured. Giving in a gift economy is, first, hierarchical—in fandom, as in potlatch (Boyle, 2003; Hyde, 2007; Mauss, 2000 [1925]) and other gift practices (E. Pearson, 2007), giving more produces status. Producing a lot of stories or vids, or a story/vid perceived as a great contribution to the community, provides one major way to be a Big Name Fan. The effusive commenter is also seen as a good contributor, while on the other hand there is less regard for the person who either writes only sporadically or begins a story and doesn’t finish it. Additionally, giving and returning gifts is obligatory in such an economy (Jenkins et al., 2013; Mauss, 2000; E. Pearson, 2007). Karen Hellekson (2009, pp. 114–5) notes that “Fan communities[,] as they are currently comprised, require exchanges of gifts” as “the gift of artwork or text is repetitively exchanged for the gift of reaction” (emphasis added). The gift of creative production obliges the recipient to provide feedback, such that under this model of exchange the “lurker” who reads but does not write can be seen as a freeloader or “leecher” (Jenkins et al., 2013, p. 63).
Because contemporary gift economies are alternative to capitalist distribution in general, and fan gift economies often resist industry in particular, it is often seen as inappropriate to enmesh the two (De Kosnik, 2012; Jenkins et al., 2013). Hellekson (2009, p. 118) describes fandom having its own “field of value” that “specifically excludes profit, further separating their community from the larger (male-gendered) community of commerce.” Russo (2010, p. 226) similarly speaks of a "repugnance to many fans" of assuming "equivalences between market price and value, between value and public recognition, and between recognition and hierarchical authority." In particular, fans tend to see it as inappropriate to monetize work done on a fan object for one’s own benefit (Banks & Humphreys, 2008; Postigo, 2003). However, loveboring lurks here, since the resistance to monetization rests on the belief that, like other forms of love or intimacy, being “sullied” with commerce demeans fan love. In their norms of obligation and affect, these fan activities can therefore be seen as rooted in what Lewis Hyde (2007, p. xiv) describes as “eros,” “the principle of attraction, union, involvement which binds together” rather than what he calls “logos,” which is “reason and logic in general, the principle of differentiation in particular.” This distinction illuminates how and why fandom has tended to have values that differ from the mainstream, capitalist mode of exchange; Hyde notes that “a market economy is an emanation of logos.”

A major component of the traditional distinction between fandom’s economy and the market economy comes from this aspect of affective ties. In a gift economy, gifts produce obligations, which produce reciprocation, which produces relationships between people (Jenkins et al., 2013; E. Pearson, 2007). From multiple and continually reconstituted relationships of giving comes a community—as Roberto Esposito (2009, p. 5) reminds us, etymologically

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community is from *cum* (with) *munus* (“the gift that one gives because one *must* give and because one *cannot not* give,” emphasis in original). Community comes into being as continually recirculated or performatively constituted though acts of (obligatory) bonding. Communities exist in being *done*. The relationship thus differs categorically from the contract or the market exchange, which is set, defined, contained: I provide X and therefore you provide Y. Market exchange contains immediate cause and effect and the relationship exists only in that moment of the exchange proper. Gift-built relationships have indeterminacy, as the relationship between the gift and the reciprocation is norm-based, often asymmetrical, temporally remote, and not guaranteed. Tushnet (2007b, p. 152) notes that when she describes practices of giving authors credit in fandom, “Credit here works, among other ways, as a financial metaphor. Creators are paid not in cash, but in credit.” She adds, “Moreover, a credit-based transaction necessarily implies a continuing relationship between the parties.” As a gift economy, then, producing and circulating and commenting forges the social bonds of community.

Yet, how can pleasure and affect and nonmarket values also be party to exploitation and surplus value? The key lies in the fact that fan/audience activity is a nonrivalrous good: taking it for profit doesn’t mean that fans have less.⁶ These things can all be true simultaneously because fan production exists in multiple economies or value systems simultaneously, which the single-level focus of political economy scholars on structural conditions of user labor or cultural or fan studies scholars on the subjective experience of being a fan creator has precluded recognizing. Media consumers’ work is at once often oriented toward sociality, community, or recognition (Andrejevic, 2008; Fuchs, 2010; Tushnet, 2009) in their own motivations and deployable for

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⁶ In this framing, my thinking is informed by Tushnet’s (2009, pp. 529–30) discussion of slash fan fiction as being “about nonrivalrous pleasures,” such that the same set of “characters, stories, and plots” can be used by all, in contradictory ways, without preventing other uses.
profit or the furthering of more abstract industry interests, such that the combination of industry’s increased interest in alternative sources of labor has collided with fan traditions of nonmarket production to overdetermine the exploitation of fan labor.

**Conditions of Labor, Conditions of Consent**

This context then raises the question of whether fans can be said to meaningfully consent to these relationships with industry. Drawing from work on sexual consent, I employ a theory of consent here that has two components: In addition to not being coerced, people have to know what they’re agreeing to (Cowling & Reynolds, 2004). In considering whether fans understand what they’re doing in these activities, one factor is that unlike paid work, wherein people sell themselves to capital and are exploited, audiences are sold by the media producer to the advertiser as an audience or data commodity. The intractable need to earn a living makes paid work also deeply coercive and not freely chosen either, but people tend to at least be aware of that coercion in a way that audience labor goes unnoticed. Without awareness, it cannot be said to be a free choice. However, several scholars have pushed back on the idea that fan or user participation is duped into existence or the product of false consciousness, insisting that such laborers know what they’re doing. Only Julian Kücklich (2005) says that his study population of video game modders do not understand the structures in which they create. However, as Mark Andrejevic (2012, p. 153) points out, “The point of a critique of exploitation is neither to disparage the pleasures of workers nor the value of the tasks being undertaken. To argue otherwise is to stumble into a kind of category confusion: an attempt to reframe structural conditions as questions of individual pleasure or desire”—enjoyment or choice should be

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7 Authors taking this position include: J. E. Campbell, 2011; Hesmondhalgh, 2010; Jenkins et al., 2013; Postigo, 2009.
distinguished from the structural conditions and the former don’t cancel the latter out. After all, there is a structural inequality between industry and fans: “They do not freely choose to exchange their personal information for convenience but do so under conditions structured by the private ownership of network resources and the attendant low level of awareness about actual tracking practices” (Andrejevic, 2012, p. 157).

With regard to coercion, feminists have argued unequal circumstance makes the “free” status of choices shaky (W. Brown, 1995). From a similar premise, part of my analysis here traces out the structural coercions acting on fans. Andrejevic (2012, p. 153) notes that “Rejoinders to critiques of exploitation in such contexts typically involve both the lack of coercion and the pleasures of participation,” which points to the need for the more expansive notion of coercion I develop here. People willingly choose to engage in these activities, but the leisure or pleasure framework obscures significant aspects of the nature and implications of their activity. Many authors note that the voluntary nature of these activities encourages not seeing them as work. This tendency echoes and reinforces the trouble with quotidian notions of the gift in that both emphasize “free” choice that is actually socially constrained.

Constraint on choice thus takes subtle forms. Opting out of platforms on which large swaths of contemporary interaction take place carries a social cost (B. Brown & Quan-Haase, 2012; Scholz, 2012). Moreover, fans do not always constitute an organized bloc, a condition which, as various authors point out, undermines the capacity to fight for their interests (Boyle, 2003; Deuze, 2007; Kücklich, 2005). Daren Brabham (2012, p. 405) asks, "Can crowds organize against unfair labor practices?" and the answer is probably “No” precisely because of the aggregation rather than unity of the crowd model. Even Sharon Ross (2009, p. 108), in no sense

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8 See, for example: B. Brown & Quan-Haase, 2012; De Kosnik, 2012; Scholz, 2012; Wittel, 2012.
a Marxist, notes that “The balance of power lies inevitably with an industry that has the resources to shut down sites over copyright.” This imbalance results in fans and industry having very different rights. A trip through the Terms of Service of the various websites reveals that submissions are automatically licensed to the site’s owners at the web homes of Star Trek, UC Berkeley (Cal), and the Mariners. Even more dramatically, the TOS say creative materials automatically become the site owners’ property at BSG, Star Wars, and ESPN. The idea that anything transmitted to you becomes yours to do with what you please—of course and ironically—is the very logic that the industry condemns as copyright violation and piracy when enacted by consumers.

Using the same logic for opposite ends avoids a hopeless contradiction by the assumption that industry has, and should have, all control. Unequal power underlies the times when industry allows production. Building on Henry Jenkins’s (1992) famous metaphor of the fan as a poacher who absconds with mass media, Simone Murray (2004, p. 14) provides an excellent analysis of the ways intellectual property permissiveness “amounts to the turning of the gamekeeper’s blind eye, rather than the legitimating of poaching per se,” identifying it as “a conditional agreement [by the corporation] not to enforce its IP rights for the precise period during which fan activities further its commercial interests.” The “gamekeeper” could at any moment decide to once again “see” the violations of industry’s still-legally-enforceable rights, as there hasn’t been any change in the legality of “poaching.” Similar arguments have been (less colorfully) made by Mia Consalvo (2003) and Lobato, Thomas, and Hunter (2011). The selectiveness of being permissive, and the underlying unequal power, parses out structurally identical instances of the use of copyrighted material into legitimate and illegitimate, producing a norm beneficial to industry (Coombe, 1998) as it frames its stance as munificent and as granting “amnesty” for
transgressions if fans can play nice (Johnson, 2007, p. 295).

The insight from feminism that choices made between bad options cannot be considered free provides leverage here (Hochschild, 2003; Nussbaum, 1998). This allows us to see that—as with Jenkins, Ford, and Green’s aforementioned contention that the contemporary mediascape is better than broadcast—by comparison to very bad options, one might be willing to accept almost anything. De Kosnik (2012, p. 108) points out that the historical “definition of fandom as a state of passive reception verging on, or tipping into, insanity has undoubtedly set a low bar for what fans can hope to define as their rights vis-à-vis larger society,” and such low expectations have consequences.

Thinking in terms of structural coercion, one important contributory factor in fans’ exploitation comes from the fact that the work they do exists in a legal gray area. This is to take seriously the insight that sex work is dangerous because it is illegal and denies workers access to legal protections (rather than being illegal because dangerous to its practitioners) (Nussbaum, 1998; Rubin, 2011; Sullivan, 2004): Being in a legally troublesome position in one respect makes it quite difficult to access one’s other legal entitlements. Whether or not fan activity is actually illegal (indeed, in many cases it is not), the contemporary model defaults to an assumption of piracy (Jenkins, 2006a)—constructing fans as “lucky” to be allowed any way of working with or on media texts. As Jenkins (2006a, p. 138) puts it, "Studios often assert much broader control than they could legally defend: someone who stands to lose their home or their

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9 Much fan production is legal as fair use because it meets the requirements of Section 107 of the US Copyright Code: It a) is noncommercial, b) does not use substantial parts of the original, and c) has no effect “upon the potential market for or value of the copyrighted work”—or at least, as promotional labor shows, not a negative one. More particularly, some percent of the time fan work comes into being because of “market failure”—fans want a thing industry is not producing (Jenkins et al., 2013; Meng & Wu, 2013; Tushnet, 2009).
kid's college fund by going head-to-head with studio attorneys is apt to fold." Thus, when fans work on media texts, industry allows it but could equally at any time choose to shut it down as (actually or assertionally) illegal, and though Jenkins, Ford, and Green (2013, p. 71) criticize “companies acting as if they were ‘bestowing’ agency onto audiences,” structural inequalities do position industry as having the final say.

By comparison to these broad assertions of control, then, other industry approaches look downright generous. Though at the Star Trek site they claim automatic right to license fan works, they follow up by stating “We respect your ownership of User Submissions. If you owned a User Submission before providing it to us, you will continue owning it after providing it to us.” However, later in the Terms of Service the site notes that “We may take any of the following actions in our sole discretion at any time and for any reason without giving you prior notice,” and the list includes “Restrict or terminate your access to the Services” and “Deactivate your accounts and delete all related information and files in your accounts,” thus revealing them to be no more fan-friendly than other sites after all. For its part, Star Wars, as mentioned in Chapter 4, does have an annual fan film contest, but you have to submit exactly the right kind of thing to it: Parody and extensions of the story in the same genre are okay, but the terms forbid “fan fiction”—by which they mean relationship- or emotion-centered narratives. Filmmakers can use Star Wars music, but only up to 59 seconds’ worth and they have to mail in their submission if they do so or else it may get caught in the automatic intellectual property filter in the uploading process. ESPN, surprisingly, grants fans a license to make derivative works based on their IP—contingent on fans granting ESPN rights to the work they create.

These structures, then, undercut the possibility of fan demands for fair treatment as workers by defaulting to shut-down and framing anything else as generous. As Alexis Lothian
(2009, p. 135) contends, shifts toward incorporating fan production “can also be understood as an inversion in the direction of fannish theft. Rather than fans stealing commodified culture to make works for their own purposes, capital steals their labor.” The reaction to one direction of appropriation, of course, differs substantially from the other. Indeed, as Jenkins (2006a, p. 190) notes, corporations can get away with greater theft generally, as "Under the current system, because other companies know how far they can push and are reluctant to sue each other, they often have greater latitude to appropriate and transform media content than amateurs, who do not know their rights and have little legal means to defend them even if they did." To repurpose Christian Fuchs’s (2012b, p. 141) argument about privacy, intellectual property rights are at once "upheld as a universal value for protecting private property” when it comes to corporations and “permanently undermined” for everyday people “for the purpose of capital accumulation." The same action means something quite different depending on who does it. Given these structural inequalities and fans’ limited options, their “choice” doesn’t seem like much of a choice. Indeed, as with the concept that letting fans do anything at all is generous, it seems that while fans may have access to the means of production of media, industry still controls them—and recent moves point toward gaining sway over the means of production of fandom itself.

**Embrace as Enclosure, or the Industry’s Arms are Made of Fences**

The industry’s contemporary embrace of fandom can usefully be understood as a form of enclosure in that it privatizes something formerly public and dispossesses people of the means of production. The metaphor of enclosure appears with some frequency in relation to intellectual property, from early iterations in the work of Graham Murdock (2000) and James Boyle (2003) to more recent versions (Beller, 2011; Dyer-Witheford, 2010, 2011; Tan, 2013). These analyses
rely on the way copyright and other IP law, originally intended to feed the public domain as a commons by establishing incentives to creativity, has instead been deployed to enclose that commons into private intellectual property (Boyle, 2003; Hyde, 2010). Mass culture was produced by fencing off common culture, and—in Lawrence Lessig’s famous quip—the constant extension of copyright terms sets out to ensure that "no one can do to the Disney Corporation what Walt Disney did to the Brothers Grimm" because Disney’s IP will never become public domain. These scholars worry that enclosure stifles further creativity by privatizing the “raw” material of ideas (Boyle, 2003; C. M. Rose, 1998). Here I want to build on this work and that which discusses enclosure in a fan context only briefly (Lothian, 2009; McCourt & Burkart, 2007; Scott, 2011) to examine the full implications and insights afforded by using the concept of enclosure to think about fandom.

First, let us consider the structural features of the traditional form of enclosure. In classic or literal enclosure, formerly public arable land became enclosed as the property of the nobility and no longer available for peasant farming. As Boyle (2003, p. 37) describes the contemporary iteration, in this process “Things that were formerly thought of as either common property or uncommodifiable are being covered with new, or newly extended, property rights.” Enclosure can thus be understood, first, as articulating new areas of human activity to the market. Though cultural production may have been unpaid for most of human history (Hesmondhalgh, 2010), it was not always producing profit. Similarly, there have long been productive forms of leisure, but they were not always employed for capitalist ends (Kücklich, 2005; Postigo, 2003; Wittel, 2012). These features of enclosure suggest why Tiziana Terranova (2000, p. 36) identified the gift economy as increasingly important to “late capitalism as a whole.” If fandom has often been described as a gift economy, then leveraging gifts made in the fannish economy for surplus value
in the market economy has usefully been termed a "regifting economy" by Suzanne Scott (2009, 2011). The most notorious version of regifting came from FanLib, a company that sought to serve as the conduit between the fan economy and the for-profit economy but did so in a way that fundamentally misunderstood the fan side and its noncommercial incitements—offering prizes like t-shirts and "proximity to the participating shows' producers" in exchange for turning over the rights to one’s fan fiction (Scott, 2011). Though FanLib was poorly executed and ultimately rejected by fans, the idea that fan productivity can and should be turned to profit is still in circulation.

The second characteristic of enclosure was that it produced the landless laboring class that made capitalism possible. It took away the ownership of the means of production from people who then had to survive by having their labor appropriated for a wage (Andrejevic, 2009b; Dyer-Witheford, 2010). Thus, Nick Dyer-Witheford (2011, p. 279) notes that “Primitive accumulation was an accumulation not just of territories, but of a proletariat.” Though there might be resistance to considering largely middle class fans a proletariat, it is useful to recall Dyer-Witheford’s (2010, p. 492) point that “Class is defined by who appropriates surplus value from whom”—structurally, fans are proletarified through being the object of appropriation. Thus, like the peasants of yore, fans may not have actually owned the means of production before when ownership was fuzzy, but they had free use of it since neither did anyone else. With clear ownership, they work on someone else’s property. One obvious way fans lack control over the means of production of fandom comes from the fact that fans and other users do not own the platforms on which they labor.  

This concern in fact gave rise to one battle cry at the formation of the nonprofit fan advocacy group Organization for Transformative Works: “I want us to own

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10 For versions of this argument, see: Bruns, 2012; Fuchs, 2012b; Jenkins et al., 2013; Terranova, 2012.
the goddamn servers!” (Busse, 2009b). Often, as with Facebook or Twitter, the ownership of the means of production is third-party, but the dispossession is intensified when industry invites fans onto proprietary turf: “Programs and networks are building their own playgrounds for viewers, creating a fundamentally different viewing experience than in the past” (S. M. Ross, 2009, p. 176). These practices "create a 'digital enclosure' within which they can carefully cultivate an alternate, 'official' fan community whose participatory value is measured by its consumption of advertisement-laced ancillary content" (Scott, 2011, p. 205); “the industry is encouraging audiences and fans to work their fields, rather than despoiling them and moving on to cultivate their own land” (Scott, 2011, p. 154), and to add to Scott’s excellent analysis, this enclosure produces fandom as a dispossessed workforce for industry.

This relationship differs greatly from the way that the gift economy produces the space of fandom as a commons. Like a common piece of land, everybody has a stake in maintaining the commons of fandom. It is, in some sense, public. In Christopher Kelty’s (2008, pp. 16–7) description, “The very name commons [ . . . ] was meant to signal the public interest, collective management, and legal status of the collection” (emphasis in original). Importantly, all members of the community have free use of the commons, but in a way categorically distinct from the ways in which capital exploits the commons (Fuchs, 2010, p. 146). Instead, fan creative production is productively understood as what Carol Rose (1998, p. 144) calls “limited common property,” which is “property on the outside, commons on the inside.” It’s not a pure commons, because not everybody may exploit it, but those on the inside can make use of it as completely as the norms of the community allow. Leon Tan (2013) gives an example of a similar structure when he calls for an understanding that when an indigenous group like the Maori acts to prevent others from using their cultural heritage, they aren’t fencing off part of a “universal” commons.
that rightly belongs to all humanity but rather there exist different commons and this commons is a Maori commons—free on the inside and restricted on the outside. One problem with the usual deployment of the commons metaphor is its invocation of a binary opposition between restrictive, bad property and free-for-all commons, whereas more nuance is needed. The model of limited common property provides great insight for fandom: Everybody in the community has shared access to everybody else’s stories, vids, essays, or whatever, but their circulation through the bond-forming gift economy means there’s often a protective attitude in relation to outsiders. Limited common property explains how people can seemingly share things freely and at the same time have a right to freedom from appropriation by capital.

I don’t want to fall prey to romanticizing the commons. Fan culture was never some utopian space any more than there were nothing but happy peasants in ye olden times before the Enclosure Act. Fandom has conflict and inequality as all human systems do. What matters is that a commons mode makes certain things possible that other modes do not. Yochai Benkler (2007, p. 20) proposes to “treat property and markets as just one domain of human action, with affordances and limitations,” and the commons would thus be another domain with affordances/limitations. The latter means of organizing ownership affords certain uses and relationships because its resources are “available to anyone who wishes to participate” (Benkler, 2007, p. 23).

We should therefore ask what happens as fandom is enclosed and made private rather than common. A number of scholars have raised concerns about privatization of the public Internet in general (Dyer-Witheford, 2010; Scholz, 2012) and the privatization of people’s personal data in particular (Andrejevic, 2012; Terranova, 2012), and I think that such questions need to be asked in regard to fandom as well. As Russo (2010, pp. 224–5) explains, "To FanLib,
the vast commons of freely exchanged fanworks perhaps appeared as if it simply lacked a businessperson with the savvy to privatize it. But in fact, creative fandom has a rich tradition of conceptualizing its labor in ways that reject financial profit as a criterion for value.” But FanLib only stood out and produced a backlash because it was clumsy—as Chapters 4 and 5 have shown, many other initiatives, great and small, work to funnel fan productivity into industry coffers.

