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Gatekeeping Remix: Fandom Spaces and Identity Politics

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GATEKEEPING REMIX: FANDOM SPACES AND IDENTITY POLITICS

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As people today spend more time online than ever, the question of how identities are constructed in different online spaces has become a critical question. One means of identity building is through remix, specifically when marginalized groups in particular insert themselves into exclusive spaces by reinterpreting existing work. One online space that engages in this work frequently is fandom, where fans excluded from larger narratives use fanfiction and fanart to create a space for themselves. Fandom provides an opportunity to see how an existing online culture navigates questions of conflicting identities through remix, and particularly how disagreements surrounding remix and identity are negotiated.

KEYWORDS: remix, online identity, fandom, disagreement, online aggression, digital media

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

I would like to propose an experiment. Go to the comments section of any article, right now, and see how long it takes for you to come across some kind of hostile disagreement. I'll wait.

It probably didn't take very long, at least if your social media is anything like mine. The climate of social media echoes our current sociopolitical situation, where argument has permeated everything. I've noticed two major threads: first, that many of the disagreements we see center around identity and what it means to be certain identities and what different groups are "allowed" to do. Second, many of these disagreements devolve quickly into personal insults, threats of violence, and other harmful moves. While these types of argument are certainly not new, and not as recent as many would believe, I do see how social media has put these ideas to the forefront. Therefore, one of the fundamental questions of digital rhetoric seems to be, "how do we conduct constructive disagreement on the internet?"

In order to explore a very small sliver of this topic, then, I decided to focus on a formative part of my internet experience: fandom and Tumblr. Fandom is a community of people who form a group based on a communal interest. Anything can be a fandom, in truth, but when I talk about fandom, I'm talking about the more traditional narrative of fandom, which surrounds a TV show, movie, book, video game or other media. Furthermore, the way I interpret "fandom" here involves a fan taking a source text and remixing it by writing fanfiction about it, or drawing the characters, or some other artistic interpretation of the text. Though there are other ways of engaging with a text as a fan, the fandom community I have experienced involves this world of fanfiction and remix. Beyond my own familiarity with the world of fandom, I chose fandom as the focus of my analysis because fandom and Tumblr exists, at least in reputation, as a space for

those individuals that don't fit the typical narrative shown by the media. Tumblr is supposedly a progressive space, a queer space, a feminist space. While this is true in a lot of ways (fandom was one of the first stepping stones of my learning about queer issues), there is also a great deal of work to be done in making fandom a welcoming space, and conversations surrounding what remix is acceptable and what is not is a huge part of the community.

Scholars, including Adam Banks in his book *Digital Griots,* have introduced the concept of remix as a mode where writers in digital spaces begin to see themselves as "remix DJs who are synthesizing multiple languages and forms of expression for multiple communities" (Banks 5). In saying this, Banks draws on the African-American experience and the cultural importance of DJing as remix by piecing together sections of existing work to make a new story. Furthermore, Banks describes the importance of remix in composition studies today by saying, "The beauty of the remix as trope is that in its focus on renewed vision, on re-vision, those doing the remixing never discard the original text. The antecedent remains an important part of the next text, the next movement; ancestors and elders remain clear, and even central, to the future text" (Banks 156). In particular, then, remix creates a space in composition for students from marginalized communities where remix works to disrupt power dynamics. Banks focuses on disrupting white supremacy in current narratives, but one can also see this work of disruption in remix questioning patriarchal, heterosexist, and cissexist narratives, among others.

Following from the work of Banks, one online arena where I see remix used as a large aspect of identity formation is in fandom spaces. My conception of the remix work that is done in fandom spaces draws on existing work, notably that of Kyle Stedman, Dustin Edwards, and Michele Knobel. Fanfiction, fanart, photo manipulation, and other fandom activities rely on remix in order to interact with existing works. My argument, based on these models of remix, is

that fans can use remix as a way of reclaiming texts that don't represent them. I propose this answer because in my experience through 11 years in fandom, fan communities that engage in fan remix are typically marginalized in some way, as fandoms online are often made up of women, people of color, and LGBTQ+ individuals, among others.