One challenge to proposing industry embrace as enclosure is that the practices of fandom may be the same inside the new enclosure as they were before it was built, much as peasant lives may not have changed a great deal when the land they farmed first became property. However, enclosure produces a structural difference. A model conceptualizing fan production as user-generated content orients fans toward a vertical relationship between a user and a media product and beyond that the industry. The gift economy thinks of fan activity as a contribution to a community and thus produces horizontal (though not necessarily egalitarian) bonds between fans. If, following Sara Ahmed (2006, p. 3), we understand "orientation" spatially, it becomes clear that "orientations shape [. . . ] 'who' or 'what' we direct our energy and attention toward." The directions we face "make certain things, and not others, available," because in facing one thing we precisely turn away from other things (Ahmed, 2006, p. 14). The market economy that orients fans toward the media company thus threatens the very existence of fandom as produced through exchanged gifts. Labor exploitation and the gift economy may be able to coexist, but these different orientations are fundamentally incompatible, such that capital may be killing the very thing it seeks to monetize.

Thinking back to questions of consent, then, the enclosure of fandom can only be freely chosen if fans know it could be otherwise. Here lies the danger of the "regifting economy,"
which presents “a narrowly defined and contained version of 'fandom' to a general audience” that is “unfamiliar with fandom's gift economy” (Scott, 2011, pp. 199, 202, 205)—not everyone knows the regifted version isn’t the only option. As Noppe (2011, sec. 3.5) notes, “Fannish practices and mindsets are just as susceptible to change as those of companies, so the fact that certain concerns have been dominant among fans up to now doesn’t mean they will always remain so.” Again, I do not seek to hold on to some romantic notion of the way it was in the good old days, but to note that as these new forms gain ascendancy, old forms may fall out of use and cease to be an option—if fans no longer have an awareness that it could be otherwise, they will be unable to make an informed decision about which kind of fandom they want to have.

Conclusion: Nonaligned Interests, Meaningful Consent, and Fair Compensation

Though these alterations in the means of production of fandom may seem innocuous and may produce no immediate experiential changes, they nevertheless have serious implications. In the end, sometimes the interests of industry and those of fans align and sometimes they don’t (Baird Stribling, 2013; Banks & Humphreys, 2008; Jenkins et al., 2013). Interests align when people want to gain access to the industry or reform it. They don't align when fan production is oriented toward other values. To assume that what is good for industry is good for fans is fundamentally wrong. However, it is also fundamentally wrong to assume that what's good for industry is bad for fans. Instead, the question must be asked.

Fan motivations to create are skew relative to the industry's motivations to have fans create. They don't intersect because they're on a different plane, not because they are fundamentally oppositional, such that satisfying them is not zero-sum. Indeed, precisely because fan and industry desires lie in different planes, both can be satisfied at once. Banks and
Humphreys (2008) and Noppe (2011) both suggest that these different value systems can “coexist.” The relevant question is whether “the benefit constitutes adequate compensation for the work members perform” (J. E. Campbell, 2011, p. 506). “Sufficient” may mean something other than a monetary reward (Bruns, 2012; Postigo, 2009), particularly given the historical nonmarket fan value system addressed above, though in earlier work Postigo (2003, p. 605) noted that while such laborers “may receive more than just money for their work, when compared with the billions of dollars that video-game companies reap, it would seem that they should gain more than a good reputation.” Having a nuanced understanding of what motivates production can make us sensitive to the fact that “Taking part in free labor may be meaningful and rewarding (as compared to previous corporate structures), even when a company may be perceived as providing too little value or recognition for that work” (Jenkins et al., 2013, p. 57). Ultimately, it must be recognized that fans can be exploited labor and simultaneously compensated in a currency they value in a way they consider sufficient and not alienated from their labor by draconian terms of service and copyright measures in the process.
Chapter 6
Fandom’s Normativity: Assuming and Recruiting the Socially Dominant Fan Subject

During the period this project examines, particular fan practices have come to be seen as reasonable or even expected, as detailed in the consumption and labor chapters. This chapter and the one that follows reorient the question of fan normativity somewhat, examining what kinds of people are imagined to engage in the practices of fandom. By comparison to the pronounced stigma attached to fan subjects that the early years of fan studies catalogued,¹ many believe that being a fan is now seen as something “regular people” do (Baym, 2007; Jenkins, 2006d; Sandvoss, 2005). Indeed, this chapter demonstrates the ways fans are frequently constructed as members of culturally dominant categories, differing substantially from the old stereotype of fans as "social misfits," "feminized or desexualized," and "infantile, emotionally and intellectually immature" (Jenkins, 1992, p. 10).² Such understandings of fans also diverge from the traditional association of fans with danger, violence, and pathology or just loneliness, alienation, and loserdom³ and the litany of "greatest hits" of dysfunctional and murderous fans that formerly accompanied discussions of fandom—Mark David Chapman, John Lennon’s fan and killer; John Hinckley, Jodie Foster’s fan who tried to kill Ronald Reagan to impress her; and Robert Bardo, the fan who killed actress Rebecca Schaeffer.⁴ In comparison to these images, the more recent idea of fandom as a reasonable or even expected pastime for white men indicates that being a fan is constructed as a more normative position in contemporary culture.

¹ For example: Brower, 1992; Jenkins, 1992; Jensen, 1992; Lewis, 1992b.
² For similar arguments on the issues of gender/sexuality and maturity in representations of fandom, see, for example, Driscoll, 2006; Hills, 2002; Johnson, 2007; Lewis, 1992a, 1992b.
³ Authors who discuss this imagery include: Jenkins, 1992; Jensen, 1992; Johnson, 2007; Lewis, 1992b.
⁴ For discussions of the deployment of Chapman and Hinckley, see Jenkins, 1992; Jensen, 1992; Sandvoss, 2005; on Bardo, see, for example, Allen, 1996; Ravensberg & Miller, 2003; Schlesinger, 2006.
The current chapter examines the “new” normativity of fandom—instances in which fan subjects are constructed as those who occupy structurally normative or dominant positions like masculinity and whiteness, as well as the ways fandom becomes normative through being appropriate for all ages. In Chapter 7, I consider the construction of fandom as failure—which, far from being contradictory, actually acts to reinforce whiteness, masculinity, and heterosexuality. Through an analysis that draws promiscuously from across the archive of fictional and nonfictional representations of fans, the policies and structures of official websites for media properties (films, sports franchises, etc.), and statements made by industry workers who produce content for fans, this chapter examines the recruitment of structurally dominant fan subjects. By considering these different sources simultaneously as aspects of a single system, the assumption or enlistment of particular fan bodies shows more clearly than looking at a single one of these discursive registers alone. My deliberate mixing of sources enables the underlying structure of fan subject norms to emerge from the commonalities across these disparate locations, demonstrating that the contemporary embrace or normalization of fandom remains as selective with bodies as in practices of consumption or labor.

Race: The (White) Elephant in the Room

I both begin from and structure these chapters broadly through race. I do so in large part as a corrective to the absence of an examination of race in fandom thus far. The dominant axis of analysis in fan studies has traditionally been gender. As Aymar Jean Christian (2011, sec. 2.2) notes, “While fan studies has been relatively silent on issues of race, it has provided a robust literature on the interpretive work women have done as fans.” The historical inattention to race within fan studies shows when it is either absent from the list of modes of difference within
fandom, as with John Fiske’s (1992) account of fan social stratification as occurring by age, gender, class, and education level (but not race), or included but subordinated, as when Constance Penley (1997) describes fandom as diverse in race, age, ability, gender, and class but then orients her analysis around women transgressing sexual norms. Similarly, scholars sometimes acknowledge that fandom as a group is “largely white” (Jenkins, 1992, p. 1) or that the "elite consumer" as recruited by industry is "disproportionately white” (Jenkins, 2006a, p. 23) but do not actually examine the implications.

Indeed, only sports studies has consistently analyzed the role of race with respect to fandom, largely because it must grapple with the history of overt racism that has made sports fans “a much less likely and indeed likeable subject of study” compared to media fans’ position as underdogs (J. Gray et al., 2007, p. 5). Sports studies has found that sports fandom privileges whiteness in a way that frequently alienates fans of color. Against this baseline of whiteness, fans’ engagement with particular practices and particular sports reflects their sense of racial, ethnic, and/or national belonging. Sports studies scholarship also catalogues the ways in which those numerically and structurally dominant white fans are frequently either passively or actively racist (Müller et al., 2007; Newman, 2007; Ruddock, 2005).

The common tendency to minimize race within fan studies meant there was a void to be filled by a 2011 special issue of *Transformative Works and Cultures* on “Race and Ethnicity in Fandom.” In their introduction, editors Sarah Gatson and Robin Anne Reid (2011, sec. 3.4) highlight the role of silence in producing a disregard for race and other forms of inequality:

> Not to speak about race, gender, class, sexuality—or being pressured not to

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5 See, for example: Crawford, 2004; Newman, 2007; Quinn, 2009; Ruddock, 2005
6 Works in this vein include: Crawford, 2004; Gibbons, 2011; Quinn, 2009; Rommel, 2011.
7 The special issue contained an earlier version of the argument elaborated in Chapters 6 and 7.
speak—in a fandom space ends up creating the image of a “generic” or “normalized” fan. [ . . . ] The default fanboy has a presumed race, class, and sexuality: white, middle-class, male, heterosexual (with perhaps an overlay or [sic] geek or nerd identity, identities that are simultaneously embedded in emphasized whiteness, and increasingly certain kinds of class privilege, often displayed by access to higher education, particularly in scientific and technical fields).

The failure to consider race in fandom has had the effect of whitening it. Whiteness, scholars inform us, is the unmarked category (marking others), the unexamined category (subjecting others to examination), and the norm (making others insufficient), the cumulative effect of which is privilege (and disadvantage for others). ¹⁸ Ross Chambers (1997, p. 189) adds that, though "there are plenty of unmarked categories (maleness, heterosexuality, and middle classness being obvious ones)," it can be argued that "whiteness is perhaps the primary unmarked and so unexamined—let's say 'blank'—category."

To equate whiteness with a lack of race is therefore a distinctly (though dissimulatedly) white position to take. As Chambers (1997, p. 192) argues, "In contrast to those whose identity is defined by their classificatory status as members of a given group, whites are perceived as individual historical agents." This difference, then, makes the category "white" what he calls "the unexamined"—it's not perceived as relevant, because white people get to be "just people" whereas others get classified as some of those "hyphenated" Americans. Though whiteness is constructed as blank and nothing in particular (Dyer, 1997; Frankenberg, 1993; Kusz, 2001), it clearly is something. It's the norm-defining something (Frankenberg, 1993). It's the body that

meant when universality—itself a hegemonic construct (Butler, Laclau, & Žižek, 2000)—is invoked. Thus, following Kyle Kusz's (2001, p. 393) call to "read whiteness into texts that are not explicitly about race if one is to disrupt Whiteness as the unchallenged racial norm," these two chapters insist on a recognition and analysis of the whiteness of fandom.

Attending to absence and not just presence, then, the loud silences around race in the archive need to be named. Fandom’s whiteness often emerges indirectly through race being unmarked. In five of my six interviews with workers at Campfire and BMU (all of whom are white), race was never mentioned as a characteristic they thought about in relation to who fans were, unlike gender, age, and class. The one worker who did mention race was James of BMU, who was somewhat differently positioned from all of the other interviewees as both a practitioner and an academic—though as I’ll discuss below, James’s consideration of race, like other exceptions to the nearly unrelenting whiteness of fandom, tends to reinforce whiteness as central. Neither do industry workers discuss race in public statements like DVD features or news. Classifying race as something that does not matter, as Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2003) notes, relies on benefitting from the current racial system—a white position to take that perpetuates whiteness as unmarked.

A similar whitening by near-omission occurs with the websites. Race does not appear in their interfaces at all—websites do not ask for this demographic characteristic when one registers to use them. Though the objection might be raised that race has no relevance to one’s use of a website, I would point to the fact that the sites do collect equally irrelevant data about one’s birthdate (when legally, as I’ll discuss below, the requirement is an affirmation that one is over 13, 18, or 21, depending on what one is signing up for) and gender. In classifying race as something that does not matter, then, the dominant category, whiteness, effectively comes to
stand for all people, as eliminating race by fiat does not make the material social reality go away (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). Race appears on sites only in their terms of service, and then only as a locus of trouble. SyFy/Battlestar Galactica (BSG) forbids “harassing, offensive, vulgar, abusive, hateful or bashing communications—especially those that put down others' sexual orientation, gender, race, color, religious views, national origin or disability.” ESPN tells its users that “You agree that you will not Distribute any Submission that” among other things, “is bigoted, hateful, or racially or otherwise offensive.” When put alongside the silences, this fear of racial disruption begins to look something like a Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell policy about race. Race’s position only as racism in these sites shows their participation in the logic of colorblindness—the belief that, the quip goes, “Only racists notice race,” and consequently if we don’t notice it, it will go away. Like the original DADT, this policy structures the site as comprised of the dominant category, whitening the implied subject as it was straightened by military injunctions against discussing homosexuality.9

Beyond the fact that the race gap in fan studies must be filled, understanding race is also vital because it quickly becomes apparent that fans are most often understood to be white people, particularly white men. Fan bodies as directly depicted in representational sources, and especially as primary characters, are overwhelmingly (though not exclusively) white. The sheer, overpowering number of white people who appear as fans in audiovisual sources should be taken seriously and examined for its meaning, particularly against the logic of colorblindness in which white people have no race. Even if these representations were to reflect a composition of the fan population that is in fact overwhelmingly white—which we cannot know because research into

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9 The list of other characteristics around which trouble might arise, of course, has a similar effect of identifying the site’s main population as members of the dominant category with respect to these structures as well.
actual racial demographics of fandom does not exist and would be difficult to adequately sample—fandom has often been able to carry on unaware of its own whiteness. This tendency toward unreflexive whiteness persists despite the existence of a “complex network of discussion relating to the cultural makeup of fandom and [. . . ] a history of work by fans of color and white allies” (Gatson & Reid, 2011, sec. 3.4). Indeed, even the few prominent discussions like RaceFail ’09, a months-long conflict in fandom around racism and exclusion of people of color, were directly caused by unexamined whiteness (TWC Editor, 2009).

Depictions of fans of color are present in the audiovisual sources with some frequency, but rarely as main characters (Hiro of Heroes is the only exception, and he’s part of a large ensemble cast). While admittedly it is absurd (and essentialist) to count instances of non-white people as if the numbers themselves have meaning, to some extent I’m reduced to doing just that because such fans are generally just there. Frequently, fans of color appear only in groups forming the background bodies of convention scenes (Galaxy Quest, The Simpsons, Trekkies 2) or sporting events (D2: The Mighty Ducks, Facing the Giants, Happy Gilmore). Ultimately, locating people of color in these representations tends to be a bit like finding Waldo. Moreover, such non-white fans, when more than scenery, tend to be silent. South Asian character Raj in The Big Bang Theory literally does not talk because his pathological inability to talk to women (or even in their presence) silences him in many scenes. Or, more figuratively, an East Asian fan in The Captains asks regarding the camera “Is it on?” which William Shatner mishears as calling him Spock, much to Shatner’s offense, rendering her actual statement irrelevant (paging Gayatri Spivak). Fans of color do sometimes both appear and speak, but these tend not to be fans with personalities or fleshed-out characters but rather show up only briefly, as in Mathematically Alive, Double Dare, or Xena: Warrior Princess episode “Soul Possession,” such that overall the
structure generally positions fans of color as irrelevant.

Unfortunately, the times when fans of color and race as a structure are central do not increase the nuance or depth in the treatment of race. A common plot point in sports representations—where the strong racialized division of labor between (substantially) black players and (substantially) white fans limits the ability to ignore the issue altogether—is for race to appear as racism much as on the websites. Thus, the opening scene of The Express, a biopic about African American football player Ernie Davis, depicts the 1960 Cotton Bowl, in which the Dallas crowd seems to be egging on the white players from the University of Texas to beat up the black players from Syracuse University. Whether the film reflects the historical facts or not, using such a scene to address the intersection of race and fandom reduces race to racism in line with colorblind logic. Indeed, when Ernie rallies the other black players to resist this racism for the sake of the few black spectators in the stands it feels like an artificial opportunity for a grand lesson about overcoming racism, as generally the African American fans throughout the film have watched games on shared televisions rather than being physically present. The same logic of race as racism animates a scene in Friday Night Lights the film, in which the coach of an opposing team argues that “There’d be a problem with our fans sitting with your fans” because Odessa has multiracial fans and the other team’s are entirely white—a tension that also appears in the television version of FNL. Race in fandom, then, generally operates on a flat, symbolic plane when it appears at all.

Thus, the presence of fans of color often reinforces a norm of whiteness. James from BMU, for example, operates from a baseline of whiteness as he describes the racial composition of the university’s fan base:

part of my job was, you know, you see these like half- these time out promotions,
where they do activities, you know, Coca-Cola whatever basketball shot. And as a marketing person they used to want me to go out and select the contestants, and at basketball in particular we would try to get a cross section of people and get different- Trying to find an African American at a basketball game- walking around, looking for- so they could participate in a time out activity. Generally when I found somebody they were somehow connected to the team. They were somebody's uncle or they were a guest of the player and so they were ineligible.

In this way, African Americans appear at games not as “real” fans but as family members of players, whitening BMU fandom by contrast. Though James was the only industry worker to discuss the impact of race on fandom, and indeed named race as a structure, saying, “It's a total race thing. Walk around a football game. I mean it's clear” (original emphasis), he did not therefore have a particularly progressive outlook, as suggested already by his checkbox model of diversity. Certainly, he characterized fans from East Asia who returned there after completing their degrees solely as a “donor base” rather than, again, as people who might really love BMU athletics—constructing these bodies out of fandom as well. Thus, between numerical dominance of white bodies as fans, the refusal to consider race except as racism, and the marginalization of fans of color, the whiteness of fandom is overdetermined.

Gendering Fandom: Practices, Texts, and Omissions

Fandom and Gender in Scholarly Analysis

At the dawn of fan studies, Henry Jenkins (1992, p. 19) identified a difference in gender tendencies between media and sports fandom, with the former being mostly female and the latter mostly male. This gender schematic continues to be a relatively accurate description of the views
taken by academic work. On one hand, fan studies has been greatly (or even primarily) *interested* in women’s fan activities around media objects (Christian, 2011; Walliss, 2010). On the other hand, this body of work has demonstrated that speculative media fandom, as a *population*, is heavily female. This argument has been consistent from the advent of fan studies (Bacon-Smith, 1991; Jenkins, 1992; Penley, 1997) down to more recent examinations (Busse, 2009a; Coppa, 2006; Hellekson, 2009). In particular, scholar-favorite practices like vidding, or editing pieces from televisual texts to music to tell a new story (Coppa, 2008, 2009; Scott, 2011) and fan fiction (Derecho, 2006; Hellekson, 2009) are understood as dominated by women—or even as distinctively female ways of seeing (Coppa, 2008, 2009; Derecho, 2006; Jenkins, 2006c). The Internet has been understood to facilitate the dominance of fandom by women, protecting them from the appearance-based judgment they usually experience in embodied contexts (Hanmer, 2003) or from stigma as fans (S. G. Jones, 2000a). However, this “safe space” argument has some been challenged, with Booth and Kelly (2013) contending that the Internet carries *more* stigma than face to face fandom. Moreover, early fan scholarship demonstrated that women already had a strong presence in fandom long before the Internet (Bacon-Smith, 1991; Jenkins, 1992)—plus, as Jenkins (2006c) notes, early male dominance of the Internet had to be overcome first.

By contrast, researchers typically understand sports fandom as a stronghold of men. Garry Crawford (2004) discusses the double bind faced by female sports fans because they are considered inauthentic by men, even the most dedicated are not invited or allowed to engage in the most hardcore expressions of fandom, which then proves them inauthentic because they don’t do those things. Victoria Gosling (2007) and Katharine Jones (2008) describe a similar definitional exclusion, in which traditional or “authentic” sports fandom is figured as a
masculinist abuse-fest, where women really do not belong and their attendance has the potential to destroy “genuine” sports fandom. The sports stadium provides a key space for this masculinism (Crawford, 2004; Tanaka, 2004). More specifically, the stadium is at times not just pro-male but actively hostile toward women (Gosling, 2007; K. W. Jones, 2008). Beyond the stadium itself, David Nylund’s (2004) analysis of a sports talk radio show demonstrates how this sport fan space is similarly masculinist and sexist as well as heterosexist.

The gendering of sports fandom as masculine often rests on a sense that women are not real fans. Toko Tanaka (2004), Crawford (2004), and Gosling (2007) all indicate a belief among male fans (and media outlets, and, in Gosling’s case, academics), that in many cases women attend sporting events only in order to gawk at male bodies rather than out of any enjoyment of the sport. In particular, many assume that women do not know enough about the sport to be true fans (Pope & Williams, 2010). Davis and Duncan (2006) argue that their interviewees understand the high level of sports knowledge required for fantasy sports as basically impossible for a woman. Tanaka (2004) describes a particularly glaring example of this tendency as she argues that many female fans were more knowledgeable about soccer than the journalists pressed into service to cover it for the 2002 World Cup, but due to gendered assumptions about sports understanding only men were asked to be commentators, no matter how incompetent. This male-centrism occurs despite the fact that women are in fact sports fans—at times in equal (or nearly equal) numbers to men (Crawford, 2004; Oates, 2012), with great intensity (Pope, 2013), or with long histories of participation (Pope & Williams, 2010). As with speculative media fandom, female sports fans can be assisted by the non-visibility of their gendered difference from the male norm on the Internet (Guschwan, 2011; Tanaka, 2004). However, moving to the Internet does not guarantee fannish parity. Tanaka (2004) notes that Japanese fan websites are actively
hostile toward new fans who have less knowledge—such newbies are, in a forum without automatically visible gender, assumed to be women simply because they aren’t terribly knowledgeable.\(^{10}\) Davis and Duncan (2006) and Donald Levy (2005) similarly describe the online practice of fantasy sports as having a distinctly masculinist climate.

**Fandom’s Discursive Construction as a Male Domain**

The female-centric tendency of speculative media scholarship and the nuanced gender accounting of the sports work—though based in analysis of actual fan populations—do not correspond to the popular understanding of what it means to be a fan. The default body named and shown for both types of fandom is male. Mike and Merrin of Campfire both discussed the ways in which the clients they worked with assumed men or boys as the target audience; though they themselves had a more complex view, this assumption was the background for their work. Much the same logic animates an exchange in the commentary on 2004 *The Simpsons* episode “My Big Fat Geek Wedding”—set primarily at a speculative media convention—in which the creative staff have a dispute over the gender breakdown at Comic Con, on which the diegetic convention was based:

Matt Groening: But you know, it’s easy to poke fun at these guys- and girls, but-

Male voice:\(^{11}\) No, no girls, guys.

Groening: No, but that’s it, here’s what I’ve seen change over the years is that it used to be a nerd boy fest and now it’s all- girls show up!

\(^{10}\) Lisa Nakamura (2009) makes similar arguments about particular behaviors being racialized on the Internet despite the invisibility of physical bodies.

\(^{11}\) The commentary tracks generally have six to eight commentators, nearly always all men; though all participants introduce themselves at the beginning of the commentary, I find it impossible to differentiate between so many similar voices given the ever-changing composition of the show’s creative staff—except Groening himself, whose voice is present in DVD materials with some consistency, and the women who intermittently participate.
The disbelief from Groening’s interlocutor with regard to the idea that women might go to Comic Con shows the logic of default maleness in the space—even though all the commentators said that they went to Comic Con regularly, such that the second man could reasonably have been expected to share Groening’s experience of gender inclusion.

Similarly, news coverage consistently uses the term “fanboys” to demarcate Comic Con attendees, and journalists much more frequently interview men and boys or discuss their behavior. To be sure, the Disney purchase of Marvel Comics, discussed in Chapter 2 as such a licensing-based consumption bonanza, was specifically undertaken with the understanding that comic books are for boys—in order for Disney to balance the princess part of its portfolio (Nakashima, 2009). The AP’s pieces on “football widows” (C. Davis, 1999) and a “men-only Superbowl party” (“Billings church hosts men-only Superbowl party,” 2009) also identify men as the default or assumed fan. As Thomas Oates (2012, pp. 605–6) describes, “Proponents of the football widow narrative, relying on anecdotal evidence and common sense rather than data, crafted a vision of football spectatorship as an exclusively male practice, at least within the boundaries of normativity.” These discussions operate from an understanding of fandom as something which "No woman could possibly enjoy," as Suzanne Scott (2011, p. 118) describes in her discussion of a 2008 Entertainment Weekly piece about Comic Con,

Indirect construction of the fan norms again assumes males, much as they are normalized by being shown and named. Following Michele White’s (2006, p. 27) attention to the way the male option on website signup forms is either the default or seen first by being above or to the left, the membership forms at ESPN, SyFy, Star Trek and Star Wars all construct their ideal website users as male by doing one of these three things (the Mariners do not ask for gender, Cal

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12 As I’ll describe below, the exception to discussing only fanboys came with Twilight, but these fans were specifically marked off as not regular attendees—and indeed, not “real” fans at all.
and Purdue have no signup option, and MLS routes signup through Twitter or Facebook). Similarly, Major League Soccer (MLS) constructs its audience as particularly male by displaying fan contests and prizes in relation to Father’s Day and not Mother’s Day. Overall, in both forms of fandom, fans are men in the same way that they are white—overwhelmingly, though not exclusively.

In addition to assuming a male audience, industry norms also recruit men. As a purely demographic move, Scott (2011, p. 34) notes that the contemporary embrace of the fanboy "reinforces Hollywood's ongoing allegiance to 16-34 year-old young men as their target audience"—a structural valuation which surely bears on how sports approaches its audience as well. Certainly, the logic of demographics is pervasive, with Christian’s (2011, sec. 4.4) independent web series producers “often citing the desirability of young white male viewers, the most coveted group in both film and television.” Scott (2011, p. 4) also identifies the fanboy as not just a member of an age demographic but a participant in a specific, taste-based market, noting that "because journalists and the media industry are actively constructing and courting ‘fanboys’ as a market segment, with ‘fangirls’ remaining an invisible (or worse, actively excluded) part of that ‘fanboy’ demographic, these terms matter. How fans participate in convergence culture, and whose participation is valued, is increasingly determined by these labels."

Ultimately, this logic constructs Comic Con’s “male attendees as Hollywood's most prized focus group” (Scott, 2011, p. 60).

The normalization of practices associated with men also engages men as fans. That is,
"the fanboy's visibility is, in many cases, a byproduct of his complicity with industrially valued (that is to say, marketable or co-optable) modes of fannish participation" (Scott, 2011, p. 12). Thus, as Kristina Busse (2013, p. 77) notes, “It is often the less explicitly fannish (or, one might argue, the less explicitly female fannish) elements that have been accepted by [the] mainstream.” Gender maps onto participation of the “right” kind to the extent that "Fanboys have historically been essentialized as desiring incorporation, being heavily invested in canon and authorial intent, and more likely to collect (trivia and merchandise) than create" (Scott, 2011, p. 81), all of which industry finds much more palatable as a form of fandom to embrace, as the careful management of fan consumption and labor examined earlier in this project has suggested. This “playing by the rules” approach has contributed to what Abigail De Kosnik (2009, pp. 120–1) has identified as the “interestingly gendered” classifications around which fans have been able to professionalize: "A number of Star Wars fan filmmakers (all men) have received development deals or employment with major studios on the basis of their fan work. Another remix genre, game modding, has also produced professional game designers from its ranks.” Busse (2013, p. 82) suggests identification with particular fans may play a role in why industry is more open to such fan incorporation: “Fanboys have grown from pimply geeky parental basement dwellers into heroes (or, we might translate into non-fictional examples, into producers and successful academics).”

Beyond certain practices and orientations being recruited directly, the contemporary normalization of fandom relies on the increasing production of fan-friendly texts—but texts enlist certain types of fans. As Jonathan Gray (2010, p. 18) notes, paratexts in circulation around a text “can determine genre, gender, theme, style, and relevant intertexts, thereby in part creating the show as a meaningful entity for 'viewers' even before they become viewers, or even if they
never become viewers.” Thus, the suite of licensed toys gendered *Star Wars*, such that girls who avoided engaging with the text were then basing their understanding of the text on the paratext of the toys (especially their packaging) being for boys (J. Gray, 2010, pp. 85–6). We might also think here of the hostile climate of the stadium (Crawford, 2004; Gosling, 2007; K. W. Jones, 2008) as a paratext to the sport itself that excludes women; women experiencing the different paratext of TV coverage may then understand the sport text differently.

In addition to paratexts, intertextual features such as genre recruit certain participants and not others. Louisa Stein (2008, sec. 5.2) identifies the tension experienced by one show located between “science fiction, with its association with male fans, and teen romance, with its commonplace association with young female viewers/consumers. Despite the instrumental involvement of women in science fiction media fandom from its inception, these gender/genre associations appear entrenched.” That “entrenched” condition means that engaging differently gendered genres produces contradiction rather than balance. Similarly, as Busse (2013, pp. 76–7) notes, certain practices are more acceptable with particular genres “where melodramatic plotlines and male sexualization may be permissible in soaps but not in comics.”

While these forms of para- and intertextual invitation of particular fans over others have long been a feature of media, the expansion (even explosion) of speculative media texts that particularly recruit intensive engagement—the shift often understood as the mainstreaming of fandom—has generated new modes of selectively inciting fans. Sharon Ross (2009, p. 9) calls such strategies, exemplified by shows like *Battlestar Galactica, Heroes*, and *Lost*, “obscured” invitations to tele-participation, a method which she says “resides primarily in the narrative structure and content of the show itself through a certain ‘messiness’ that demands viewer unraveling” (original emphasis). The increase in the use of this strategy corresponds to the rise of
what Scott (2011, p. 161) calls the “fanboy auteur,” understood as “simultaneously one of 'us' and one of 'them.'” “Fanboy auteurs” act to construct who counts as the “us”: As Busse (2013, p. 82) notes, “It’s mostly those we’d call affirmational rather than transformational fans,” those who “celebrate the story the way it is” (Murray, 2004) rather than tinkering with it. The proliferation of official materials—webisodes, podcasts, etc.—that fill in every gap in the narrative and explain authorial intent for all things produces a situation in which the "fanboy auteur's voice is privileged and his interpretations are posed as the 'correct' reading of textual events” (Scott, 2011, pp. 168–9). In that, as Jenkins (1992, 2006b) has persuasively argued, looking for and abiding by authorial intent tends to be an approach taken by men, this expansion and normalization through these particular types of texts also has the effect of gendering the normative fan.

Thus, as Scott (2011, p. 305) notes, "boundaries between the mainstream and the margins, historically critical to fan studies, [. . .] are increasingly drawn along gender lines." This gender divide in mainstreaming leads to Driscoll and Gregg’s (2011, p. 572) deep disappointment with Jenkins’s (2006a) inattention to gender in Convergence Culture, noting that “There are methodological as well as political stakes in the shift from the earlier phase of Jenkins' work to the more commercially palatable convergence arguments.” As Busse (2009a, p. 106) asks, “If such convergence can allow fans to become parts of the media industry, should fans embrace these options? And how are these economic issues deeply gendered if predominantly female spaces embrace gift cultures while men are more likely to turn their fannish endeavors into for-profit projects?” The normalization and recruitment of particular practices and approaches has exclusionary consequences.

**Marginalizing Women**
To examine the position of women in the contemporary discourse of fandom, I have to bracket temporarily the history of seeing fandom as a site of women’s resistance and empowerment (Bacon-Smith, 1991; Jenkins, 1992; Penley, 1997). Thus, I conduct an analysis in the spirit of Cornel Sandvoss’s (2005, p. 7) exhortation to not “limit our analysis to those fans who are disempowered and who do utilize fandom as a form of resistance” by defining “fandom as a cultural practice limited to those disempowered” and ascribing to it “a subversive ideological function” (original emphasis)—i.e., Sandvoss cautions not to romanticize fandom as inherently a space of resistance and appropriation. By not doing so, more empowered, non-resisting, and non-subversive fans become visible as the ones being embraced by industry, and the ways in which some aspects of fandom, some ways of being a fan, and thus some fans remain marginal becomes clear. As John Walliss (2010, sec. 1.4, 1.5) shows in his analysis of a fan film, the focus in fan studies on women’s resistance has rendered it insensitive to other modes of fandom, which don’t make the same “attempt to reenvision the canon”; the fan filmmakers he examines “are seemingly content to color within its lines,” which, as discussed, tends to be an approach of men. Thinking through such analyses, I contend that attention to resistance has meant the increasing relative marginalization of women and women-associated practices precisely through the normalization of men in a classic case of what Chapter 1 discussed as the unintended consequences for those left behind by normativity.

Despite Driscoll and Gregg’s critique, Jenkins (2006a, p. 154) does actually acknowledge the gendered nature of incorporation into industry logics, noting that Hollywood professionals "clearly identified more closely with the young digital filmmakers who were making 'calling card' movies to try to break into the film industry than they did with female fan writers sharing their erotic fantasies." But Jenkins does not then examine the implications of this differential
identification, leaving him open to criticism. Fan fiction and vidding have an equal and opposite
highly gendered status to fan filmmaking and modding, both a) deeply feminized in their focus
on feelings and relationships and b) dominated by women producers—and, as discussed in
Chapter 5, not eligible for incorporation into industry. Thus, Busse (2013, p. 74) points to the
way gender inequality resides “not only in the way female fans are regarded but also in the way
certain negatively connoted fannish activities are considered specifically female.”

Jenkins (2006c, p. 44) argues that women tend to participate heavily in such activities
because they are accustomed to having to rework texts produced by and for men. As Busse
(2013, p. 83) puts it, “After all, most TV programs, especially science fiction and crime drama,
are geared at the 18-35 white male heterosexual demographic. In response, these viewers often
do not feel the need to transform the fictional worlds they are offered, since they are their prime
target.” Scott (2011, p. 81) contends that:

Though not all fangirls are 'resistant' in their reading practices, they have historically
been more invested in subtext rather than text, and more attached to the 'fanon' (texts
produced by other fans) than the producer's construction of the canon. Moreover, the
forms of fan productivity that have been historically dominated by women, such as
fanfiction and vidding, actively avoid monetization and industrial detection.

Between their disinterest in or refusal of monetization, resistance to authorial control, and often
touchy-feely subject matter, then, these practices and the feminized fans who engage in them are
not being embraced by industry’s new norms.

Similarly, mentions of women reinforce the male default. James of BMU, after noting the
lack of female fans even at women’s sporting events, says that he sees change:

I think that- with Title IX, one of the big impacts of Title IX has been the fact that
girls are exposed to things at a younger age. As a little girl, my wife may not have been pushed to play basketball or engage in these things, but now that they have been they become fans at a young age because they have access to it. And so because they have access, because they have knowledge of it, they're participating as girls, as they mature into women I think they have more--they're more active participants which I think is going to lead to more fan support. (Original emphasis)

Though James clearly has no interest in actively excluding women and even possibly is excited about the prospect of more women getting involved and interested, his comment nevertheless operates within a contemporary situation of male dominance at sporting events that he takes as a self-evident baseline. A similar logic animates the consistent appeals in news coverage to sports as a family event. As Gosling (2007, p. 250) describes, pitching sports as an activity for a family audience—meaning the inclusion of women and children against an assumed-male baseline—is precisely about increasing women’s participation and decreasing the roughness of the stadium atmosphere imagined to scare women off. While Oates (2012, p. 605) describes this as a situation in which “women spectators helped to secure football’s status as legitimate entertainment during a period when the game’s violence threatened its public image,” this pushback, like James’s, relies on a baseline of sports being primarily for men. With this construction, much as with the strategy Oates (2012, p. 606) describes as “shrink it and pink it” in the production of “women’s jerseys,” there’s an idea that women have to be actively courted rather than showing up of their own accord and require that sports be changed rather than liking the “regular” version.

An assumed baseline of maleness in speculative media likewise makes women notable as
fans. In documentary *Horror Fans*, a bookstore owner notes that “A lot of my clientele- a lot of
my female clientele especially, are drawn to the vampire thing because there's an eroticism.”
This statement ghettoizes female interest into particular sub-genres rather than it being
imaginable that they would be broadly interested, or interested in the features like violence and
gore that normally characterize horror as a genre. The construction of female fans as inherently
illegitimate shows in the way that “sexualizing celebrities, for example, is accepted and expected
among men but get quickly read as inappropriate when done by women” (Busse, 2013, p. 75)—
things fangirls do are not real fan things, even if fanboys also do them. As these links of female
fandom to eroticization begin to suggest, female fans are frequently figured as excessively
emotional women,14 and in particular screaming, weeping girls, a consistent image from
Beatlemania down to the Twi-hard (*Twilight* fan). The idea of *Twilight* fans as particularly
scream-inclined was established from the franchise’s first appearance at Comic Con in 2008. The
2008 piece was entitled “‘Twilight' Fans Camp out for a Peek (and a Scream)” (S. Cohen,
2008b), which was implicitly gendered by the screaming but not explicitly so, but by 2009—
when there was anti-*Twilight* backlash—the headline ran “‘Twilight’ Sequel Draws Fangirls by
the Thousands” (S. Cohen, 2009a), non-coincidentally making the gender specific.

Scott spends an entire chapter detailing the 2009 Twihate backlash protests at San Diego
Comic Con (SDCC), noting that "Fanboys at SDCC were simply fans, [but] fangirls at SDCC
were always already aligned with *Twilight*, even if they had no interest in the franchise or had
been attending SDCC long before Teams Edward and Jacob arrived" (Scott, 2011, p. 87). Scott
(2011, pp. 104–5) also argues that “While the Twihate protesters at SDCC didn't come close to
dwarfing Twi-hards in number, the press coverage of the outrage, and the ways in which those

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14 See, for example: Driscoll, 2006; Jenkins, 1992; Jensen, 1992; Lewis, 1992b.
conversations dovetailed with the prevailing construction of fangirls as ‘unwelcome’” made the protests an important milestone in the history of Comic Con. The presence of *Twilight* fans was taken as proof of “the con becoming *too* mainstream/inclusive” (Scott, 2011, p. 106, original emphasis). Though this complaint about excessive inclusivity dates back to at least 2000 with concern over the influx of movies and TV potentially supplanting comic books (Lin, 2000), it gained new intensity with the high visibility and audibility of fangirls and became a rallying cry to hold the line on Comic Con (and fandom) as a men’s space (Scott, 2011).

In contrast to the depiction of fans of color, there *are* some prominent, fleshed-out female fan characters. These women’s (universal) whiteness apparently outweighs their femaleness and lets them be main characters, but they are still figured as non-normative. Even when they are the main character, as Liz Lemon of *30 Rock* or Cyd Sherman of web series *The Guild*—and even when the women who play these characters have creative control over the show as in both of these cases—women’s fandom articulates tightly to loserdom rather than ever being unremarkable. Scott (2011, p. 293) notes that “One recurring joke on *30 Rock* is that Liz routinely dresses up in her Princess Leia costume and plays the part of the deluded fangirl in order to get out of jury duty.” The jury-duty scheme relies on the character’s actual fandom, which on one occasion causes her friend to reprimand her, “No, Liz. Do not talk about stuff like that on your date. Guys like that do not like *Star Trek.*” (Liz’s reply: “Wars! I’m sorry, you’re right.”) Across the first three seasons of *The Guild*, Cyd never gets more heterosexual success, never gets a job, and achieves only a modicum of competency and self-esteem.

More dramatically, the episodes of *Supernatural* featuring the fans of a diegetic novel series based on the main characters’ adventures include both fangirl character Becky and “the book series' publisher (Sera Siege) who is also the quintessential fangirl,” who “not
coincidentally [ . . . ] shares a first name with Sera Gamble (an executive producer and writer on the show) and a last name with the writer of the episode Julia Siege” (Schmidt, 2010, sec. 2.2). However, as Scott (2011, p. 296) argues, “If the introduction of female love interests for Sam and Dean in Season Three indirectly acknowledged Supernatural's female fan base and attempted to thwart their preferred mode of textual production,” i.e., undermine fan advocacy for an incestuous, homosexual relationship between the Winchester brothers (known as Wincest), “Seasons Four and Five made their awareness of the show's female fanbase explicit” by including characters such as Sera Siege and Becky. Importantly, the seeming embrace of making these fangirl characters present and even naming them after show personnel is undercut by their excessive and creepy sexualization of the Winchesters and their textual purpose of marginalizing fangirls and their textual sensibilities. As Busse (2013, p. 82) argues, “This mean-spirited and hateful representation of female fans seems strange, and yet it suggests the intended viewer’s subject position as clearly not that of a fangirl.” Thus, men are the normative fan who is represented and whose practices are welcome, while women are both indirectly marginalized and at times directly classified as not proper fans at all, constructing fandom as “rightfully” residing in the dominant category of masculinity.

**Fan for All Ages: Age Inclusivity in Fandom**

Examining age with respect to fandom requires flipping the question of normativity somewhat from the articulation of fans to dominant social categories. Here, fandom becomes normative through the participation of multiple age categories. Normativity thus takes the form of inclusion rather than exclusion. In a broad sense, across data sources, age groups spanning the full range from newborns to the elderly are all expected among the population of fans. This
different position of age as a form of social stratification also shows in the fact that it was something that industry workers had specific thoughts about, and particularly a structure they were much more willing to name. Both Steve and Merrin of Campfire, for example, readily discussed age as a demographic factor that marketers usually consider as a way to segment their target markets, which differs significantly from these workers’ silences around race.

The practitioners at BMU were even more forthcoming, explaining quite specifically what age groups their fan recruitment efforts targeted. The two big categories of concern to them were children and the elderly, demonstrating adulthood as the unmarked center of gravity that didn’t have “special” requirements. The different ages called for different approaches, with Lisa noting that “I guess my target audience would be- is children and then families” for the primarily nonrevenue sports to which she was assigned. Correspondingly, James noted that “Because of the price of the tickets, for example, you don't see as many kids at football or basketball games because you're talking about a $50 ticket, where I can go to a baseball game or to a volleyball game for free. Now, you get some kids, but in terms of- You're not going to see big school groups going.” Older folks also had specific needs. When asked about shifting advertising efforts to social media, Lisa noted that “In this community we have a lot of older fans that are die-hards that come to everything, and they're the ones that read the paper in the morning and they're the ones that- So you still have to do, use that traditional media. I think that's still a huge outlet for us that's not going away anytime soon” (original emphasis). Particular, age-specific fan desires also came into play. For instance, the donor section in the BMU basketball stadium, populated by wealthy, older people, did not do the work of providing stadium atmosphere at the same rate as sections that weren’t so old. The “deadness” of that section and conflict between older people who just wanted to watch a game and rowdy college students were consistent themes mentioned.
by all three BMU workers.