However, despite this, while remix can be used for subversion, such usage is not universal and disputing norms in one area does not guarantee similar critical thinking in another area. For example, while fanfiction that reimagines white male straight characters as LGBTQ+ is a common remix in fandom, there is still a great deal of racism and misogyny that permeates these remixes. As such, remix in fandom is a complex issue that cannot be classified as either total subversion of norms or confirmation of the status quo. Instead, remix is as messy and complicated as the rest of fandom. While that is an easy answer, it doesn't help us begin to untangle the complications to see how to start actually making the internet and the world become more welcoming.

Further, while remix is used as a way for fans to insert their own identities into canons that often exclude marginalized identities, much of the existing work in fandom studies discusses such remix as a singular act and as though all fandoms and fans are created equal in their use of remix. However, as in any space, identities are intersectional and conflicting, and the types of remix being done and by whom varies and occasionally causes conflict within these spaces.

While fandoms can be seen as just another name for affinity groups that form around a particular work, my research shows that it is more complicated than that. Subgroups form around particular groups within these fandoms based on characters and even further, interpretations of those characters and these subgroups generally tell us something about the identity of the members of the subgroup they belong to. Community interaction on Tumblr often relies on

creation and remix as the discussion starter or even as the form of discourse, and as such, subgroups crop up around these remixed creations and become the site through which we can observe how identities are curated within the site's framework.

In large part, individuals identify themselves partially by naming themselves as a member of this or that group. This naming, as Kenneth Burke has indicated, is an important piece of language used to form people's identities, particularly in online spaces. According to Burke's theory, "Identification is affirmed with earnestness precisely because there is division. Identification is compensatory to division" (22). I relate this concept to the idea of fandom division because it explains both why individuals flock to others with similar interests and yet why even within these affinity spaces, there is still division because of disagreements about how fans identify themselves within a fandom. Personal identity also relates to this idea, because fans have to purposefully name themselves as a member of a group in order to engage in certain kinds of discourse. In this way, identity is a central way that users on Tumblr engage in argument and persuasion.

Additionally, online spaces are particularly fruitful for such work because of its simultaneously public and private nature (McKee and Porter). Heidi McKee and James Porter discuss the potentially problematic ways in which the internet is conceived of by the academy. For example, "participants in online spaces do not always perceive their communications as public" (10), but groups like the CCCC contend that anything published online is fair game for public consumption. To be specific in terms of this project, fandom blurs the lines between public and private because users give away intensely personal information about their identities, including gender, race, sexual orientation and other things, while maintaining a level of distance

from their "real life" identities. Therefore, fandom presents a space where users are led to perform identity in specific ways because they are aware of their audience.

Furthermore, our identities are multi-layered, and as such, disagreements stemming from these identities are as well. Therefore, when examining such disagreements, taking into account the positionality of all parties involved is key. Additionally, current calls seeking middle ground on issues of marginality fall flat because asking marginalized individuals to compromise their identity creates a false compromise. Finally, many online disagreements, even in progressive spaces, can act to recreate harmful power dynamics which perpetuate harmful ideologies.

I.   Source Material

In terms of how I conducted my analysis, I examined the Tumblr community for the fandom of indie book series *All for the Game*. I chose this fandom for a few reasons. First, it is a small fandom, so it is easier to sift through content than in a larger community with more subgroups, such as Supernatural. Second, it is tightly knit, so there is more interaction than in a larger fandom where fans tend to be able to stick to their niches. Finally, on a pragmatic level, I am personally involved with the *AFTG* community, so I have more access and insight to how the fandom works.

All for the Game (AFTG) is a series focused on protagonist Neil Josten, who is recruited for a university level sports team at fictional Palmetto State University. The team is made up of individuals seeking a so-called second chance after trauma in their pasts, such as addiction, abuse, and other experiences. While at Palmetto, Neil meets several characters, such as his future partner Andrew Minyard. Throughout the series, he confronts his past and the series asks readers to consider issues of sexuality, trauma, friendship and other themes.