Despite these conflicts between different constituencies, it’s clear from looking at age that fandom can be normative because it’s set up as something *anyone* can enjoy. This logic drives describing events like comic book conventions (“NYC pop culture show draws TV and sports celebs,” 2009) or Super Bowl festivities (Elber, 2002; “Travel briefs,” 2003) as suitable for “all ages” or “families.” In addition to including women, these terms classify the event being described as safe for children (usually meaning a lack of sex rather than violence), but also indicate the presence of aspects to keep the still-default audience of adults entertained.

The websites display the idea that fandom should normatively be safe for children most dramatically. The Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act of 1998 (15 U.S.C. § 6501-6506) requires all websites to pay attention to children as users to the extent that no site may collect identifiable data about children under age 13 without parental consent.15 However, against the background of a shared legal obligation to protect children’s privacy when doing business within the United States, insights into beliefs about age in fandom emerge in the way the various organizations choose to respond. ESPN, the Mariners, and MLS, for example, have fairly boilerplate Privacy Policies directed at adults: “We recognize the need to provide further privacy protections with respect to personal information we may collect from children on our sites and applications. Some of the features on our sites and applications are age-gated so that they are not available for use by children, and we do not knowingly collect personal information from children in connection with those features” (ESPN). SyFy/BSG and *Star Trek*, on the other hand, speak directly to an implicitly untruthful youthful user, with the former stating that “By using the

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15 In practice, this law tends to play out as Terms of Service forbidding people younger than 13 from registering for site services, as sites are unwilling to allow users who can’t be turned into a data commodity.
Site or Other Services you agree to respond truthfully and accurately about your age” and the latter informing visitors: “You may not access any age-restricted Services unless you are above the required age.” Star Wars takes this concern for children to another level entirely, directly hailing KIDS in all caps repeatedly throughout the Terms of Service as well as multiple warnings to PARENTS. By contrast to one or two notations of youth at other sites, Star Wars has pages upon pages, mentions and mentions and mentions, indicating a very high level of attention to children as potential site users. Even if this intensive attention arises because LucasFilm is unusually paranoid about lawsuits, it does build the child-as-user into the site in quite an intensive way.

Thus, compliance with an inescapable legal requirement of not turning children under 13 into data commodities simultaneously exposes general assumptions that children should be provided for as users, and this idea also crops up in other ways. Star Wars, with its excessive if not obsessive attention to children using its site, also has a whole drop-down menu for “Kids” at the top of its front page, supplemented with a side-scrolling section with the same name near the bottom. The presence of this age group in prime screen real estate clearly demarcates youth as a major constituency Star Wars has in mind at the site. Though embedded under the “Fans” tab on their site rather than given its own, the Seattle Mariners similarly have a “Mariners Kids” page that, while lower profile, functions much the same way to construct this age demographic as well within their fan base.

The idea of kids as a major constituency is actually quite pervasive. When I asked Lisa about how BMU deals with geographically dispersed fans who may not be able to attend games in person, she noted that “We have a kids club that we’ve offered- the first five thousand people from [our state] are free in that. So that spans, obviously, the entire state.” Shortly later in the
interview, Lisa added that “We also have, like a newborn package where people can get a signed letter of intent from one of their coaches, they get, like, a beanie hat, all these things for a newborn, so that's kind of encompassing people all around, too,” which gestures toward the next conjunction of fandom and youth—the norm of fandom as a family tradition or transmission. A similar logic has led character Lyla in *Friday Night Lights* (TV) to be a football fan: “My parents dressed me up in cheerleader outfits and took me to Dillon Panthers games since I was five.”

Intergenerational transmission of fandom also appears for speculative media, as with the contention that, with their purchase of Marvel, “Disney will have something guys grew up with and can experience with their kids, especially their sons” (Nakashima, 2009). The idea that parents, particularly dads, are how people have come to have the fandoms they do also appears in *Fanalysis*, *The Replacements*, and *We are Wizards*. This trope presents an idea of fandom as wholesome and traditional and to be shared with the whole family, marking it as considerably more normative than it used to be. This notion of family-friendliness relates to a narrative of child fans as pure, as worthy, as needing protection that I’ll discuss in Chapter 8, “Conclusion: Owning Fandom, Owing Fandom,” in which child fan characters represent the truest and most important constituency.

**Conclusion**

In these various ways, then, fandom appears to be well incorporated into normative modes of audience participation. It is imagined to belong to white men, and it’s considered safe and fun for all ages. Under a liberal social-movement style framework it might be tempting to believe that while the exclusions of women and people of color that undergird this normativity are of course deeply problematic, we should celebrate fandom’s arrival in the center of
contemporary culture. Taking such a view would suggest the first battle for fan recognition has been won and what remains is a social justice issue of gaining inclusion for less socially dominant categories. This position displays the deeply troublesome tendency I call “moving the bar” politics, wherein a new group is included—as with non-ideal bodies to beauty (Weber, 2009) or gays to marriage (McRuer, 2006)—and the norm gets to congratulate itself on its tolerance, but when there’s such spectacular tolerance with some groups still excluded those who remain outside get forcefully produced as unassimilable and Other. Participating in moving the bar means saying: “The system is okay, we just want in on it,” but as I’ve shown throughout this project minor modifications or inclusions can’t salvage media’s fundamentally, structurally unequal relationship to its audiences. Moreover, as I’ll discuss in Chapter 7, “The Fandom Menace: Failed Masculinity, Heterosexuality, and Whiteness,” normalization is not the whole story even for heterosexual white male fans.
Chapter 7
The Fandom Menace: Failed Masculinity, Maturity, Heterosexuality, and Whiteness

While fandom is sometimes, as I described in Chapter 6, articulated to normativity, at other times it remains understood as a practice of weird, abnormal people. Here, through an analysis of fictional representations, documentaries, news coverage, and statements made by industry workers in interviews and DVD supplementary features, I consider the ongoing equation of fandom to failed masculinity, maturity, heterosexuality, and whiteness. Through a deliberate mash-up of these disparate sources, the commonalties between them become clear and demonstrate the underlying structure. Treating the kinds of data simultaneously as aspects of a single system makes the normalizing capacity of nonnormative fans much clearer than would be possible if one examined only a single discursive register. By means of analysis drawing widely from across the archive, this chapter argues that, while fandom is set up as failed masculinity and whiteness through failed adulthood and heterosexuality and thus seems at odds with the normativities described in Chapter 6, the narrative of failure also illuminates a path to redemption for white male fan bodies. The redemption narrative works both to reinforce the cultural commonsense of privilege as a "natural" property of white, heterosexual masculinity and to produce fandom as white.

I deploy a theoretical framework as systemic as the method; by attending to heteronormativity, I parse out the position of fan subjects with respect to norms of sexuality, gender, and race simultaneously, not least because they are mutually constitutive. Judith Butler (1993, p. 238) gestures toward part of the inextricability of these structures when she notes that "homophobia often operates through the attribution of a damaged, failed, or otherwise abject gender to homosexuals," and the equation can easily run the other way, with "damaged, failed or
otherwise abject gender" suggesting a corresponding "failure" of heterosexuality. Elsewhere in *Bodies That Matter*, Butler points out the ways in which race operates differently on bodies differentiated by sexuality or class as well as how gender is racialized and race is gendered, indicating (somewhat obliquely) the complex interconnections. Roderick Ferguson (2003) tackles the question of race more directly, noting that heteronormativity is racialized as white and "deviance" is racialized as nonwhite. Indeed, Ferguson (2003, p. 1) pulls together all of the threads of heteronormativity, arguing that "racial difference," "sexual incongruity," "gender eccentricity," and "class marginality" cannot actually be disentangled from one another as demarcations of deviance from the norm. I examine the construction of fan subjects as white and male but insufficiently masculine, childish, and failing at heterosexuality through this complex notion of interrelated forms of normativity. Though the concept of heteronormativity demonstrates the fundamental inextricability of sexuality from race from gender, the linear constraints of writing require that I do disentangle these concepts analytically, at least to some extent, and in what follows I consider whiteness, masculinity, adulthood, and heterosexuality in turn.

**Doing Fandom, (Mis)doing Whiteness**

To begin again here with race, this chapter much more explicitly treats whiteness as a discourse, just as the project as a whole approaches fandom. I interrogate the meanings that culturally join to whiteness and the structural means through which these articulations occur to show how whiteness functions as a vector of power in the discourse of fandom. By actually analyzing the whiteness of fandom, it becomes clear that fans are not simply constructed as white but often more specifically as what Richard Dyer (1997) calls "skin" white but not what he terms
"symbolically" white—though fans represented in mainstream cultural artifacts are most often phenotypically white, and though fans of color are indeed marginalized, images of fandom frequently do not fit comfortably within the positive valuation usually attached to whiteness in dominant American culture, largely because these white bodies fail at other components of normativity: masculinity, adulthood, and heterosexuality.

Though whiteness is generally understood as a position of dominance, not all cultural appearances of white people equally demonstrate the expected windfall of privilege. Scholars have usually explained images of white non-dominance in one of two ways. Some argue that such constructions demonstrate, as a backlash against the perceived destabilization of white male privilege, a belief that white men are now victims of discrimination. Alternatively, other authors contend that representations of white male nonprivilege disrupt the naturalness of the equation of whiteness with superiority and thus represent an opportunity to rework and undo white privilege (Hill, 1997b; Newitz & Wray, 1997a, 1997b). Though the former point of view argues that nonnormative whitenesses obscure a continuing white privilege and the latter argues that such representations actually undo white privilege, both take the premise that whiteness alone controls the meaning of these representations, and that it can only be one thing at a time. However, both of these views miss the insight of intersectionality: Subject positions are complex and produced by the confluence of a wide variety of factors, such that as things play out on real bodies no one is purely dominant or purely subordinated (C. J. Cohen, 1997; Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991).

Due to intersectional complexity, as Ross Chambers (1997, p. 191) argues, "In the end, identity becomes a bit like a poker hand, in which the value of the ace (whiteness) can be enhanced, if one holds a couple of face cards or another ace (masculinity, heterosexuality, middle classnesss)"

1 See, for example: Frankenberg, 1993; Rodino-Colocino, 2012; Savran, 1998; Wiegman, 1999.
or, alternatively depreciated by association with cards of lower value (ethnicity, lack of education, working classness)." Fandom, I contend here, functions as one of those cards of lower value.

In particular, the point at which fandom and normative whiteness come into conflict—and fandom becomes constructed as an insufficient whiteness—is the issue of self-control. Indeed, the construction of the category "white" has traditionally been in some sense predicated on an equation of whiteness with self-control and blackness with the lack thereof. As David Roediger (1991, p. 100) has argued, the historical invention of whiteness came out of a move to "displace anxieties within the white population onto blacks." Particularly, slurs used against whites perceived as lazy became ways of stereotyping people of African descent. This construction allowed the lack of work ethic these insults implied to become a black trait, a constitutive Other to a whiteness correspondingly defined as hardworking. The association of whiteness with working “properly”—i.e., having career success—continues to be relevant. As I’ll show below, not being good at work represents one way fans fail to live up to the expectations of normative adulthood—and thus by implication, given the racialization of normativity, fail at whiteness. Normativity rests on a "notion of whiteness having to do with rightness, with tightness, with self-control, self consciousness, mind over body" (Dyer, 1997, p. 6). Whiteness was invented as part of larger historical trends that worked to "eliminate holidays, divorce the worker from contact with nature, bridle working class sexuality, separate work from the rest of life and encourage the postponing of gratification" (Roediger, 1991, p. 96).

As Dyer’s and Roediger’s formulations begin to suggest, whiteness relies heavily on sexual self-control in particular, and here again my analytic non-intersectionality must give way.

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For versions of this argument, see: Dyer, 1997; Floyd, 2009; Roediger, 1991; Savran, 1998.
Indeed, Mike Hill (1997a, p. 157) argues that "Although more obviously connected to race and class issues, whiteness sustains itself ultimately on sexual grounds." The foundational status of sexual self control can be seen from how sexuality is racialized: "Sexual stereotypes commonly depict 'us' as sexually vigorous (usually our men) and pure (usually our women) and depict 'them' as sexually depraved (usually their men) and promiscuous (usually their women)" (Nagel, 2003, p. 10). Under this construction, then, white male sexuality is "vigor" without "depravity," is modulated and controlled. This position for sexuality relies on the affiliation of whiteness with civilization and rationality as opposed to sexuality. The counterexamples reinforce this association: A failure of the normative expectation of sexual self-control undergirds the "failure" of whiteness built into the category "white trash," a group typically constructed as having a propensity for bestiality, incest, and rape (Newitz & Wray, 1997a, 1997b; Sandell, 1997), and the production of white men as victims quite specifically includes a sense of an inability to keep not just a job but, crucially, a girlfriend (Ching, 1997; Dyer, 1997).

In the sections which follow on gender and sexuality, I articulate how a similar failure of—or deviance from—sexual normativity appears in popular cultural images of fans, working to undermine the position of privilege their whiteness would otherwise provide. In examining fandom and whiteness as discourses that are in some sense antithetical, then, the prevalence of white-embodied people as the bearers of fandom reveals the ways in which whiteness is less the outcome of pigmentation than behavior. Beginning from the insight that gender is constituted through enactment (Butler, 1990; West & Zimmerman, 1987) and extending it to other social categories, the need to repeatedly perform one's whiteness in order to construct and reaffirm it opens up the possibility that a white-skinned person can "fail" at whiteness (Ahmed, 2006; Dyer,

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See, for example: Ferguson, 2003; Floyd, 2009; Nagel, 2003; Sandell, 1997.
I argue that fandom is one way of doing whiteness "incorrectly." Much like white trash is "a naming practice that helps define stereotypes of what is or is not acceptable or normal for whites in the U.S." (Newitz & Wray, 1997a, p. 4), so too is "fan." The discursive construction of fans as white works to produce a notion of "appropriate" fandom through whiteness and "appropriate" whiteness through fandom.

"I was trying to be a man, a plan with a fundamental conceptual flaw": Fandom and Failed Masculinity

While it may seem from Chapter 6 as if everything is coming up roses for men as fans, particularly when, as Suzanne Scott (2011, p. 38) notes, the fanboy has "become the media industry's new favorite character archetype," this only tells part of the story. Indeed, it might be more accurate to say, as in 1999 The Simpsons episode “Mom and Pop Art,” that everything’s coming up Milhouse: Fans overwhelmingly don’t quite succeed at being gender-normative men. In the encounter with this complex of norms, much like their phenotypic whiteness, fans seem to get gender and sexuality "right" in that they visually indicate maleness and have a heterosexual disposition, but when it comes to behaving in a way consistent with constructed-as-white normative, middle-class, heterosexual masculinity, there’s a “fundamental flaw” in their execution, as in the quote from The O.C.’s Seth Cohen that titles this section. This failed masculinity is particularly interesting given that sports fandom, at least, would commonly be understood to be integral to normative American masculinity. Thus it’s clear that masculinity must be enacted—attached to a normatively masculine object these fans may be, but as discursively constructed they don't act very manly about it.

Importantly, though sports fans are associated with failed masculinity in some ways—
usually through fat, non-muscular bodies and insufficient athleticism or the failures of maturity and heterosexuality discussed below, they do not tend to demonstrate all the ways men might be less than manly, unlike the speculative media fans. While one could argue that being a sports fan affords better access to normative masculinity, I would hesitate to state so definitively for the simple reason that the archive contains many more main characters—or fleshed-out minor characters—who are speculative media fans than sports fans. This screen time provides more opportunities for a full set of masculine failures to be visible. While sports fans are ubiquitous, as I suggested in Chapter 4 they’re also sometimes an assumed component of the stadium experience rather than real characters per se—most sports TV and film focuses instead on the players. Given the fact that the few complex sports fan characters do show an overall trajectory of failed heteronormativity, then, I don’t consider the absence of some characteristics from other sports fan depictions especially meaningful.

When it comes to speculative media, fandom and failed masculinity more clearly align: Many scholars agree that fandom is often devalued as feminized—whether composed of insufficiently manly men (Hills, 2002; Jenkins, 1992; Lewis, 1992b), who I’ll discuss in this section, or the excessively emotional women described in Chapter 6. As Jonathan Gray (2003, p. 67) memorably puts it, “There has frequently been a gendered element to this pathologization. Behaviour perceived as fundamentally irrational, excessively emotional, foolish and passive has made the fan decisively feminine. Even when the fan is not female, in the prevalent image of the unattractive, acne-suffering, 30-year-old virgin male computer nerd lies the epitome of all that is not masculine.” Here already, the failed manliness of the fan begins to slide into failed heterosexuality and adulthood, so it must be acknowledged that this section, too, conducts an

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4 For accounts of this trope see, for example: Driscoll, 2006; Jenkins, 1992; Jensen, 1992; Lewis, 1992b.
artificial separation in the interest of analytic clarity.

Indeed, the various facets of failed masculinity themselves are so related as to be difficult to parse. Fans fail at manly things, or even at knowing what manliness is. Sometimes fans are directly marked as insufficiently masculine, as when the characters in *Fanboys* question whether each other have "the nut sack to go through with" their plan to steal a copy of *Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace* prior to its theatrical release. A similar logic animates a scene in *The O.C.* in which fannish character Seth suggests, “Let's do what guys do,” and then after a beat has to ask his more conventionally masculine adopted brother: “Ryan, what do guys do?” Neither can fans do assumed “guy stuff” like construction, as when a shelf hung by fan character Morgan in *Chuck* collapses and destroys a computer containing government secrets or the running joke through *The O.C.*’s four seasons that Seth knows nothing about hardware.

Fan men also frequently fail at normative masculinity through being cowardly. Director Jim Kontner of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* episode “Grave” uses the term directly in the episode’s commentary, saying of fannish characters Andrew and Jonathan that “and then we see their true colors. Cowards that they are.” Writer David Fury responds that “Now Jonathan was showing a good side, what seemed to be a heroic side. But ultimately he's just a little weasel. Apologies to those people that are- those Jonathan shippers out there.” Richie demonstrates a similar weaselly demeanor in *The Benchwarmers*, running away instead of helping his teammate Clark when the entirety of the other baseball team beats him up. Of course, the scene doesn’t speak very highly of Clark either as a grown man calling for his mommy in the face of prepubescent boys. Perhaps

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5 Interestingly, on one hand this comment seems to privilege fans by apologizing for disappointing their view of Jonathan as potentially heroic. On the other, it misuses the fan term “shipper,” which does not mean an advocate of a single character, as Fury uses it here, but rather, as a shortened form of “relationshipper,” it indicates a fan who advocates a romantic relationship between two or more characters.
the most absurd cowardly moment comes in *The Big Bang Theory*, when Sheldon flees down a
hallway squeaking, “Don't hurt us!” when in fact he himself is not in danger, merely his fighting
robot.

Fan characters are also routinely called women or compared to them. The characters of
*Fanboys* get insulted as "ladies," "Spice Girls," or the perennial favorite "pussies." Though
accusations of non-masculinity may be a common weapon in the young male insult arsenal,
being open to such accusations in the first place marks the manliness of the target as vulnerable
to a challenge, which is reinforced by having a woman sometimes be the one to call fans
something like “a little bitch” in *The O.C.* or “ladies” in *Fanboys*. Fan characters in *Chuck,*
*Forgetting Sarah Marshall*, and *My Name is Bruce* are all directly described as screaming (in
fear) or crying (in sadness) in ways that sound like women or girls. Being categorized as
feminine is, at least for some fans, a routine occurrence, with *The O.C.*’s Seth noting on several
occasions some variation on: “Ryan, I’m no girl- although I did spend several summers at Camp
Takaho being called such.” Often, the fans compare unfavorably to women, who outdo them at
masculinely-gendered activities. Blonde, below-average-intelligence next door neighbor Penny
in the *Big Bang Theory* chides the fannish men, “Look, guys, for the future, I don’t *mind* killing
the big spiders, but you have to at least *try* with the little ones.” In *Kickass*, the eponymous
homegrown teenage superhero is bumbling and incompetent compared to 11-year-old Hitgirl,
who can drive and fight and shoot guns (none of which Kickass knows how to do)—and she
calls his Taser “gay.”

Kickass’s pathetic attempts at heroism match the ways in which fans are often figured as
physically weak. In *The Big Bang Theory*, Leonard attempts to convince Sheldon that they can
retrieve their friend’s TV from her ex-boyfriend because “There's not going to be a scene.
There’s two of us and one of him.” Sheldon replies, “Leonard, the two of us can't even carry a TV.” Chuck’s Morgan not only cannot crush a soda can, but manages to hurt his hand squeezing a can a stronger character has already crushed. The ever-quippy Seth of The O.C. would dispute my characterization of people like him as weak, as he insisted that “I’m not weak, okay, I’m just delicate” when mocked for bringing a humidifier on a road trip to prevent nosebleeds. Whatever we might call it, this lack of physical strength often makes fans vulnerable to being beaten up (Buffy, Big Bang Theory), including by women (Heroes, Chuck), or children (Benchwarmers, Fanboys, The O.C).