II.   Platform

I chose Tumblr over another space, like Archive of our Own, because in order to discuss discord in fandom spaces, there needs to be space for discussion. AO3, as a primarily fanfiction hosting site, is more isolated in that you go there to read what you want to and people tend to stay in their niche area. There is relatively little space for interaction between fans. The fanfiction community on Tumblr, by contrast, relies on discussion between fans. The platform of Tumblr itself became the home for fandom spaces (despite not being an entirely fandom-dedicated site) because of its social capabilities. Secondly, while AO3 is (for the most part) dedicated to fanfiction, Tumblr includes many different kinds of fan interaction, from fanfiction to fanart to meta commentaries, which all feed into these ideas of fan discord. Additionally, because of the dashboard format of Tumblr, a user's interests feed into each other instead of there being separate boards for different interests. Therefore, fandom conversations don't necessarily exist in isolation from each other the way they might on other fansites.

As far as limitations of this platform, I was more limited to what I had available on my dashboard and from blogs I follow, because the searching and archiving functions are more limited than on a site like AO3, where their primary function is as a fandom archive. However, the increased interaction of Tumblr as a social media platform and my own familiarity with Tumblr's interface made it the ideal choice for this project despite its shortcomings.

III.   Methodology

For my methodology, I took a mainly autoethnographic approach, by looking through posts that individuals made surrounding the issues I was concerned about. I adhered to a feminist approach of autoethnography, because I participated in the fandom as regularly as I would have otherwise, and coming from a place of understanding and good faith in my analysis. In my

methods, I draw on the work of Mary Sheridan and her feminist approach to ethnography, stating that the goals of ethnography are to understand how the community being studied works and to mold the researcher's practices to those community norms.

For my own study, this approach to ethnography indicates my openness to keeping my methodology flexible throughout the whole process of the project. Additionally, I was able to approach my study differently than others in fandom studies particularly because I am a member of the group I studied. While much of the fandom scholarship I read prior to this project was done by individuals outside of the communities they studied, it was important to me that I speak from my personal experiences and a fandom I had a stake in, because I can better understand the complexities of that individual community, rather than fandom as a whole. Additionally an autoethnographic approach was best because being immersed in the fandom space myself allowed me both a better grounding in my insights and an investment in portraying the community fairly, instead of as an outside space open to judgement. In short, I didn't search for shortcomings, but rather sites of community, acknowledging that discord is a fundamental part of all communities, as a contrast to fandom scholarship I had experienced before.

With that being said, since I am coming from a feminist autoethnographical approach, I still want to work to protect my users, even in a public space. Therefore, I am enacting these principles by considering the complex reasons individuals have for their opinions and showing multiple perspectives, and not labeling certain actions as more valid than others. Additionally, I speak about my own experiences as much as others' experiences, indicating that I too have a personal stake in this research, and that my goal is to come from a place of wanting to portray this community fairly and charitably, acknowledging my own positionality as frequently as possible. Finally, this project is a feminist autoethnographical project because one of the goals of

feminist work is to interrogate power dynamics created by different spaces, as well as to try to mitigate furthering these power dynamics in our work. Throughout this project, I was committed to showing how fandom disagreement can help to reinforce misogynistic, heteronormative and ableist hegemonies, which aligns with the goals of feminist autoethnography.

IV.   Methods

The data I collected consisted of screenshots of posts discussing the different points of fandom inquiry I explain above. These posts are commentaries on characterization, validity of ships and worlds being created. In short, I collected posts that qualified as meta-commentary on the fandom itself, rather than fan creations themselves. I also looked at comments on fan creations that constitute such meta-commentary. For each subset, I gathered as many posts as I could initially, but limited my sample to a few posts per chapter.

To collect data, I looked through the "tags" of certain characters and ships within the fandom. These tags are built into Tumblr's interface as a way of sorting through data so users can find specific content. I also used my own blog for content I had seen over the past two and a half years I spent in this fandom for more evidence. Then, I stored screenshots of posts in a Google Doc. I also used my own Tumblr profile for likes, which are visible only to me and built into Tumblr's interface, in order to keep the original post easily accessible. However, the screenshots were necessary in case a blogger deleted their post and I no longer had access to it. I did not use these screenshots in my analysis, instead using general quotes and pieces of posts. This is because users frequently change usernames or deactivate their accounts, making it difficult to reach them for permission. However, since all posts made on Tumblr are public, I have decided, under advisement from IRB, that they are still within rights to use without counting as human subjects research.

V.   Chapters

The second chapter explores how remix is used to change the canon or not. Which canon elements are accepted or rejected by a subset of a fandom could reveal some of the ideologies used in fandom. Certain fandoms and fans are more dedicated to the canon than others. Therefore, the argument becomes whether or not remix is necessary or even allowed within that space. Additionally, I propose that many of the arguments on Tumblr and beyond are not in stasis and therefore propose that such disagreements should be explored by using identity and the points of stasis as screens to determine where disagreement is occurring and how to address it.

The third chapter largely discusses how the interpretation of characters is a very personal issue and tensions can be raised in disagreements surrounding characterization because of their ties to marginalized groups. However, the opportunities for such subversion to flourish is limited by gatekeeping in the community, such as harassing creators who remix characters in ways that are deemed unacceptable, sometimes to the point that creators stop remixing entirely. Disagreement in these spaces, especially public disagreement, therefore holds another purpose. Rather than aiming to change the other party's mind, many disagreements are instead used as a signal to others with the same opinion that they are a member of that group. In many of these disagreements, then, the dominant opinion is allowed to make its way to the forefront and the less popular opinion is buried.

The fourth chapter focuses on two areas of disagreement about relationships in fiction. First, there are disagreements about which ships are acceptable or deserving of attention. The second concerns how these ships can or cannot be shipped, and what dynamics can and should be shown within these relationships. I have found that conversations surrounding shipping often reveal power dynamics in terms of which relationships get prioritized (often those concerning white

men), as well as create boundaries about what kinds of relationship dynamics are acceptable surrounding norms such as marriage.

Finally, my conclusion describes the implications of my findings, including further work I and others can do to continue exploring how identity and the complexity therein can both create and deconstruct boundaries within online communities, because these identities frame our positionality in different arguments. As such, the complexity and intersectionality of identity in online spaces plays a role in online aggression, and should continue to be addressed in scholarship and in the classroom.

CHAPTER II: TO CANON OR NOT TO CANON: STASIS THEORY AND UNSOLVABLE

ARGUMENTS ON TUMBLR

Whether we're talking characters, ships, or something else entirely, the sacred cow of fandom seems to be canon. No matter if a user adheres to or rejects canon, your perspective on canon nevertheless shapes your attitude towards fandom and your fandom experience. Therefore, in this chapter, I tackle the biggest rift in fandom circles: how to interpret the canon that fans are working with in creating their remixes.

During the process of writing this project, I had a rather interesting conversation with my sister over breakfast about what canon and fanfiction meant to us respectively, and found that even though we have been in fandom for the same amount of time, our ways of interacting with the space are very different. She adheres to a more faithful understanding of the canon, where the remix she values is extending the story outside of the canon. She also said that her understanding of fanfiction is a lot of wish fulfillment, and that she doesn't read alternate universe (AU) fanfiction because it isn't realistic and doesn't line up with what would actually happen.

"But isn't that the fun of fanfiction?" I asked her.

She paused for a moment. "Not for me. It just seems very…idealistic."

I was admittedly perplexed. "Well, it's not like I want everything I see in fanfiction to happen in canon."

"You don't?"