Related to this incapacity for fighting, fans often lack physical fitness. Visibly overweight fans appear with impressive consistency in both sports and speculative media, in both fiction and documentaries, overrepresented in all of these areas as a seemingly indispensable part of any flock of fans. Indeed, much of the humor of the Simpsons Comic Book Guy comes from the way he waddles and wobbles, his constant eating, or jokes such as him sweating through his jumpsuit with half a jumping jack at fat camp as a teenager (“The Way We Weren’t,” 2004) or when wizard caps from his store get stuck on his flabby chest to give him a look reminiscent of Madonna circa 1990 (“Radioactive Man,” 1995). Much the same idea appears with tubby character Paul Aufiero in Big Fan, played by portly comic/actor Patton Oswalt—who joked in a question and answer session with film viewers that he had to “get fat for the part,” reinforcing the idea of such a physical state as expected or necessary for a sports fan character such as the one he was playing.

Being overweight shades easily into an understanding of fans as indoorsy and/or unathletic. Two of the three players in The Benchwarmers start out being quite terrible at baseball; only after some improvement can Richie announce, “You know, when you throw it to
me, and I catch it, not with my face but with the glove, I like it.” Similarly, in Invincible, the story of Vince Papale—a fan-turned-professional discovered at a publicity-stunt open tryout for the Philadelphia Eagles—the rest of the fans are awful to highlight the odds against finding anyone who could actually succeed at football among them and reinforce Vince as exception. A visibly flabby man, speaking to a reporter, declares “I'm in the best shape of my life!” implying that he feels he’s ready to be recruited onto the team. Of course, this fan is nowhere near ready, and neither is anyone else but Vince, as all the others are slow, easily wearied, and unable to catch. This pattern also appears in Fanboys, when a friend of the fans comments that "This is, like, the most exercise you guys have had all year" as they all run across the grounds at Star Wars creator George Lucas's production facility Skywalker Ranch in the course of their heist.

Indoorsiness similarly articulates to fandom, as when the parents of one teenage fan in Galaxy Quest shrug at his strange pronouncement that he needs to use fireworks to help land a spaceship and comment that "At least he's outside." This statement implies that he does not go out often, which suggests that he is not physically active (though he is thin). Likewise, actor Oswalt was not only “willing to bulk up for the role” as the lead in Big Fan, as already mentioned, but also, writer Robert Siegel joked, “stay out of the sun. He had a pretty healthy, glowing tan at the time and he promised he would go method and stay in his basement for a few months to kind of get rid of that.” Of course, Oswalt was already not only large but pasty-complexioned, but the belief that this look was indispensable to the role, to the point where he would generate it if necessary, demonstrates expectations about fans. Indeed, writer/director Siegel says he was cast because “I just thought he looked like he could be an obsessive, you know, nerdy sports fan.” Paleness and tan-ness, of course, are distinctly white phenomena. Though historically being pale was associated with upper class people’s freedom from outdoor
work, by the late 20th century being tan rather than pale had been articulated to health and fitness and became the privileged condition, but the reversal in valuation did not sever the attachment to whiteness (Dyer, 1997).

Last but not least, there is a particular insistence on or fascination with male fans appearing in drag as women, particularly in nonfiction sources. Though these instances may be difficult to separate from the general cultural tendency to respond to drag with staring, it nevertheless seems to be the case that the strong association of fans and failed masculinity means any fan in drag has to be recorded. Thus, we learn that “Hefty 34-year-old Ronald Salazar donned makeup, women's clothing and a huge false chest Friday to become a contestant in a ‘dating game’ at Houston's Gallery Furniture warehouse” in order to try to win a ticket to the Super Bowl (Goldberg, 2000). In addition to being in drag, Salazar demonstrates the overweight fan and also veers from fandom as homosocial to homosexual in his attempt to go on the date with a salesman the game provides. He also contended that “The Super Bowl is better for a guy” than for the women who were supposed to be competing, reinforcing the idea of the male-dominant sporting event. The crew recording a Xena convention for stunt-double documentary Double Dare made sure to include more than one fan in drag—both a man in a Xena costume who had a really deep voice and in no way succeeded at realism in his drag performance and a guy in a costume that matched that of his female companion, both wearing blonde pigtail wigs and Viking helmets in a reference to an episode of the show where two female characters go undercover as conjoined twins.

Perhaps the most dramatic departure from standard masculinity comes with a costumed, overweight, pasty-white fan who features in an extended scene in Trekkies. At the time of the interview, this man is attending a convention dressed not as a major character from Star Trek,
nor even as a *minor* character, but as the (extrapolated) *wife* of a minor character—the connection to the show is so tenuous that it almost seems as if he chose to dress in drag and then retroactively sought a convoluted justification. He is also *visually* marked as disconcerting through zooming so close that viewers can see his makeup running due to sweat, like the *Xena* convention-goers adding failure at femininity through *bad* drag to his transgressions. In an exaggerated form, then, this single fan encapsulates the masculine lack attributed to fans as a group, making it clear that having a body both male and white does not guarantee normativity as he, like other fans in these constructions, conspicuously "does" normative masculinity and whiteness incorrectly.

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"When are you gonna grow up?": Fandom vs. Adulthood

In the course of parsing the differences between the treatment of fanboys and fangirls, Suzanne Scott (2011, p. 79) contends that "Admittedly, fanboys continue to be infantilized in name and pathologized by the media, but their growing status as Hollywood tastemakers has granted them a modicum of mainstream respect." However, the connection of fans with immaturity and irresponsibility is worth exploring in more depth. As Henry Jenkins (1992, p. 10) noted in his famous early catalogue of fan stereotypes, speculative media fans are seen as "infantile, emotionally and intellectually immature." The ways in which fans are infantilized as immaturity fixated on activities more properly the purview of childhood or youth is well established, not just by the first wave of fan studies (Cline, 1992; Jensen, 1992; Lewis, 1992a, 1992b) but also subsequent generations of examinations, though for its part, sports studies has been silent on this issue. Much as occurs with the assumption of maleness, even when the

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identification of fans as young does not represent the actual population, fans of other ages or maturities must struggle for recognition against this baseline (Brower, 1992; Fiesler, 2007; Lackner, Lucas, & Reid, 2006).

Examination of the contemporary discourse of fandom shows that it coheres with fan studies’s observation that fans are seen as childish. The logic of children as appropriate fans or fandom as acquired in childhood described in Chapter 6 produces, from a negative side, a construction of adult-bodied fans as childish or immature. Thus, fan characters are explicitly described as failing to grow up (Chuck, Fanboys, The Guild, Supernatural) or exhorted to get on with it by people in their lives (Big Fan, The 40 Year Old Virgin, My Name is Bruce) with variations on the question in this section’s title. This idea frequently articulates to an idea of immaturity; certainly, writer/director/producer Judd Apatow, who nearly always uses a fanboy of some sort or another as his main character, directly ties the two, noting that he has “told a lot stories of underdog, immature guys trying to figure out how to grow up” (S. Cohen, 2007b). In one particularly colorful example of fan immaturity, Gus suggests to Clark in The Benchwarmers that “Maybe this is a sign you should get a car,” to which the 30-something Clark replies, “My mother said I should hold off getting my license for one more year, you know, just to make sure my reflexes are fully developed.” Irresponsibility also runs rampant, as when Chuck of Chuck forbids Morgan access to the demonstration copy of a new videogame because “The last time I lent you a game sampler it ended up all over the Internet, so this one's gonna stay in my locker, and you can play it when you get some adult supervision.” Seth of The O.C. even explicitly rejects the logic of maturity, saying: “No plans. That’s a dirty word. Right up there with responsibility and future.” Buffy the Vampire Slayer writer and producer Jane Espenson notes of the appearance of the three fannish characters in the show’s sixth season that “In a season that is
about leaving childish things behind and taking on responsibility, the perfect counterpoint are villains who can't." Thus, in these various ways fandom is directly classified as failing at the age norm of adulthood.

After all, fans are known for collecting "toys," with one convention organizer saying that Comic-Con "is like Toys R Us on steroids" ("NYC pop culture show draws TV and sports celebs," 2009). This terminology is standard to talk about collectibles in interviews with industry workers, news coverage, and fictional sources, as when the sexually frustrated girlfriend of the title character in *The 40 Year Old Virgin* complains, “Andy, I am throwing myself at you and all you can think about is a fucking toy!” In addition to the link of fans and toys, commentaries for various media objects hail people interested in fannish supplementary materials as “Kids” (*Friday Night Lights* [TV], *Heroes, Kickass, The Simpsons*). Such hails sometimes take the form of “Don’t try this thing the character is doing,” directed at avoiding responsibility for actual youth misbehavior. Alternatively, calling fans “Kids” can act informationally, to explain cultural references viewers may be too young to recall or as “That’s what you learn in film school, kids!” Fans are often compared to children (*Fanalysis, The Guild, Heroes*), as when the baseball commentator in *For Love of the Game* describes an outburst of hostility toward an opposing team as “Yankee Stadium is like a schoolyard!” *Heroes* character Hiro is consistently naïve, enthusiastic, and committed to an oversimplified hero-villain ethic. The show identifies his attitude as a form of childishness because Hiro shares these characteristics only with the two children in the story. Executive producer and director Greg Beeman makes the link when speaking of child character Micah, whom he identifies as “the one of all the heroes- him and Hiro- who really wants to be a superhero. He really wants to use his power.”

Accordingly, there is a frequent narrative of fandom as an indication of being stuck in
childhood. One fan interviewed in Fanalysis says “I've been a Trekkie my whole life. My dad made me watch it as a child. I'm scarred for life.” While it’s probably meant as a joke the concept of fandom as arrested development had everything to do with why it made sense to include the statement in the documentary. Indeed, fandom itself is often equated to childishness, with fans loving texts for children (Trekkies 2, The O.C., The Simpsons) or having the same behaviors they themselves had as children (Fanalysis, Horror Fans, Trekkies, Mathematically Alive), marking them as in some sense trapped there. Certainly, Big Fan writer Siegel notes that “I grew up listening to sports radio. I still listen to it, but as a kid I listened to it pretty obsessively every single night. When I went to bed I would crawl under the covers and turn out the light and stay up way past my bedtime listening to WFAN,” and with the exception of having a bedtime adult character Paul behaves precisely this way. Fictional Boston Red Sox fan Ben in Fever Pitch also exists in a state of arrested development: A childhood trauma led to him being a fan, and he likes that baseball is simple, safe, and predictable, unlike "real life." When Ben’s girlfriend goes to help him decide what to wear to meet her parents and discovers that "This is not a man's closet" because Ben's wardrobe consists almost entirely of Red Sox paraphernalia rather than more sober attire, she tells him "You're a man-boy. Half man, half boy," underscoring Ben's lack of adulthood.

Another aspect of childishness or refusal to grow up is living with one’s parents, particularly in their basement, an idea with particular persistence since at least William Shatner’s famous anti-fan tirade on Saturday Night Live in 1986. Some fans live in the basement (Buffy the Vampire Slayer, The Guild, Supernatural). Fans in Mathematically Alive, The Big Bang Theory, and Chuck all live with their parents. Mike of Campfire mentioned the stereotype of “those boys in the basement” as something that frustrated him about some of the clients with whom he had
worked. Other industry workers, such as two commentators on 2003 *The Simpsons* episode “Barting Over,” deploy this idea rather than objecting to it; after one recounts an argument with “an Internet guy” who insisted that what was being touted as the show’s 300th episode was in fact mis-numbered, the second notes, “That guy still lives with his mother, by the way.” In 2004 *Simpsons* episode “My Big Fat Geek Wedding,” one of the fans in Klingon attire declines to “help our brother with his blood feud” because “My mom worked really hard on this costume”—a statement he makes in Klingon, with subtitles. Though usually associated with speculative media, sports fans also live with their parents. For example, Paul of *Big Fan* has this argument with his brother when Jeff sues the football player who beat Paul up:

Jeff: I'm acting in your best interests. You're not seeing things clearly here.

Paul: You have no right.

Jeff: I have a right if you're my brother and you're not mentally competent to make decisions for yourself.

Paul: I'm mentally competent!

Jeff: You're a 36-year-old man who lives home with his mother, who depends on her for food, for laundry, and countless basic fuckin' life necessities. All right? On paper you're basically a fuckin' vegetable!

Character Zaboo in *The Guild* is even less independent: His mother bathes him, breastfed him until he was 11, “insisted on driving me to college very day for the past 4 years,” and “used to take me into the ladies room with her. Until I was 15 years old. Every time I try to grow up, she has a panic attack. Or an ulcer. Or some sort of breast polyp, which she makes me feel.” Oppressed by his mother Zaboo may be—and indeed she becomes the season’s climactic villain—but Zaboo nevertheless fails at adulthood and masculinity by not standing up to her.
Fans are also imagined to be insufficiently adult to the extent that they do not have successful careers. In a basic way, that the fan has a dead-end job has a certain cultural obviousness (The Benchwarmers, Big Fan, Fanboys, The 40 Year Old Virgin, Horror Fans, Supernatural). Chuck makes the link between career failure and failed adulthood clear when he tells off his friend Morgan: “I used to be cool? When was that, when we were 13? Well I'm sorry to go changing on you, buddy, but if you hadn't noticed we are now chronologically speaking adults, so unless you wanna work retail for the rest of your life, and by the way drag me down with you in the process, I would suggest that you grow up.” At other times, fans have a perfectly okay job, but they aren’t committed to it, as when Heroes character Hiro loathes his cubicle job, but even when promoted to Executive Vice President he’s much more interested in being a hero. Harry Knowles of entertainment website Ain't It Cool News, consulted as a "web guru" in documentary Fanalysis, similarly describes the fan’s liminal adulthood as related to preferring fandom to career (and relationships): "Someone who has a nine to five job in the real world, and they want to have the wife, but they're still hanging on to being a child."

Alternately, fans are shown as interested in their jobs, but just failures at them. Playwright and Boston Red Sox fan Nicky Rogan in Game 6 is described by the film’s director as “fantasizing somehow that if, you know, the Red Sox could win this game- if- then somehow [ . . . ] this marriage will right itself, and the play will get a great review, and his genius will be recognized” (original emphasis). The Fan establishes middle-aged white baseball fan Gil Renard as a failure of normative masculine business success in the first ten minutes when his boss calls him in to tell him that he is very close to being fired due to poor performance. Ensuing scenes dramatically demonstrate Gil’s lack of employment success as the knife salesman humiliates himself in the course of his work: In an effort to increase his sales and keep his job, he goes to
potential customer after potential customer, demonstrating the quality of his company's knives by shaving first his arm hair and then his leg hair, eventually getting to the point that he jokes, "Any more of these demos and I'm going to have to start shaving the hairs on my ass," all of which frames his body as exploitable and vulnerable. These are traits typically associated with femininity rather than masculinity, and moreover the idea of Gil potentially dropping his trousers to make the sale frames him as prostituting himself, the homosexual flavor of which also contradicts mainstream understandings of normative, white masculinity. Thus, fans fail at adulthood in part by violating the construction of whiteness as "enterprising" (Dyer, 1997, p. 31).

**God Hates Fans: Heterosexual Failure and Fandom as a Sexual Orientation**

While fan studies generally has more concern for marginalization than sports studies, the former sees sexuality as a liberatory sphere rather than a source of inequality but the latter treats it as a problem. Sexuality appears in sports fandom as heterosexuality. On one hand, this takes the form of heterosexism (Nylund, 2004) or homophobic modes of heckling (K. W. Jones, 2008). On the other, it means the reduction of female fans to (hetero)sexuality. First, this means the ways female fans are understood to eroticize athletes (Crawford, 2004; Gosling, 2007; Tanaka, 2004) or actively seek to have sex with them as groupies. Second, female fans are understood to be sexual objects for players (Mewett & Toffoletti, 2008), media, (Tanaka, 2004) or male fans (K. W. Jones, 2008). Katharine Jones (2008) notes that male spectators in stadia chant sexual things about players’ wives/girlfriends as part of their repertoire of verbal abuse and male fans sometimes demand that women in the stands (fans, employees, even police officers) take their clothes off; her interviewees were resentful of women who wear sexy clothes to the stadium who

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7 See, for example: Forsyth & Thompson, 2007; K. W. Jones, 2008; Mewett & Toffoletti, 2008; Wedgwood, 2008.
they believed draw sexual attention to women more generally.

For fan studies, by contrast, sexuality—studied nearly exclusively through slash fiction—tends to be seen as a site of empowerment and challenging heteronormativity. Scholars understand slash as subversive (Bacon-Smith, 1991) and as transgressive of traditional gender roles\textsuperscript{8} both because the writers are mostly women and openly discussing sex, and because the sex in question occurs between men (Busse & Hellekson, 2006; S. G. Jones, 2002). Such work takes the view, broadly, that fandom is about women reworking media to make it suit their desires (Penley, 1997, 2012). More specifically, this work sees fandom as a space in which one can "explore and negotiate issues of sexuality by reading and writing their desires, by acknowledging and sharing sexual preferences" (Busse, 2006, p. 208). It is, in particular, understood a space for this sort of working-out for women,\textsuperscript{9} or one that allows gays, lesbians, and queers of all genders to articulate their identities.\textsuperscript{10} Such proclamations can be overblown, in that slash narratives may operate from heteronormative premises\textsuperscript{11} and transgression assumes a heterosexual text that may not exist (S. G. Jones, 2002; Tosenberger, 2008b). Nevertheless, slash \textit{does} produce overt same-sex desire in a way that "official" or "real" or "maintext" can or will not (Scott, 2011; Tushnet, 2009).

\textbf{The Fan as Creep and Virgin}

However, fans as discursively constructed don’t resemble either of these things. Rather than the hyper-heterosexuality of sports studies or the intentional transgression of fan studies,
fans are figured in representational sources as white men simply failing at heterosexuality. This attitude was already well established by the time William Shatner appeared on *Saturday Night Live* in 1986, playing himself at a *Star Trek* convention and demanding of the “Trekkies” there assembled whether they had ever “kissed a girl”—implying, of course, that they hadn’t (Jenkins, 1992, pp. 9–10). The idea of fans as virgins, sexually deficient, and/or unable to engage in “real” relationships has often been debunked as inaccurate, but it remains a potent image (Hills, 2002; Lewis, 1992b).

Sometimes these fans have a general lack of sexual success (*The Big Bang Theory, Chuck, The Guild, Kickass, My Name is Bruce, The O.C.*). Sometimes it’s little more intensive, as with this exchange between millionaire Mel, who bankrolls the campaign to stand up to the athletic kids on behalf of fannish nerds, and the three adult fans conducting it:

Mel: The cause of the benchwarmers—the kids who warm the bench while the others get to play and have all the fun. Now all of us here in this room have been excluded from athletic activities, and now our kids are going through the same tomfoolery? Now, Richie, do you have any kids?

Richie: Never had a date.

Mel: Clark?

Clark: Never spoke to a girl. [Mel does a double take.]

Mel: Gus?

Gus: My wife and I are working on it.

Richie and Clark thus demonstrate a rather comprehensive failure of heterosexuality, and the high level of excitement they’ve just shown over Mel’s collection of *Star Wars* paraphernalia links it to their fannishness. Paul of *Big Fan* has no more heterosexual success; he his mom have
this discussion after Paul disparages his brother’s wife:

Mom: You should only meet somebody as good as Gina.

Paul: Oh, boy, that'd be tough to top.

Mom: Yeah, for you.

Paul: Yeah, give me about an hour.

Mom: You have to actually date someone to top it.

Paul: I date.

Mom: Oh, sure. You're dating lots of girls.

Paul: You don't think I date?

Mom: I know exactly who you're dating. Your hand.

The idea that fans generally cannot succeed in their heterosexual quest for women is quite common, with *Heroes* actor Masi Oka saying of his character that “This is actually Hiro's first time that he was able to get the girl and kiss- though it ends tragically.” The tragic end is a common theme, with fans often being left by their wives (*Game 6, Trekkies, Looking for Kitty*).

Even more common than having loved and lost, however, is never to have loved at all, with fans figured as virgins in *The Benchwarmers, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, The Guild, and The O.C.* Indeed, the lead character in *The 40 Year Old Virign* is a fan, though *The Simpsons* Comic Book Guy has him beat for time, since, he numbers himself among “45 year old virgins who still live with their parents” (“Mayored to the Mob,” 1998). Even if not strictly virgins, fans are generally understood as inexperienced and desperate for any sexual attention from women. The characters in *Fanboys* are constructed as unfamiliar with information pertaining to sex. When they get caught by the security guards at Skywalker Ranch, the head guard informs them that "Mr. Lucas is touched and mildly flattered by what you have done here" in seeking to steal the
film so that their dying friend can see it, explaining that the breaking and entering charges will be dropped if they can prove their status as "fanboys" by means of "a simple quiz." The scene equates fans with failed heterosexuality when said quiz not only consists of *Star Wars* trivia they're supposed to know, such as "What is the name of the gunner in Luke's snow speeder?" (which they can indeed answer without hesitation), but sexual trivia they're supposed to *not* know, such as "Where is a woman's g-spot located?" (which generates head-scratching). Fans consistently lack knowledge or experience (*The Benchwarmers, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Chuck, Heroes, The Guild*), and it's not merely sexual but rather a lack of knowledge about relationships in general. When Leonard of *The Big Bang Theory* attempts to cajole Sheldon into helping their friend with her boyfriend problem, he says, “Come on, you know how it is with breakups,” only to have Sheldon reply, “No, I don't. And neither do you.”

As an addendum to this cluelessness, fans are frequently shown as less romantically or sexually knowledgeable than younger people. In particular, adult fans know less about sex than teens or tweens (*The Benchwarmers, The Guild*). Ben in *Fever Pitch* asks for relationship advice from a high school student he coaches, which constructs him as less mature and knowledgeable than a teenager. High school senior Seth in *The O.C.* asks some younger boys who haven’t even completed puberty. This need for help from kids dovetails with the idea of fandom as arrested development discussed in the previous section to suggest fans’ residual attachment to childhood through fandom makes them incompetent with respect to sex. As Gayle Rubin (1993) points out, heteronormativity is constructed as a domain of sexual activity between two (and only two) mature adults, such that any concurrence of the youthful and the sexual is regarded as impermissible.

Part of fans’ lack of success comes from being awkward with women, as displayed by
characters like Leonard and Raj in *The Big Bang Theory*, Windows in *Fanboys*, and the cosplayers (*costume play*) in *Supernatural*. Chuck’s sister in *Chuck* has to explain to him that “Even though we may ask, no woman really wants to hear about an old girlfriend.” At times, awkward shades into creepy through being tactlessly sexual (*The Benchwarmer*, *The Guild*, *Superbad*) or just eager to the point it resembles stalking (*Chuck*, *The O.C.*, *Scott Pilgrim*), both of which represent a failure of the norm of whiteness as sexual self-control. A comedic version of awkward comes from *The Big Bang Theory*’s Howard Wolowitz, who creator Chuck Lorre describes on the first season DVD as like Pepe Le Pew; actor Simon Helberg describes Wolowitz the same special feature as “a genius, but he’s an idiot with girls, because he thinks he's as brilliant with them as he is with, you know, science.” Howard’s creepy gets played for comic effect, as when he plots to find the house where *America’s Next Top Model* is filmed:

Howard: Isn’t it obvious? Every week, they kick out a beautiful girl, making her feel unwanted and without self-esteem, a.k.a. the future Mrs. Howard Wolowitz.

Leonard: Are you insane? You’re not going to party with them! You’re not even going to get anywhere near that place!

Howard: That’s what they said to Neil Armstrong about the moon.

Sheldon: No one said anything of the kind to Neil Armstrong; the entire nation dedicated a decade of effort and treasure to put a man on the moon.

Howard: Well, my fellow Americans, before this year is out we will put a Wolowitz on one of America’s top models.

Raj: And a large number of people will believe it never happened.

However, creepiness can be more sinister, as in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* when fan villains the
Evil Trio use a “cerebral dampener” to make a woman do what they want and when the effect wears off she tells them: “You bunch of little boys, playing at being men. Well, this is not some fantasy. It's not a game, you freaks. It's rape. You're all sick.” Here, as with fans being guided by kids, failure of heterosexuality and immaturity are shown to be tightly linked, and its articulation to violent crime amps up the nonnormativity considerably.

**Between Homosocial and Homoerotic**

Fans are also sometimes constructed as violating heteronormativity in the most obvious way—through being gay. The broad-spectrum fan demonstrated with race and age in Chapter 6 comes into play here, with a checkbox model of diversity permitting the inclusion of “actual” homosexual fans (*Double Dare, 30 Rock, Xena: Warrior Princess*), but they tend not to be central. More often, characters deploy homosexuality as an insult against male fans intending to be heterosexual (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer, The O.C., Superbad*). The idea that fans can be made fun of in this way is so pervasive that in *The Benchwarmers*, an antagonist who continually hangs out with another, half-naked man in seemingly sexual situations still feels able to call fan ringleader Mel a “homo.” The obnoxious Philadelphia Eagles fan Philadelphia Phil who serves as the villain in *Big Fan* goes on at length about how Giants fans are “giant fags” (extremely gay) and “Giant fags” (gay in relation to their team of choice) by varying the emphasis in the statement. *Fanboys*, as with most things, has no subtlety about this: “Gay” and “fag” are common forms of invective among these characters (and not just the male ones). In particular, they call the *Star Trek* fans they encounter things like "Kirk-loving Spock-suckers," and their use of the accusation of homosexuality as an insult makes it clear that these men perceive a need to restabilize their own heterosexuality though destabilizing that of other men. Characters indeed exhibit a great deal of paranoia about seeming gay (*The Big Bang Theory, Buffy the Vampire*...
This deployment of what C.J. Pascoe (2007) calls “fag discourse” articulates fans particularly to youth culture, which deploys “fag” to police masculinity rather than as a specific slur about homosexuality. However, regardless of the intent to heterosexualize and perhaps also masculinize the self by accusing the other, ultimately referring to fans this way “taints” all of them with sexual "deviance." At times, this is even a literal accusation of homosexual conduct rather than just an insult intended to mark failed heterosexuality (Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Chuck).

Beyond name calling, there is at times a link between fandom and actual same-sex eroticism. Sometimes, such activity is incidental, as when Ben in Fever Pitch is so excited to receive his season tickets that he leaps, half-clothed, onto the delivery man, drag-wearing fan Salazar’s willingness to go on a date with another man to get to the Super Bowl, or Philadelphia Phil’s graphic and repeated insistence in Big Fan that, because his is the superior football team, Giants fans should perform oral sex on him and/or he will perform anal sex on them. The Fan consistently and extensively marks Gil as sexually nonnormative, whether visually, as when he accosts a baseball player in a steam room in a scene evocative of a gay bathhouse; musically, as with the consistent use of the Nine Inch Nails song "Closer," with its lines "I want to fuck you like an animal/I want to feel you from the inside," in all of the scenes in which he obsesses over player Bobby Rayburn; or both, as when "Closer" plays with Gil standing in Rayburn's closet among his clothes. Though he never directly engages in same-sex action, the equation of his fandom with such desire is thorough. At other times, men commit actual erotic acts, particularly as a demonstration of the idea that fans are gay for their object of fandom: A guy in Fanalysis exclaims "I love you!" to actor Bruce Campbell and tries to kiss him. The Trekkie antagonist in Fanboys tenderly cradles the severed head of his prized statue of the character Khan, screams
"Khan!" like Captain Kirk did in *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*, then, after using his inhaler, kisses the statue full on the lips. Thus these fans, too, fail at the sexual self-control expected of them as white men.

Homoeroticism may also be the result of a slippage from homosociality. It’s common to think of fandom as a male homosocial space, as suggested in Chapter 6 with regard to the inconceivability of female sports fans as well as the idea that girls never attend conventions or visit comic book stores. Indeed, the fannish title character in *Scott Pilgrim* insists that his *house* is “No girls allowed,” rendering it homosocial and himself childish. However, Scott Pilgrim shares his house, and his bed, with a gay male roommate, and homosociality forever threatens to collapse into homosexuality in similar ways for other fans. Thus, Eric’s brother in *Fanboys* asks whether, while the fans have been hanging out together, they have been "sticking G.I. Joes up your butts," raising the specter of anal eroticism—often assumed to be an automatic indication that a man is gay. Moreover, fan relationships with other men are constructed as or described as resembling romantic or sexual relationships (*The Big Bang Theory*, *The Guild*, *Knocked Up*, *The O.C.*). In *Big Fan*, when Paul goes to jail for assault after shooting Philadelphia Phil with a paintball gun loaded with Giants colors, all the other prisoners have women visiting them (presumably intending to suggest wives and girlfriends), but Paul gets a visit from his football friend Sal, drawing the parallel between their relationship and the heterosexual ones surrounding them. Even more explicitly, Chuck and best friend Morgan are repeatedly called “boyfriends” or “life partners” in *Chuck*, including by Morgan himself. Certainly, the show played with this dynamic, having a reunion between the two after a fight play out in slow motion, their eyes meeting across the room in exactly the way romantic outcomes are typically staged, which creator Josh Schwartz described as “our romantic finale, because at the end of the day, you know,
the relationship between Chuck and Morgan really is a huge part of the show.”

Prioritizing Fandom, Eroticizing Fandom

Fandom is also imagined to be incompatible with being in hetero-romantic or sexual relationships. This logic drives Knowles’ comment above from Fanalysis that fans can’t “have the wife” because of their fandom; it’s why one fan in Trekkies says that “my obsession with all this stuff was what always ended my relationships”; it is the downfall of Ben in Fever Pitch, a great boyfriend during the off-season who finds his fandom in conflict with his relationship once baseball starts up again. More intensely, this becomes the idea that fans will tend to choose the object of fandom over having romantic entanglements, as with one baseball fan in Mathematically Alive, who says of his fandom that "It's almost perhaps too important to me because I will blow off anything, whether it's a date or wearing this jacket on a Saturday night in Manhattan. I couldn't care less. It's Mets first." Though the structure of the comment makes it hard to follow, the upshot is that his desire for the Mets is greater than his desire for women, which would make it difficult to engage in heterosexual courtship rituals. Paul in Big Fan also desires his object of fandom more than women, declining a lap dance and even leaning around the dancer because she’s blocking the view of his favorite player; in an NPR interview, actor Oswalt joked that Paul’s attitude in the scene was “Please get your gorgeous, naked body out of my way, so I can look at the giant guy who's about to pummel me into a coma.” A similar logic of ignoring women in favor of fannish activities arises in The Big Bang Theory, Kickass, and Star Trek: Voyager. Alternately, fans may prioritize fandom over relationships they do actually have, as with the discourse of football widows as well as behavior exhibited by characters in Fever Pitch, Horror Fans, Knocked Up, and Trekkies. Out of such priorities, fan characters Zach and Seth in The O.C. drop their competition over the girl they have both been pursuing when a
meeting with George Lucas occurs on the same night as their senior prom and decide that one of them will meet Lucas and the other go to the prom—though ultimately both prefer Lucas.

The contemporary discourse of fandom also demonstrates Joli Jensen's (1992, p. 16) argument that representations frame "fandom as a surrogate relationship, one that inadequately imitates normal relationships." Rather than choosing fandom over relationships, many have argued that fandom is believed to substitute for the real romantic and sexual relationships fans lack.\(^\text{12}\) Fandom is figured as a consolation prize when relationships go awry in *The Big Bang Theory* and *The O.C.* One fan seeks a robot version of his favorite star in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and *The Guild* engages extensively with this logic in its promotional video “Do You Wanna Date My Avatar?” based around the idea that a gaming fanboy might prefer just that. This relates to the idea of fandom itself as an unrequited love relationship (Jensen, 1992; Lewis, 1992b), an idea mentioned specifically by writer Siegel as an interpretation of *Big Fan* and also shown by Ben’s realization that the Sox don’t love him back in *Fever Pitch*. This logic also explains the incredibly consistent and otherwise mystifying insistence that fans have passion or love for their object of fandom. Fandom as “passion” or fans as “passionate” is used by Elizabeth of BMU and Mike and Steve of Campfire, by director Tim Burton (S. Cohen, 2009b) and horror awards producer Casey Patterson (S. Cohen, 2009c). Fandom is conceptualized this way in *Big Fan, Fever Pitch, Horror Fans, and Trekkies*. The idea of what fans feel as “love” was also mentioned by Mike and Steve and in *Galaxy Quest* and *Major League II*. All these moments, to varying degrees, set up fandom as a love-type relationship.

Prioritizing fandom over relationships or having it be the primary relationship in one’s life quickly slides into the concept that fans eroticize their object of fandom. The Spock-sucking

\(^{12}\) For versions of this argument, see: Driscoll, 2006; Hills, 2002; Jenkins, 1992; Lewis, 1992a.
and ballplayer-fucking discussed in the previous section begins to get at the idea that at least part of what fans get out of fandom is sexual pleasure, and the decision of Fred Phelps’s Westboro Baptist Church to picket the Comic Con 2010 would seem to suggest that the far right, at least, has made the same judgment. Fan scholars, however, have not drawn this conclusion despite their wealth of arguments about the sexual pleasure experienced by fans. Several authors note this pleasure\(^\text{13}\) but don’t really examine it. Certainly, the connection of fandom and sex is present but latent in many discussions of fan fiction. Scholars point out that fan fiction is an erotic practice.\(^\text{14}\) Fiction that includes or centers on sex is widely acknowledged to be a major genre well within the mainstream of fandom\(^\text{15}\)—indeed, as Catherine Driscoll (2006, p. 84) notes, “vast majority” of fiction includes sex. Many of the major organizational practices of fan archives point to the fundamental role of sex in the production of fandom: The genres, at the broadest level, are "gen" (no sex), slash (same-sex sex), and "het" ("opposite"-sex sex) and fans label stories and make archives searchable by the pairing of characters who have a sexual or romantic relationship in the story (Busse & Hellekson, 2006; Driscoll, 2006; Kaplan, 2006). Last but not least, fan fiction ratings usually denote, like the Motion Picture Association of America’s ratings, level of sexual explicitness rather than violence (Busse & Hellekson, 2006).

Drawing on all of this research as well as the evidence of the constructions examined here, it would seem to be time that sex came out of the slash closet in fan studies. Other practices than the specific production of erotic fiction should be examined with respect to sexual pleasure—and not just vidding, though Francesca Coppa’s (2009) argument makes a good start.

\(^{13}\) Scholars making this point include: Allington, 2007; Busse & Hellekson, 2006; Green et al., 1998; S. G. Jones, 2000a, 2000b.

\(^{14}\) On this point, see: Green et al., 1998; Lackner et al., 2006; Sandvoss, 2005; I. Willis, 2006.

\(^{15}\) Those making this argument include: Busse & Hellekson, 2006; Jenkins, 1992; Tosenberger, 2008a, 2008b; Woledge, 2006.
Sports studies makes this move to some extent with its discussion of eroticizing players (Crawford, 2004; Gosling, 2007; Tanaka, 2004) or groupie behavior, but ultimately does not have a rich sense of the erotics of fandom either. Cornel Sandvoss (2005, p. 75) calls sexuality "underexplored" in fan studies because the topic is uncomfortable for both fans and researchers; this approach makes a certain amount of sense when part of the pathologization of fandom has long been about sexuality, either in the nineteenth century when the term arose or through etymology back to the Latin fanaticus and its links to orgies (Jenkins, 1992). Even Sandvoss (2005, pp. 73–4) himself, despite recognizing the importance of sexuality and the ways that fantasy, "directly or indirectly sexual," is important to fandom, still guards against “reducing” fandom to sexual pleasure. Instead, I propose to take seriously the implications of the fact that fans get sexual pleasure from their fan activities.

Certainly, fandom’s discursive construction appears to demand such analysis. Fans are, first, understood to eroticize the object of fandom, whether in sexy versions, as with sexy comic books (D. Anderson, 1997; “NYC pop culture show draws TV and sports celebs,” 2009) or nude or semi-nude versions of characters (Trekkies, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Fanboys, The O.C., The Big Bang Theory). This logic produces the scene in 1998 The Simpsons episode "Das Bus," in which Comic Book Guy attempts to download a racy picture of Star Trek: Voyager commanding officer Captain Janeway, only to be thwarted by his slow Internet connection. The scene advances a plot about Homer becoming an Internet Service Provider, but it achieves that goal by promulgating the idea that fans seek out erotic iterations of the object of fandom. Fans may also eroticize the object in its regular version. The opening poem in The Fan operates within this discourse, saying “Opening day I always can trust / It's just for this high that I crazily lust” and

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16 See, for example: Forsyth & Thompson, 2007; K. W. Jones, 2008; Mewett & Toffoletti, 2008; Wedgwood, 2008.
that “The grace from the field arouses the crowd.” This idea also appears in *The Big Bang Theory*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Horror Fans*, *Trekkies*, and Patton Oswalt’s acting out of a fellow customer’s tendency to rub his nipples while looking through the latest comic books. Paul in *Big Fan* has a dream in which his gaze lingers on the various body parts of player Quantrell Bishop in a way that would set anybody’s Mulvey sense to tingling, which is supplemented in another scene when the player’s poster is the last image before Paul begins to masturbate, implying that it aids his process. This scene, like the way three of the four fans in *Fanboys*, in a catalogue of their fan practices, acknowledge that they had "named their right hand Leia" after the *Star Wars* princess, gains extra force as nonnormative by drawing on the cultural common sense, described by Rubin (1993), of masturbation as inferior to partnered sex.

Industry acknowledges that fans eroticize the object of fandom, but usually condemns it. As teenager Heather Lawver ponders with regard to *Harry Potter* actor Daniel Radcliffe’s nude turn in the stage production *Equus*: “I would love to know how many girls are going there just to see Harry Potter naked,” which she described as “so funny because Warner Brothers has been fighting that kind of angle to their franchise for so long, fighting slash fiction writers, fighting all of that. ‘We don't want any of that nudity or pornography associated with our franchise,’ and here their star is going off and being nude in a play” (*We are Wizards*). Similarly, the production staff of *The Guild* were aware of and anxious about being eroticized by their fans. Particularly, star Felicia Day was teased by the other commentators that a scene in which she turned her shirt around on camera would be greatly appreciated by fanboys and played in slow motion for the chance to peek at her chest through the arm hole. Moreover, as Heather’s comment above suggests, industry is sometimes aware of slash, as with *Supernatural* discussing (with clear condemnation) the Wincest narrative in its episodes featuring fans or *Heroes* creator Tim Kring
arguing that interpreting “the patented Nathan Petrelli shoulder rub” as anything sexual is to “misconstrue. We’ve seen the YouTube movies. Don’t think we don’t watch the YouTube movies, people out there.” At other times, eroticizing the object of fandom takes the form of incorporating it into one’s sexual or romantic practices. Thus, Ben in *Fever Pitch* finds his girlfriend especially sexy when she wears a Red Sox jacket and fans in *Trekkies* discuss their sexual role-playing of characters from the show, much to actress and documentary host Denise Crosby’s discomfort. Dressing up as a character is how Summer in *The O.C.* tries to win her competition with another girl for Seth’s attention, and exasperated Trish in *The 40 Year Old Virgin* asks, “What do I have to do for you to have sex with me? Do you want me to dress up like Thor? I'll dress up like Thor. I'll dress up like Iron Man.”

This is the logic of the fetish, as when in *The West Wing* episode "Arctic Radar" White House Deputy Chief of Staff Josh Lyman asks a staff member wearing a *Star Trek* pin,

Tell me if any of this sounds familiar: "Let's list our ten favorite episodes. Let's list our least favorite episodes. Let's list our favorite galaxies. Let's make a chart to see how often our favorite galaxies appear in our favorite episodes. What Romulan would you most like to see coupled with a Cardassian and why? Let's spend a weekend talking about Romulans falling in love with Cardassians and then let's do it again." That's not being a fan. That's having a fetish. And I don't have a problem with that, except you can't bring your hobbies in to work, okay?

This scene, too, constructs an idea of fandom as deeply, inevitably, involving sexuality, both through directly calling certain fan practices a "fetish" and the way in which Lyman's "And I don't have a problem with that" echoes the *Seinfeld* "Not that there's anything wrong with that" quip about homosexuality. Less overtly sexual, fans are constructed to tend to incorporate
fandom into their marriages, whether the wedding ceremony—a ceremony with baseball bats in *Mathematically Alive*, one on Halloween with devil horns on the groom in *Horror Fans*—or the marriage in general, as with a proposal in Klingon at a convention, mentioned by creative staff on *The Simpsons* and replicated in 2004 episode “My Big Fat Geek Wedding,” or Nicky Rogan’s insistence in *Game 6* that he is a true Red Sox fan because his wife is from Boston.

**Fandom as Sexual Orientation**

Through discursive moves such as these, fans are constructed as directing sexual attention toward the object of fandom, and in light of their failure of normative heterosexuality it begins to seem as if fandom itself is a nonnormative sexual orientation. Fandom as a sexual orientation shows in the rhetoric used to discuss fan practices. Ben of *Fever Pitch*, for example, broaches the subject of his Red Sox fandom to his new girlfriend by saying, "There's something you don't know about me," and "I've been avoiding this," and his admission is framed as a variety of "coming out." Indeed, two different fans in *Trekkies 2* use the rhetoric of "coming out" or being "in the closet" about their fandom. Scholars, too, have discussed closeting and outing in relation to fandom (Hanmer, 2003; Jenkins, 1992; Russo, 2010), but I wish to move beyond the framing of sex-based shame and stigma and instead make a queerer move. Somewhat like the idea that “Slash fangirls define themselves in sexual terms in relation to their object of adoration” (Lackner et al., 2006, p. 202), fans can usefully be seen as oriented toward the object of fandom as a mode of desire and as a mode in which identity functions. This concept emerges in the association of fans with other discourses of nonnormative sexuality, as when one fan in *Trekkies* says, "Fans: We recruit!" and taps into the conservative antigay idea that homosexuals recruit, or a fan in *Trekkies 2* deploys a version of Queer Nation's chant "We're here, we're queer, get used to it" by proudly proclaiming, "I'm here, I'm into *Star Trek*, get used to it!"
With this articulation to Queer Nation, the queer potential of fandom as a refusal of normative teleologies comes into view. While, as I’ll show below, fans usually redeem themselves into heterosexuality through an exercise of white male self-control, there are other possibilities. Paul in *Big Fan*, for example, does not have a great job or a girlfriend and he lives with his mother, not complying with any of those dictates of normative white heteromasculinity, but unlike the narratives that have a trajectory of fans “learning their lesson” Paul has no interest in normativity, quite content to be exactly who he is, refusing reproductive futurity just as Lee Edelman (2004) valorizes. As actor Oswalt says of the character in an interview on NPR show *Fresh Air with Terry Gross*, “You realize it only looks like loneliness from the outside, so I didn't play Paul as this yearning, lonely guy. I played him as a guy who, in his mind, he thinks it's all settled, it's perfect [. . .]. What I tried to tap into was, in his mind, his satisfaction of the circumstances of his life.” Oswalt also notes that Paul “just wants to stay working in the garage, and he's very offended by the pressure of him to take another job,” and a similar contentment with his living arrangements and non-partnered status can be inferred from Oswalt’s further comments that “Paul, for all of his faults, and he has a lot of faults- He does not desire to reach out to anyone. [. . .] If anything, his battle is to keep the world away from him.” Writer Siegel adds, “If he could just be left alone I think he'd be happy.”