Our conversation went on like this for a while, with us learning about our different ways of looking at fandom. Leaving the conversation and ruminating on it for the next few days, I was confronted with just how much canon lay at the heart of my entire project. I incorrectly assumed implicitly that all fans saw canon the way I did, and in doing so I became a living example of

how disagreements manifest in fandom spaces, and other online spaces today. We assume that we are having conversations about the same thing, when we in fact are talking around and over each other. Additionally, since remix in the form of fanfiction and meta posts typically are used to somehow interject into problematic norms in fandom communities, canon is often wielded as a weapon to combat these interjections. Therefore, this chapter deals less with actual remixes and more with how disagreements on the canon affect not only how people remix, but also which remixes are taken seriously. The prioritization of remixes is important to address because conversations of validity can lead to repercussions for those whose ideas on canon do not align with the larger fandom.

I.   Stasis Theory, Terministic Screens, and Tumblr

With that in mind, stasis theory can help reveal how many of the arguments on Tumblr and beyond result in hostility and gatekeeping because users are not arguing on the same points. Stasis theory, at its core, establishes what is being argued by different parties and determines whether people are speaking around each other based on certain categories of stasis. Some of these questions include: 1) the facts, i.e. did something happen?; 2) the definition, i.e. what happened?; 3) the quality, i.e. is it positive or negative?; and 4) the policy, i.e. what should be done? (Purdue). Under stasis theory, then, agreement cannot be found between participants unless they are debating the same issue. Additionally, Sharon Crowley states that "argument entails the exchange of claims and evidence about a disputed position; minimally it requires an advocate to recognize that an opponent has a position on the issue at hand" (29). Furthering her point about stasis and its role in contemporary argument, she goes on to say that:

> If participants in a dispute do not formulate the position about which they disagree, the
> necessary respect for an other may not be in play, and neither the conduct nor the

outcome of the argument may be just. Rhetorically speaking, if stasis is not achieved, each side may generate all the evidence in the world to support its claims and yet never engage in argument." (29)

Based on Crowley's characterization of stasis and its role in contemporary discourse, I see several parallels. First, I see that individuals in fandom disagreements are often unwilling to acknowledge that there is an "other" in the discussion at hand. For example, if one individual is attempting to articulate a position on the canon, and one of their arguments is to say that canonicity does not matter and therefore fans are free to remix in whatever way they choose, individuals can differ on the issue of mattering, but not engage in conversations beyond that. If, on the other hand, someone is articulating a point about mindful representation of marginalized communities in media, refusing to understand that another user may understand the language used differently because of their identity, that also halts the progression of argument. In itself, neither of these positions is necessarily problematic. After all, no one is obliged to engage in such discourse, especially if doing so would be to the detriment of their mental health (for instance, marginalized people should not be obliged to defend their personhood to others). However, in many cases within fandom, a lack of meaningful discourse occurs when one individual is discussing representation while another is discussing canon. In other words, unsolvable arguments occur when these arguments are not in stasis.

In terms of fandom then, there are a few typical threads of argument that align with the different categories of stasis theory. First, in terms of fact, there are questions of whether there is a problem in canon, for example, whether plot holes are in fact plot holes. Second, for definition, there are conversations about what kind of problem is occurring. For example, questions of whether a problem on the page is character-based or author-based fall under this category. Third,

for quality, there are conversations about whether a certain decision by either a character or author is a good decision or not. Finally, under policy, there is the question of what can or should be done about any issues. Conversations about proper representation of marginalized communities and what should be done by authors and fandoms about representation typically fall under policy. My characterization of fandom is just one possible reading of the different categories, however. There are many arguments that have not been considered here, and many who would argue that the categories differ.

Another theory relevant to our understanding of how the differing conversations surrounding canon affect remix is that of Kenneth Burke's terministic screens. Terministic screens, in essence, describe how language is used to draw our attention towards certain ideas and away from differing ideas, which in turn incites us to act in certain ways in accordance with the attitudes that such language induces in us. In other words, "Even if any given terminology is a *reflection* of reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must be a *selection* of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a *deflection* of reality" (45). As such, the words used to describe a situation operate on three levels.