In a more theoretical sense, if, to return to Sara Ahmed (2006, p. 3), we understand the "orientation" in sexual orientation spatially, it becomes clear that "orientations shape [. . .] 'who' or 'what' we direct our energy and attention toward." The directions we so face "make certain things, and not others, available," because in facing one thing we precisely turn away from other things (Ahmed, 2006, p. 14). As a result, by being oriented toward the object of fandom, the fan, though typically constructed as intending to be heterosexual, is presumed incapable of being
oriented toward the "opposite" sex, or indeed toward any "real" person. Ahmed (2006, p. 101) adds, "The choice of one's object of desire makes a difference to other things that we do. In a way I am suggesting that the object in sexual object choice is sticky: other things 'stick' when we orientate ourselves toward objects, especially if such orientations do not follow the family or social line." In orienting themselves toward the object of fandom, then, fans don't follow that normative, white line, and what accordingly sticks to them in the cultural imaginary is nonheteronormativity: nonmasculinity, lack of business success, immaturity, the inability to "get" a girl, and even homoerotic attachment.

Redeem Yourself Now! (Restrictions May Apply.)

By contrast to my focus here on the failures of fan men, Suzanne Scott (2011, p. 277) notes the ways in which the "fanboy's representational recuperation into hegemonic masculinity aligns with (or helps to justify and support) his industrial (re)incorporation into Hollywood's demographic hegemony of 16-to-64-year-old men." There is, indeed, a recuperation narrative available to fans in the fictional and documentary sources, which does seem at first to resist the idea of fan as unsalvable loser and point to a new era of fan normativity. The "happy" ending (for those narratives that have one, generally the comedies) comes when fans are recuperated into heterosexuality by trading in some of their behaviors that are incompatible with it. If whiteness depends on sexual self-control and fans are constructed as white people sexually out of bounds, fandom is also constructed as fully able to be "salvaged" into normative white, heterosexual, masculine self-control. The deviance of the fan comes from correctable bad decisions. Though heterosexual romance coming to fruition commonly drives happily-ever-after in film, and though some fans do simply grow up and learn to be heterosexual (The Benchwarmers, Fanboys, Superbad), fandom is often positioned as the specific impediment,
which does a particular kind of cultural work that requires closer examination.

The salvation of the fan comes in several forms. Some fans have to get rid of their excess of fannish possessions into a more restrained appreciation in order to succeed as heterosexuals. In *The Big Bang Theory*, Leonard’s fannish acquisition of a movie prop blocks up the stairway in his building and ruins his neighbor Penny’s day, causing her to scream at him and his fan friends: “My God, you are grown men, how could you waste your lives with these stupid toys and costumes and comic books and- and now that- that-” before trailing off in disgust. Later, though Penny has apologized, saying, “You are a great guy, and it is things you love that make you who you are,” Leonard decides to sell his fannish possessions, declaring, “Still, I think it’s time for me to get rid of this stuff and- you know- move on with my life.” Penny replies, “Oh. Wow. Good for you” and kisses his cheek, positively reinforcing his decision with affection from his unrequited love interest. Similarly, Andy in *The 40 Year Old Virgin* sells his extensive toy collection, makes half a million dollars, and uses it to finance the wedding that his move away from fannish virginity permits.

Other fans just need to reprioritize their lives away from fannish immaturity. Jeff in *My Name is Bruce* learns to be brave and solve his own problems rather than relying on actor Bruce Campbell to be a hero like the characters he plays. Fan characters in *Kickass* and *Knocked Up* refocus on their relationships in place of their “immature” fan-dreams. In *Fever Pitch*, Ben loses his girlfriend Lindsey and decides that he needs to grow up and give up fandom by selling his lifetime season tickets to the Red Sox. Ultimately, Lindsey does not let him make this sacrifice for her, saying, "If you love me enough to sell your tickets, I love you enough not to let you," but—much like Penny’s approval of Leonard—his willingness to abandon his "childish" pursuits proves to her that he is worth it and gets her back. The narrative of moving past all-consuming
fandom to contained appreciation compatible with heterosexuality turns up even in documentaries. In *Trekkies*, we meet Gabriel Koerner, who is excessively nerdy and focused on his fandom, but by *Trekkies 2* he has become a man, calmed his appreciation of *Star Trek*, begun a career, and found a girlfriend, collecting all four normativities.\textsuperscript{17}

In all of the cases, though fandom doesn't have to be given up, it does have to be brought under control, and this alignment with the white norm, made possible by their white male bodies, makes these fans eligible for "redemption" into heterosexuality. Nonwhite and female fans never "reform" and get their fandom "under control." Hiro never does become less childish, and fannish women like Liz, Cyd, and Becky make no appreciable character progress. The exclusion of bodies other than white men from the recuperation narrative of fandom can be understood either as constructing other groups fans as incapable of being normalized or as operating within a logic that everyone will identify with and want to emulate the redemption of the white male fan. In either case, it reinforces the construction of self-control as a characteristic of white men.

**Conclusion**

In the end, much as Robyn Wiegman (1999) argues that Forrest Gump's lack of privilege works to disarticulate the connection between whiteness and privilege, "deviant" whitenesses—like white trash or queerness, or, I've argued here, fandom—seem to dispute the universality of whiteness. However, the construction of fans as lacking privilege relies on an assumption of

\textsuperscript{17} In an interesting parallel, fan Darryl Frazetti has also become a man between the two *Trekkies* films, but through transitioning from female to male. The documentary does not explicitly address Frazetti's changed presentation, so it is difficult for me to know how the distinctive scratchy transman voice reads to someone unfamiliar with the changes a transitioning FTM body undergoes; it may be that to the average viewer puberty just seems to have come late for this particular fan—which would, of course, be consistent with the overall narrative of fan arrested development and masculine failure.
whiteness precisely as privileged. As Dyer (1997, p. 12) points out, "Going against type and not conforming depend upon an implicit norm of whiteness against which to go." The norm makes the fan deviance intelligible as deviance, reinforced by the possibility of their recuperation. Privilege is regainable for fans in the happy ending of normativity because their skin whiteness makes them eligible for symbolic whiteness, so that these narratives serve to reinforce rather than undermine the connection of whiteness and privilege. Kyle Kusz (2001, p. 394) argues that "Constructions of Whiteness as unprivileged, victimized, or otherwise disadvantaged—images that seem to contradict the ideology of Whiteness as privileged—can work in particular contexts as a mechanism to resecure the privileged normativity of whiteness in American culture," and it would seem that images of fandom constitute one of those contexts. Ultimately, this articulation of white bodies, fandom, and nonheteronormativity in industry logics constructs the supposed inadequacy of fans as the result of substandard—but standardizable—self-control.

In some sense, then, the image of fan subjects put forth in the discourse is a story about that most neoliberal of buzzphrases, "personal responsibility." The construction of fans as normative failures due to bad decisions they personally made figures their deviation from the white norm of self-control as ultimately correctable, and the whiteness self-control defines stays within reach for them. As Ahmed (2006) points out, some bodies are more interpellated than others. Simply by having white skin, then, universality and redemption is possible for fans, for "Bodies that pass as white, even if they are queer or have other points of deviation, still have access to what follows from certain lines" (Ahmed, 2006, pp. 136–7). Thus, the redemption narrative makes no more of a step forward for fans than the mocking representations or the privileging of particular practices and market segments.
Chapter 8
Conclusion: Owning Fandom, Owing Fandom

In general, the construction of fandom’s meaning in the contemporary era is troubling. The cultural common sense around this category produces a quite constrained set of options for the normative and “proper” way to interact with objects of fandom. The underlying beliefs that animate and show through industry’s relation to fans and fandom, it turns out, aren’t particularly inclusive after all and in fact lean toward falsely framing highly selective choices as radical openness. Thus, the overall tendency is toward industry increasingly acting to normalize fandom into forms it can own. However, within the broad propensity for domesticating fandom runs a subtle counter-discourse that appreciates and even respects fandom in its natural habitat, seeing fans as owed.

Owning Fandom: The Structure of Stricture

Through this project, I have parsed the overall system that structures the possibilities for fandom. Fan consumption has long been understood as going beyond consuming the object of fandom itself—whether watching in person or via media, whether paid or free—or what I’ve called Consumption 1.0, and this tendency has continued into the Internet era. As I showed in Chapter 2, contemporary fandom also normatively includes the expansive mode of ancillary consumption around the main object like concessions or travel or the acquisition of swag. This sub-consumption, Consumption 0.5, is seen as supplementary and supporting the “main” experience rather than able to stand alone. The norm further expects and recruits fans to consume licensed or franchised extensions of an object of fandom in Consumption 1.5. All three of these modes are both constructed as essential fan desires and actively facilitated, demonstrating the
way the industry relates to fans through managing desire. These constructions of normative consumption fundamentally tie fandom’s desire to consumptive modes.

Transmedia, premised on interactivity, initially appears to differ substantially from the consumptive modes of yore, but upon further investigation it is both new and old and thus usefully understood as Consumption 2.0. The forms of interactivity provided in transmedia are often “point and click and be entertained,” choices within pre-coded options, calling on fans not to act but rather react to what industry presents. Transmedia adds new material in various locations, and it does in fact expansively give more than new distribution mechanisms for more of the same. The transmedia norm incites fans to be omnivorous and consume beyond the evident boundaries of the object of fandom to get more information, more content, or more contact with the people involved or to immerse themselves in a story world. Thus, we must take seriously that transmedia is inherently consumptive. It makes a gesture toward interactivity, but examining what actions it actually recruits shows that new media have actually not radically altered the traditional idea of passive consumers who should more or less grin and take what they’re sold. The consumptive nature of transmedia shows most clearly when accessing expansive information requires further purchases, but even when additional content is free of charge transmedia ultimately acts to corral fan desire to get more into consumptive activity.

Contemporary industry approaches to fans undoubtedly recruit and desire fan desire, but in the form of reaction, working to domesticate and reorient fan desire into manageable forms. This structure therefore troubles ideas that fans are newly empowered by being courted by industry in the post-web era—to be the ideal consumer is still to be distinguished from a contributor.

Fans are actually incited to take action, however, as they are both assumed and recruited to labor in a number of ways in the contemporary era. They’re asked to work as the audience
commodity by watching the ads that support their “free” media, generating direct monetary value for industry through ad sales. Fans also normatively produce value by means of the data trade in which knowledge about user activity has value as a data commodity. The norm expects and invites fans to work to make themselves seen and known, the work of being watched. They’re even recruited to produce the very incitement to participate intended to get them to show up to do all of this other work, making their own free lunch. Moreover, fans normatively do promotional, word-of-mouth work to increase the awareness of and interest in the object of fandom. Fan work also impacts the media objects through adding on more content, allowing industry to do less labor in-house or making the object of fandom more expansive than it would otherwise be. Last but not least, the norm assumes and encourages fans to do love labor—the work of loving and demonstrating love that generates a more intangible sort of value for industry. What all of these forms of normative and recruited activity have in common is that industry extracts surplus value from these forms of work.

The challenge of this model is that fan work often seems as if it isn’t really labor because fans do it out of love. Thus, seemingly fans don’t require payment because they engage out of enjoyment—or because fandom is anticapitalist and does not want to participate in market exchange logics. In Chapter 5, I contended that analysis requires a more structural view attentive to both the unequal playing field on which fans make such choices and the ways in which conducting fandom on industry’s terms fundamentally differs from a fandom by and for fans. I argue that fan labor should be assessed against the background of labor-cost reduction on industry’s part and rejection of capitalist projects by many fans, which together produce a perfect storm situation for exploiting fan labor. Given the low level of awareness of the full implications of fan activity and the structural coercions involved, I argue that fans cannot be said to
meaningfully consent to these forms of labor and value extraction. Ultimately, I articulate a theory of the contemporary industry embrace of fandom as a form of enclosure of the commons of fandom that turns fans into a workforce for industry ends, calling for greater attention to how the benefits of fan work are distributed.

Reorienting the question to look at fans as people and not just practices adds further insight into the contemporary meaning of the category “fan.” Through such analysis, it becomes clear that between numerical dominance of white bodies as fans, the refusal to consider race except as racism, and the marginalization of fans of color, the whiteness of fandom is overdetermined in industry logics. Moreover, men are the normative fans represented and whose practices are welcome, with women both indirectly marginalized and at times directly classified as not proper fans at all. These factors construct fandom as “rightfully” residing in the dominant category of masculinity. Fandom has also been articulated to normativity through being deemed appropriate for all ages. Overall, this construction positions fandom as newly mainstream, with both the benefits of inclusion and the inevitable consequence of shifting off the former marginality of the category onto less socially powerful bodies.

At other times, the vision of fans as subjects appears opposite, with fandom set up as a condition involving failed masculinity and whiteness through failed adulthood and heterosexuality, recapitulating the same stereotypes that the Internet and industry’s embrace of fandom have supposedly rendered past. However what is new in the contemporary era is that this narrative of failure also illuminates a path to redemption for white male fan bodies. The redemption narrative works both to reinforce the cultural commonsense of privilege as a "natural" property of white, heterosexual masculinity and to produce fandom as white, and thus rearticulates fandom to dominance much as just identifying it with those categories in the first
place does. All these means, then, produce the norm of fandom as a narrow range of practices and people that complies with industry logics for behavior and demographics, setting up the “right” way as what’s right for industry.

**Owing Fandom, Or The Moment of Potential**

But then, alongside all this management, orientation, normalization, and domestication, there’s something strange. In fictional and nonfictional representations of fans from 1994-2009, the structures of official websites for media properties (films, sports franchises, etc.), and statements made by industry practitioners who produce content for fans, the idea that fans matter, that industry owes them something, that they are someone-s of value and worth considering shows up again and again. The belief that industry has an obligation to fans does not comprise a major thread in the archive; it crops up a few dozen times as compared to hundreds for more central or prominent aspects of the discursive construction of fandom. However, it does represent a *consistent* muted refrain of hope within the general trend toward constricted possibilities for fans. Indeed, saying that fans matter may even be disingenuous, but at least industry feels it *ought* to say fans matter, pointing to a sense that fans cannot be entirely controlled or disrespected with impunity. Thus, this narrative may signal the potential for *something more* in the fan-industry relationship.

**“Fans Deserve Better”**

This narrative, first, has an idea that industry owes fans something for their devotion. It sometimes presents as a language of fans as *deserving*. Thus, in journalist Sandy Cohen’s (2009c) report on the Scream awards for “science-fiction, horror, fantasy and comic book-inspired movies and TV shows,” run by the Spike TV channel, executive producer Casey
Patterson said of fans that “You couldn't point to a group more passionate, more invested, or more deserving. [. . .] These fans have waited a long time to see their heroes honored.” This demonstrates a belief in fans as specifically worthy of accessing recognition for what they love. The term “deserving” crops up again at the end of *My Name is Bruce*, when the monster pops out after it has already been defeated:

Bruce: Stop, stop. [Steps in front of the screen, breaking the fourth wall]

Director: What's the problem, Bruce?

Bruce: Look, I’m sorry, but these shock endings are a rip-off. I mean, we just killed the creature, like, 30 seconds ago, and now it's back? The fans deserve better.

Related to this idea of desert, there is a sense that, as Jenkins, Ford, and Green (2013, p. 61) argue, industry is “obligated to learn from and respond to fan expectations, not the other way around, since fans do not owe companies anything,” such that fans should be thanked for their support since they could just as easily choose to withhold it. Thus in a basic way, we get scenes like the one from *Friday Night Lights* (TV) in which rodeo cowboy Cash thanks a supporter. In a more explicit iteration, one fan in *Mathematically Alive* comments about New York Mets catcher Mike Piazza that "He always said ‘Thank you’ to me for being a fan. And you don't hear that enough from a ballplayer. You're spending your hard-earned money to go to games, and watching ballplayers, and you don't hear ‘Thank you’ from them enough." While a fan makes this statement, including it within the documentary in a straightforward, non-mocking way acts to legitimize such a position.

Beyond thanking, there’s a belief that industry has an ethical obligation to reward fan loyalty. After the 2007 fan campaign that saved CBS show *Jericho*, executive producer Carol
Barbee noted that "It was incumbent upon us to tell a great story for these people who saved the show." More expansively, actor Skeet Ulrich said, "The only reason most of us came back was for the fans. [. . . ] We wanted to make episodes for them because they certainly deserved it after all the effort they put in. I couldn't imaging turning tail on them after everything they'd done" (Littlejohn, 2008a). *The Simpsons* took a similar stance in 1996 episode “Bart the Fink,” when Bart appeals to Krusty the Clown, who has quit show business after being exposed as a tax cheat, “But Krusty, what about all those kids that depend on you to brighten up their afternoons? Are you gonna turn your back on them?” When Krusty answers in the affirmative, Bart says, “C'mon Lise, Krusty doesn't want our attention anymore. Let's go worship someone who has the guts to be a celebrity.” The episode thus condemns repaying fan dedication with abandonment, albeit in the never-fully-serious *Simpsons* way.

More specifically, this position contends that *what fans want matters*. The construction of fans desires as important could be as simple as noting that a new show has “above average” chances of success because it was “warmly received at July's Comic-Con, a comic-book fan convention,” marking fan tastes as good indicators of quality (Schechner, 2007). Alternately, fan desires more actively figure as something industry needs to live up to. The team owner in *Major League II* appeals to fan wishes when speaking to the star pitcher, saying, “Even though your fastball isn’t what it used to be, there’s no one the fans in Cleveland would rather have pitching the most important game in Indians history than you.” The owner makes this comment to increase the pressure on the pitcher so he’ll underperform as part of her nefarious plot to make the team lose so she can relocate it, but it relies on these expectations as something he feels he must live up to. Similarly, in *The Fan*, a sports radio host describes player Bobby Rayburn as the "hopes and dreams of the fans," authorizing fan expectations as a legitimate thing to consider and
try to meet.

There can also be a more specific or content-based obligation to provide for fan desires. As Merrin of Campfire put it, “There's no kind of like ‘Do X Y and Z and you're going to get this result.’ It's always, I think it's, you know, based on intuition and what you know about the community but then what you know about human beings. [Laughs] And being realistic about, you know, ‘Who would actually do this? Would they actually do this? Would I actually do this?’” Thus, concerns about what actual fans want underpin Merrin’s approach as opposed to the standardization of a formula. Similarly, Mike noted an instance when Campfire was marketing a TV adaptation of a novel series that already had a fan base, and they decided not to push to bring that preexisting group in on their attempt: "In that case we made a decision like, ‘Let's leave those guys alone, because I think what we do, and the fans we’re gonna bring to it might be disruptive to that particular fan community.’ So we'll do, kind of, step aside and say ‘They're good on their own’” (original emphasis). Thus, it’s clear that the imperative to get the maximum number of people involved does not outweigh fan needs for Mike.

Among sports practitioners, James of BMU also expressed the idea that his marketing efforts had to work around where fans were, more physically than figuratively as BMU decided to take some of the university’s sports on the road and have competitions in nearby major population centers rather than only at BMU’s more remote campus. He said, “We were taking the product to them because we couldn't get it to them any other way,” framing this decision as, again, fan needs trumping all. Prioritizing what fans want was also clear from the statement by Allen Graf, football coordinator for The Express, that the football movies he has done “have the realism. It’s really important to me because I know there’s a lot of football aficionados out there who are just looking to see: How is this football played out and how does it look?” Graf focuses
on satisfying the desires of those “aficionados” above all. At times, this logic of giving fans what they want goes so far that industry workers apologize for failing to provide to fans, such as not being funny in their commentaries (Benchwarmer director Dennis Dugan), repeating information in consecutive commentaries (The Guild actor/creator Felicia Day), having a repetitive plot structure (The O.C.’s executive producer Josh Schwartz), or having unclear storylines (The Simpsons showrunner and executive producer Mike Scully).