First, they reflect, or express a certain worldview, or perception of reality. The idea of perception is key, because our perception of the world affects how we see different situations. Therefore, when we select a particular version of reality, we are bringing attention to that worldview while taking attention away from other ideas. To use an example with fandom, using language and symbols through remix to bring attention to an interpretation of a character as a messiah figure deflects a more critical view of that character as a less heroic figure. Any time people engage in literary criticism (or other kinds of analysis), we are engaging with terministic screens in that we are choosing a version of a text that aligns with our worldview, and rejecting

that which we disagree with, and encouraging others to have a specific kind of attitude toward the text and to act in ways that align with that attitude.

Second, the language used under certain screens leads us to hold certain beliefs that spring from that language. So, for example, in fandom there is sometimes tension between someone being a rival versus being a bully. These words create different attitudes, and thus, different feelings toward characters and dynamics depending on how you look at a situation. If you see two characters who bicker as rivals, the attitude one might have is that the two characters are equals, who have the same goal that the other person stands in the way of, though they otherwise have the same chance of attaining that goal. If, on the other hand, you view one character as a bully, the attitude that springs from that characterization could be one where one character holds an unhealthy amount of power over the other character, and that they are maliciously trying to keep them from attaining their goal, in ways that are undeserved or unduly harmful to the other party.

The third and final level of language under this theory is that it encourages us to perform certain actions based on the attitudes that emerge from language. To further the last example, someone who views the characters as rivals may be induced to write fanfiction about the characters engaging in playful banter, perhaps even progressing to a romantic relationship (this phenomenon has a name, the rivals-to-lovers trope). However, someone who views one of the characters as a bully rather than a rival, may be uncomfortable with depictions of the two characters in a romantic relationship. This discomfort may lead them to act by speaking up against what they see as an unhealthy ship, leading to the kind of character discussions I describe throughout this project.

In turn, what I am suggesting through this project is that identity, as well as the different points of stasis theory, are all screens through which people understand fandom, and the differences in these screens may lead to some of the disagreements that can seem unsolvable, because they show us when individuals are having different arguments, while also illuminating how different individuals derive different meanings from the same symbols or use of language. I am drawing on Burke's theory in order to explain how users on Tumblr are called to understand common fandom descriptors and phenomena differently depending on their individual experiences with certain words.

Additionally, our identities, when understood as screens, enable us to participate differently in discussions about those identities based on our experiences surrounding certain language. In particular, when it comes to the discussion about portrayals of different marginalized identities in remix, there is a perspective that those who are marginalized have that those without that identity may lack. In other words, people's lived experiences of marginality creates a different way of seeing the world, and thus, of using language.

That difference does not make discussion impossible, but it limits the amount of engagement possible by those on the outside. For example, in a discussion about sexism in media, women have a specific screen through which they view the world that men are not privy to in the same way based on their lived experiences. As an example, in fandom, if a woman is described as bossy, some may say that such a characterization is sexist because a man who performed the same actions would not be described as such. Women may disagree on the language used based on their own gendered experiences with the word, since some women may find being called bossy as empowering, while others find it degrading. Others may simply disagree about whether the characterization is fair at all. However, women talking about their

lived experiences with a word and its connotations is different than a man commenting on that

word without having it used to describe him in the same gendered ways. Therefore, what can

appear as a conversation about a character's actions can in fact become a conversation about

what words are acceptable to apply to women characters. The former creates equal footing

among all individuals who have engaged in the media discussed; the latter relies on the identities

of the individuals debating in terms of the sensitivity required of all individuals to not discount

other's lived experiences. Unfortunately, however, in many online spaces, marginalized

individuals are chastised for calling upon their identities and experiences in argument.

This is not to say that all women will have the same experience and will use language in

the same way, as this would be too essentialist of an argument. Rather, what I mean is that how

the individual in question sees their identity will inform their understanding of language. So, a

woman may use language in ways that encourage sexist actions if the way she has experienced

womanhood calls her to view women in such a way. By contrast, a woman who has been taught

that certain language is offensive to women may be called to act differently based on this

perception. However, no matter the interpretation, women have more of a stake in the

conversation than men do, because whether they agree or not, they are the ones whose lived

experiences are affected by others use of language. Therefore, the conversation is different for

the two sides in these cases, as one side is being made to defend their identity, while the other

side is having a purely abstract discussion.

The different components of stasis can act as screens as well, because they call us to use

language in different ways depending on what is at issue. So, for example, say there is a fandom

discussion about whether a non-canon relationship has any basis in canon. From someone

arguing on the virtue of conjecture (whether something happened), they may use language such

as, "this pairing came out of nowhere," indicating that the relationship is not supported by the text. This can cause further actions in the form of defining the relationship in certain ways. For example, a ship with no basis in canon is sometimes called a crackship, with a pejorative connotation that implies that anyone who supports that pairing must be "on crack". This characterization stands in contrast to pairings that are deemed rare pairs, which implies that the ship is valid, but simply unpopular or not well known. Such language has an effect on how different ships are treated in the fandom, in terms of which ones are permitted to be submitted for fandom-wide events, as well as which ones get attention.

Because of the effect this language has on perceptions and treatment of certain ships in the fandom, then, fans instead may argue not on conjecture, but on quality, saying that whether or not it's canon is not what ultimately matters. Rather, the fact that it could be positive representation for a marginalized group, as is the case for chronically underrepresented female/female relationships, is worth discussing. Therefore, fans who are arguing on quality will see the argument differently, and thus use language in different ways. For these fans, then, the phrase "came out of nowhere" has different connotations. In this context, the phrase has the effect of reducing something that represents their identity to a crackship, something undeserving of attention or consideration. In this way, the different points of stasis induce people to make different arguments and act differently, which has a material effect on the arguers.

Furthermore, understanding stasis theory will not instantly resolve all discussions. It can simply help make them possible, and ensure that individuals are meeting each other on the same ground and understanding what is at issue before forming arguments. As it pertains to fandom, for example, how certain individuals engage with canon and with fandom itself are key to understanding what the eternal arguments of fandom are, at least as I have experienced them.

The two key constructs are first, how much canon is to be taken into account by fans, and second, whether fans are using remix responsibly. Stasis theory tends to come into play when users confuse which conversation is being had. For example, if one user is debating an interpretation of canon and trying to "prove" that their interpretation is correct, while the other person is talking about whether the portrayal of a character of a certain identity is respectful, the two users are having different conversations.

II.   Marginality

In the same way, in fandom, many of the discussions about whether certain portrayals of identity are respectful raise the stakes for certain individuals in ways that make stasis difficult to maintain. When one member of a conversation is being made to essentially defend their identity and personhood, a power dynamic is created in which the individual who does not share the marginalized identity in question is able to have a discussion they ultimately have no personal stake in, while the marginalized individual is being asked to perform a great deal of emotional labor. Thus, the discussion is not an equal one. In terms of remix, then, discussions about which remixes are valid come down to identity and who has the right to speak about issues of marginality and in what ways. The conversation about how one is allowed to interpret characters is not an equal one as long as certain members are being asked to ignore their experiences with that story or are told that it is "just fiction." For marginalized individuals, the depiction of identities is never "just" anything; these depictions have consequences, in terms of how both individuals and groups are treated outside of fiction. With that said, there are two core constructs that, in my experience, remain unresolvable in fandom: canon and representation.

The first core construct in most fandoms is over canon—what is it, does it matter, how much it does it need to be adhered to, and so on. In relation to remix, all fandom—and by

19

extension, every reading of a text—is an interpretation. Without being the author of a particular

text, it is impossible to write characters in exactly the same way as the original creator.