This ethical obligation may even mean a belief that fans come first, superseding industry or workers’ desires. Thus, there’s a sense that industry must give fans something, even if it’s inconvenient or challenging for them to do so. Accordingly, when “David Arquette was in such a rush to show footage of his directorial debut, ‘The Tripper,’ at Comic-Con that he lost the tape on the way to the convention center,” he “acted out a few lines from the movie,” making this effort in order “to appease the crowd” rather than give them nothing (S. Cohen, 2006a). Cult film and TV actor Ted Raimi notes in Fanalysis that he will “give answers that are not too personal, but also not totally impersonal so that they'll be disappointed, because they came to see me.” Raimi does this work to carefully manage his interactions because, while he doesn’t want to reveal his whole life, neither does he perceive being entirely impersonal as a legitimate option. Similarly, Bruce Campbell notes in Fanalysis that he fine-tunes his appearance to his sense of fan desires, saying that “I'm thinking the fans want to see someone who's approachable, that you're not wearing a Hugo Boss suit.” This discourse of approachability in these two cases indicates that the appropriate fan-star relationship shouldn’t be too distant—there’s a norm of at least some degree of intimacy. Benchwarmer director Dennis Dugan seeks to meet fan needs in a different way, noting in the commentary that “I like this scene. In fact, I like the whole movie so I don’t know, why should I bore you with saying that?” In this way, he turns away from what
he finds easy to discuss in order to fit better with perceived fan interests in having commentaries provide non-obvious new information. While this statement clearly relates to the norm of fans as consuming information, the framing in all of these cases of these industry workers having to manage *themselves* points to putting fans first—even if ultimately it’s an industry-generated belief about fans that they’re trying to follow.

Putting fan desires over industry desires shades into the idea that industry will or must alter its products to suit fan desires. *The Simpsons* staff said repeatedly in the deleted scenes included with each season on DVD that even if *they* liked a scene, if their test audience did not find it funny it had to go. A similar belief, but more about general interest than humor, was held by Gary Fleder, the director of *The Express*, who said, “I'm a big believer that with an audience, if they groan or they don't seem to engage with something, you should pull it out.” Such statements suggest that artistic vision takes a back seat to fan enjoyment. In a more general sense Steve of Campfire summed up the priorities of his work as, “You have to understand the needs of the audience as much and probably more so than the needs of the brand,” indicating a somewhat unexpected ordering of priorities. Sometimes fan needs even take precedence over financial concerns. To put fans before money is quite rare, but that it should happen *at all* is noteworthy. Importantly, industry workers on the *business* side never take this position, but rather people whose motivations do not begin and end with money (though they generally do, of course, include it). Thus, in the *Jericho* revival example mentioned above, “Sacrifices were also made. ‘It was different for different people, depending on what their initial contracts were,’ notes co-star Lennie James, ‘but everybody, in one way, shape or form, took a pay cut in order to come back to “Jericho”’” (Littlejohn, 2008a). Here, these actors’ felt duty to fans outweighs their desire for maximum payment. Similarly, some argue that industry should value fans as opposed to
reducing all value to money. “Disney fan Jennifer Morrissey” expressed this view and was
legitimated in the news, contending that with their Comic Con-like D23 Expo “Disney is finally
seeing the importance in courting their fan core. ‘In the past, they were more interested in the
bottom line,’ Morrissey said. ‘They're finally getting that we exist and there's a need for
something like this’” (Rindels, 2009).

Fan needs also emerge as reasonable or even prioritized indirectly or by implication—
through an expectation or even valorization of fan knowledge. Fans increasingly figure as having
informed opinions and valuable knowledge in the contemporary period. Speaking of the rise of
sites like movie review aggregator Rotten Tomatoes, Merrin of Campfire described this belief
that fan views carry weight:

Merrin: You know, "What does this fan think about- what does an influential fan
think about this movie? Cause if a fan doesn't like it, what's- Is there a
chance that as a newcomer to the franchise I will?" Or, this kind of tension
of, "I'm not a fan of that, but what does a fan think?" And wanting to know
that it's satisfying them as well.

Interviewer: Fans as knowledgeable, like, experts in a field?

Merrin: Yeah, that's kind of the way I see things happening.

A similar set of assumptions underlies the advertisement for the Blu-ray format appended to
many post-2006 Warner Brothers DVD materials I examined. The ad sets up the normative way
of experiencing media as getting more information, emphasizing that Blu-ray looks better as well
as that it “offers new interactive ways to explore your favorite films without ever having to leave
the movie. Check out footage you've never seen before.” It also provides the opportunity to
“uncover exclusive sneak peeks of upcoming movies." However, in addition to consuming
information, the ad also invites its watchers to labor at producing more, but vitally, this invitation functions under the assumption that such fan knowledge has value: “Now express yourself with Warner Brothers BD-Live, in which your BD-Live-enabled Blu-ray player becomes an interactive gateway to the Internet. Create your own picture-in-picture commentary and share it with friends. Have a chance to participate in on-screen chats with the director and stars in the comfort of your living room during a virtual screening. Rate your favorite trailers.” This statement recruits from all users of this format the kinds of textual commentary formerly confined to fans, and further, puts it alongside official materials, at least rhetorically. The ad ultimately calls Blu-ray as format and practice “simply the best way to watch movies at home, ever.”

The logic that valorizes fan knowledge also animates the construction of texts that it takes fan knowledge to understand. Inside jokes that only fans could get provide one way of centering things fans know. Thus, in My Name is Bruce two old men from the town in peril have this conversation:

First old man: You know, they go to all that trouble to kidnap somebody, I’d have kidnapped that Jake character from Evil Dead II.

Second old man: My money’d be on that blacksmith from Army of Darkness. Now that's one stud.

I’m not the intended audience for this joke, because I’ve never seen those movies, but I’m fairly certain that these characters are played by the same actors as the characters under discussion—those actors are in the film. The insider quality makes it funny. One is supposed to know that they’re talking about themselves (or each other, since the scene continues to them holding hands and saying “I wish I could quit you.”). Similarly, at the same time that Xena: Warrior Princess
episode “Send in the Clones” makes fun of fans that can cite episode and scene by having such characters bumbling through the action, it rewards having seen all the episodes, because certain flashback scenes in this clip show only make sense if you know the episode that the clip intends to invoke.

Such forms of insider knowledge are assumed or required with nontrivial frequency in the contemporary era. In general, the increasing incidence of intense serialization of 2000s TV demands a corresponding expansion of intensive knowledge practices formerly considered niche or even marginal. With complex and long-term narratives of this sort, as Sharon Ross (2009, p. 45) notes, “Viewers must be devoted in order to understand their shows’ universes.” She notes that “It was the messy and rich mythology” of such shows—Ross discusses *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Xena: Warrior Princess*, but these were only early examples of a decade-plus-long trend—“that prompted many viewers to become to interactively involved” (S. M. Ross, 2009, p. 43), pointing to the way that particular text types recruit particular audience behaviors. However, she notes that these sorts of complex storylines that incite formerly-fan-style intensive and expansive participation, though now much more broadly used, are still not for everyone and “must be somewhat obscured, primarily so as to not alienate those viewers who have no interest in following the paths laid out for them” (S. M. Ross, 2009, p. 177). Despite these modes of diminution, however, the percentage of major-network, non-niche programs requiring or inviting fan-type knowledge has dramatically increased in the period this project examines, which works toward legitimating fandom. These various structures frame fan values, needs, and desires as legitimate or even worthy.

**Three Types of Highly Symbolic Figure**

Fans are also constructed as owed something through the deployment of three figures: the
(falsely) entitled celebrity, the innocent (and therefore genuinely entitled) child fan, and the adult fan hero. These three images, often painted in broad strokes to the point of caricature and operating as symbols, illuminate a conceptualization of good and bad in relation to fandom. *My Name is Bruce* is to some extent a sendup of the misbehaving celebrity as much as it plays out the narrative of the over-invested kidnapper fan. The character “Bruce Campbell,” played by the actor Bruce Campbell, sets the bar for rude, telling fans they smell, treating townspeople in need as country bumpkins, and displaying terrible table manners. He even actively harms others for his own ends—shoving a wheelchair-bound military veteran into traffic for annoying him and carjacking an old lady to escape the film’s monster. *Cobb*, by contrast, does not wink at its audience as baseball player Ty Cobb is nasty to nearly everyone, for example responding to what he considers a stupid question by calling the questioner an “ignorant son of a bitch.”

One key version of the mean celebrity is the greedy sports star. Indeed, such greed provides the premise of *BASEketball*, in which all of the contemporary real-life major sports (baseball, football, etc.) have declined precipitously in the world of the film because sportsmanship has become "subordinate to the quest for money" and stadiums have been turned into "giant billboards." In this world, before *BASEketball* came along "Players sold their services to the highest bidder" with no loyalty to any one place or team, teams changed cities "in search of greater profits," and the talent pool had been diluted by excessive expansion into more teams. Overall, these events have resulted in fans deprived of worthy sports, and *BASEketball’s* earnestness is just what the doctor ordered. *The Replacements* depicts the professional football players who have gone on strike for more pay as avaricious specifically at the expense of fans. A reporter asks one player “There are a lot of angry fans out there tonight that feel the players are being too greedy with their demands. Anything you’d like to say to that?” The player responds
that five million dollars may seem like a lot of money but he has to pay 10% to his agent and 5% to his lawyer—and generally misses the point. Another player, even more out of touch, cuts into the conversation to demand, “Do you have any idea how much insurance costs on a Ferrari, motherf- [gets cut off].” Bracketing the troubling anti-union politics of the film, these players are incredibly unsympathetic.

Even less likeable are the industry personnel who behave badly toward children. Actor Jason in *Galaxy Quest* shouts at some teenagers that "There is no quantum flux. There's no auxiliary. There's no goddamn ship, you got it?" Pitcher Ricky in *Major League II* blows off a party thrown in his honor by underprivileged children, leading one of them to gripe, “What a pukehead. He didn’t even have no cake.” Worse, Roger Meyers Jr., chairman of the studio that produces *Itchy and Scratchy* in *The Simpsons*, shouts at a group of eight-to-ten-year-old kids after they have given contradictory focus group data, “You kids don't know what you want! That's why you're still kids! 'Cause you're stupid! Just tell me what's wrong with the freaking show!” causing Ralph Wiggum to cry. These instances of showing the child’s reaction to industry misbehavior particularly underline its inappropriateness. Similarly, Warner Brothers came off looking like terrible bullies when they went after *Harry Potter* fan sites and sent cease and desist letters to children. As teenager Heather Lawver put it in *We are Wizards*, her friend who got such a letter “was this 12 year old girl who thought that she was going to go to prison because she was running a *Harry Potter* fan site.” Such incidents bring the figure of the unsympathetic industry worker into conflict with the deserving child.

This sort of behavior, then, is so troublesome because of the simultaneous construction of an especial duty to children. *Spiderman* series director Sam Raimi (brother to actor Ted) described himself as having a "great responsibility to tell the story of this character that kids look
up to as this great hero. Certainly you don't want to make anything that isn't worthy of their admiration” (S. Cohen, 2006b). That kids deserve inspiring figures leads to the condemnation that arises in *The Benchwarmers* when one of the nerdy, fannish adults who have been standing up to the bullying athletic kids on behalf of the nerdy, fannish kids is revealed to have been a bully himself as a child. A news reporter comments, “That's too bad. Those guys inspired a lot of really nice kids” and one of the children whose bullying story led the adults to get involved in the first place, says, crying, “I can't believe I looked up to you.”

One sub-version of this discourse contends that fandom normatively provides good examples for kids in relation to social perils and vices, most often found with sports. At the Seattle Mariners site, the materials they offer for kids include “the Mariner Moose D.R.E.A.M Team,” described as “a comprehensive school assembly program aimed at elementary school-aged students. The program uses the Moose to deliver the importance of the D.R.E.A.M. Team principles: Drug-Free, Respect Yourself & Others, Education, Attitude, Motivation.” The inspiration narrative rests on the idea that fandom influences kids, and industry therefore has an obligation to influence them positively. Thus, one news report ran, “Go ahead and try it. Tell a Texas kid not to look up to and imitate Cowboys icon Troy Aikman. These days, the Cowboys quarterback is attempting to do just that. Aikman embarked Tuesday on a don't-be-like-me campaign against chewing tobacco. In a series of public service spots and posters, Troy Aikman entreats kids to eschew habit-forming snuff” (“Cowboys icon entreats kids to avoid snuff,” 1999).

The positive-influence narrative closely relates to a belief in a duty to *protect* kids. Thus, StarWars.com affirms that “We take very seriously the safety of children, especially those under 13”—the emphasis on *safety* here provides a different valence than the overall attention to
children’s privacy described in Chapter 6, attending to caring for this category rather than simple compliance with the COPPA. This logic also animates the repeated mentions that children needed to be protected from sexual and violent content at comic book conventions, such as: “At children's eye-level: posters showing a muscular warrior raising a sword dripping with blood and a woman aiming a gun with bullet holes behind her. [ . . . ] ‘We really make it a point to try to restrict access to these materials from children,’ Comic-Con spokesman David Glanzer said” (“Age-old debate: Does violence in comics affect children?,” 1998).

Kids need to be protected, the logic goes, because they are particularly worthy fans. The child-as-worthy narrative arises, first, in repeated scenes of sports stars, especially, being respectfully asked for autographs and glad to provide them to such fans (Cobb, The Express, Summer Catch, Friday Night Lights [TV]). Child fans always legitimately deserve star attention in the archive and their respective narratives never frame them as troublesome. Similarly, young fans who might just as easily be considered obnoxious are treated as somewhere between neutral and endearing. Seven-year-old blonde boy child Darius in We are Wizards is a wizard rock musician who makes completely terrible music that seems to consist entirely of him shouting “Dragon rock rules!” tunelessly, but the audience within the documentary nevertheless cheers him on. Towheaded, freckled Bo Miller in Friday Night Lights (TV), also around seven, is exactly the sort of pushy fan demanding the star’s attention criticized elsewhere, but player Tim Riggins happily hangs out with him. Such child fans, seemingly, can do no wrong. The perfect encapsulation of the child fan as “worthy” figure comes in a news story about the 2002 Super Bowl:

Bobby Brady stood at attention outside the Superdome on Sunday, his hand raised to the brim of his New England Patriots baseball cap in a snappy salute for the
soldiers standing on the street corner. "He loves football players, but now he says he wants to be a soldier," said the 5-year-old's mother, Carolyn Brady. "Isn't this great? He gets the best of both worlds today." The Bradys, not related to Patriots' quarterback Tom Brady, were decked out in red, white, and blue team outfits that reflected the patriotic theme of the Super Bowl. (Foster, 2002)

While, as the first Super Bowl after September 11 attacks, this one is unusually articulated to nation, the trifecta of boy-child, sport, and nation illuminates particularly clearly how all three normatively reside in the realm of the unquestionably “good,” putting this form of fandom in the most culturally valued of company.

As “little Bobby Brady, the shiny symbol” begins to suggest, at times kids are constructed as so pure and special that they need no protection, acting instead as saviors for industry workers, showing them the error of their ways. Thus, in Any Given Sunday there’s an almost Socratic dialogue between player Julian “J-Man” Washington and a young African American boy child fan:

Fan: What's up, J-Man?

Washington: What's up, little man?

Fan: Is it true you makin' 10 million a year? [Washington smiles and nods] That true, then, about you not blockin' no more either? It’s part of your contract?

That’s what my dad says. He says you don’t have to catch no passes over the middle either ‘cause you don’t want to get hurt? It’s also in your contract-

Right, J?

Washington: Yeah, your dad’s got it down, kiddo.

As a result of this conversation, Washington realizes that he should not put his own financial gain
over the good of the team and changes his ways. A similar scene of boy children helping a sports star see things differently comes in *Summer Catch*, when two young fans come up to a struggling player and ask for his autograph (though the white one gets expository dialogue and the black child only says “Thank you”), treating him like a star despite his troubles. As producer/director Michael Tollin described it, “This is a scene we saw repeated over and over again, and it just seemed to have- the kids coming for an autograph at his absolute low point. It’s just sort of how it always works.” This incident helps the player in the trajectory of recovering his confidence, and in this sense, as with Washington, the kids save the day.

This child-as-savior narrative resembles the way adult fans sometimes are not just redeemed into normativity in the way described in Chapter 7 but positioned as heroic. Suzanne Scott (2011, pp. 38–9) argues that ”Refashioning the fanboy as a visible romantic protagonist, or an (often reluctant) action hero or superhero, the fanboy’s recuperation into Hollywood’s hegemonic demography has been coupled with his representational recuperation into hegemonic masculinity.” Importantly, then, as with the previously explained redemption narrative and as suggested by the preponderance of *boy* children among the pure, worthy fan figures, not everyone has access to the hero narrative. As Kristina Busse (2013, p. 81) puts it, “The fan hero remains relentlessly gendered. While the fanboys are often clearly caricatured, their portrayals nevertheless tend to be more lovingly tongue-in-cheek than the respective fangirl characterizations. Fanboys are allowed more agency and can become heroes.” This narrative is somewhat more expansive or inclusive in that both children and adults who save the day need not be only white or even straight—such that it doesn’t follow the same line as the redemption narrative and must be considered a different discursive formation rather than an extension. However, masculinity seems to not be optional.
The fan hero narrative nevertheless provides an interesting counterpoint to the domestication of fans or the imagery of fans as failed that form the main trajectory of the discursive construction of fandom. The fan hero figure usefully explains those times fans are noble and try to be brave even in the face of seemingly certain failure at their manly tasks (Leonard of *The Big Bang Theory*, the title character in *Scott Pilgrim*). One key aspect of the narrative of fan as hero is that it tends to "frame the fanboy's affective relationship with geeky media properties as an intrinsic part of his charm" (Scott, 2011, p. 285), and here we get fans who save the day precisely through their fannishness. In *Chuck*, Chuck’s knowledge of fannish things facilitates his life as a secret agent, as when the initial file containing government secrets comes to him with a video game password or he uses his *Tron* poster—which his sister has tried to persuade him to discard as childish—to disguise his research into nefarious organization Fulcrum. Chuck’s high level of familiarity with video gaming lets him be guided through flying a helicopter, and his practice with military-style games means he can describe an imaginary strike force that’s en route to his location well enough to bluff an enemy agent. Chuck doesn’t believe in his own capacities, noting to real CIA agent Sarah that “I don't think I'm really cut out for a job where you disarm a bomb, steal a diamond, and then jump off a building.” However, Sarah replies, “Well you could have fooled me,” marking his heroism as up to professional standards.

In a similar use of fan knowledge, Hiro Nakamura of *Heroes* gains an understanding of his newfound power to bend space and time through his fandom. He explains to his friend Ando that “People think of time as a straight line, but time is actually more like this,” drawing a circle. When Ando wonders how he knows such things, Hiro explains “X-men #143, when Kitty Pryde time travels.” The story frequently positions Hiro as heroic, as when the narrator solemnly
intones, “For all his bluster, it is the sad province of man that he cannot choose his trials. He can only choose how he will stand when the call of destiny comes, hoping that he'll have the courage to answer” against a visual of Hiro looking determined and noble. Similarly, Hiro insists, in the face of Ando’s quite reasonable question “If there's a nuclear explosion, shouldn't we be running away from the bomb?” that “A hero doesn't run away from his destiny.” This heroism sits uneasily alongside his goofy, childish, excessive enthusiasm to the point of being inconsistent characterization, which underscores the difference of the fannish hero compared to the “Straighten up and fly white” redemption narrative.

In *Supernatural*, fans engaged in Live-Action Roleplay (LARPing) as real heroes Sam and Dean save the day in episode “The Real Ghostbusters.” These fans want to help even though they know there’s real danger and not just the mystery game they were initially playing. The fan dressed as Sam notes, “If all these people are seriously in trouble, we gotta do something,” despite their fear, because, as the fan dressed as Dean says, “That's what Sam and Dean would do.” In the end, the fans save not only all the other people at the fan convention but heroes Sam and Dean themselves, trapped and fighting for their lives against evil spirits right up until the fans dispel them. Here again the hero diverges substantially from the redemption narrative, as these two men are a couple. Their whiteness and maleness may be what allows them to be homosexual and still heroes, or it may just be the pressure of *Supernatural*’s fan base being so queerly invested in a Sam and Dean romance that non-incestuous gay men felt safe and normal by comparison. Certainly, the larger structure privileging masculinity remains in place in the episode, as fangirl Becky seems to participate in the recuperation narrative in that she eventually loses her fannish fixation in favor of dating novel author Chuck Shurley—far more in her league than hero Sam. However, the fact that the fanboys in the story get access to the Save-the-Day
narrative overshadows Becky’s heterosexual success, rendering fangirl achievements lesser in relation to fanboys in this discursive formation as well. With the fan hero narrative, fan knowledge or a fannish value system is a source of strength. Thus, all three of these figures act to articulate fandom to the good, whether directly or by contrast. This construction is relatively rare, but it’s there, and should be taken seriously even as it goes against the grain of the overall picture.

Coda

In the end, when industry is conscious about fans or approaching them directly, it turns out that this relationship is much nicer, more open, and generally grounded in a good attitude. Similarly, it’s important to note that the workers, universally, mean well. They definitely have conflicting loyalties, but fans are one of the loyalties. Indeed, harm to fans or constraint on their action nearly always comes from structural factors rather than the conscious intent of industry workers. This shift may be what others have identified as fan-friendliness—a move from rejection on purpose to rejection as an unintended consequence that is certainly a nontrivial improvement. However, it is a mistake to then not take seriously the anti-fan outcomes that arise even without aim. This project has made these consequences visible by disarticulating outcome and intent. The good news is that if these attitudes are genuine, they provide a potential entry point for finding places industry desires and fans desires don’t conflict. Thus, a true industry-fan partnership could make as much of those opportunities as possible—even if, when the desires of these two constituencies do contradict each other, the playing field is always tilted toward industry.
## Appendix

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