Therefore, any subsequent depiction of that character is like an impression of the original. The

disagreement between fans, then, becomes not whether a fan creator is writing the character in

accordance with the original author, but rather how well it aligns with that particular user's

interpretation of the character. For example, to use a popular culture example, in *Game of*

Thrones, whether a fan saw Daenerys Targaryen's actions in seasons one through seven as

villainous or heroic affects how that viewer interprets her actions in season eight. In the online

fandom, interpretations are made more visible through the use of remix because creators'

interpretations of characters affect their remix. To further the same example, individuals who

interpret Daenerys's actions as evil will often adhere to such a view in their fanfictions,

photoshop edits and other remixes. For example, one could pick an image of Daenerys with her

dragon, in a dark palette, and place a quote associated with evil over it. Depicting Daenerys as

such would be reappropriating the quote in a new context, which is a type of remix.

For those who did not see Daenerys as a villain, however, the season eight canon did not

align with their interpretation of the character, and as such, their post season eight remixes

differed. Many viewers who disagreed with the character choices made in season eight went on

to remix in different ways than those whose interpretation was validated by canon. One way

viewers who fell into this camp used remix was by writing "fix it" fics, where the purpose is to

write fanfiction that corrects those events that were, to these viewers, wrong in canon. Different

examples include changes as small as having one character that died in canon live, to novel-

length fanfictions that reimagine entire seasons of the show. In this way, remix is being used in

order to reaffirm a viewer's interpretation of a character so that it gets back to how they see the character.

The idea of remix as a tool to express a certain interpretation of a character is tied to the second construct, that of fiction representing marginalized communities. The action of reclaiming a character through remix is important because how users see characters is in many cases tied to identity. People tend to identify with characters they see themselves in, or who they want to emulate. Therefore, when creators do not portray these identities respectfully, or rely on sexist, racist, homophobic and ableist tropes in their storytelling, individuals who are marginalized will use remix to challenge these norms because the problematic portrayals of characters with marginalized identities can perpetuate harm to real life individuals with those identities. Therefore, individuals who connect with certain characters because they share an identity with that character may feel more invested in ensuring that their portrayal is positive and respectful. Likewise, marginalized individuals will often remix characters in ways that project a marginalized identity onto them because they see themselves in that character.

Because of how identity is entwined with remix, the argument about respectful utilization of marginalized identities is fundamentally a conversation about creator's intentions, whereas conversations about canon are about characters and their actions. Therefore, the two conversations are incongruous with each other. Talking about creator's intentions when questioning a remix of a character can be easily dismissed because in much of fandom, canon is seen as partially irrelevant. If one ascribes to the death of the author in their fandom experience, it doesn't matter what the original intent of the author was. Indeed, many remixes exist specifically to increase diversity that creators left out. The idea of remix as corrective representative action, then, connects back to the idea of terministic screens because it reminds us

that marginalized fans are often looking at these pieces of media through a different lens than the author, and that each kind of marginality is itself a different screen to look through. Therefore, remix can be a means through which an individual articulates their viewpoint or lens on that media to others. While one person may see a character the same way as an author does, another individual with different life experiences can see them differently.

Furthermore, the mindset of whether canon makes sense with characterization clashes with discussions about how media acts as representation because they are unequal conversations in terms of effect. One is a conversation made for fans about storytelling, while the other is about material effects of certain depictions on individuals. The creator's intention, as well as the perspective of those affected by existing representation, is crucial to conversations about representation because these intentions highlight how the viewpoints of creators played into depictions of characters, while the perspective of those affected highlights potential harms caused by such representations.

However, when individuals cross the two conversations, it can create an impossible bind. For example, consider again the discussion of whether Daenerys is villainous. Some say that the portrayal of Daenerys as "going mad" is both sexist and ableist, because it sends the message that power is corrupting, but only for women, as well as equating unspecified or explored mental illness with evil deeds. Those who defend villainous Daenerys make the mistake of engaging with the first argument (which is what? that it's sexist, or that the character is villainous? canon) rather than the second (which is what? representation). They do this by stating that there was foreshadowing for her storyline and that her actions in the show lined up with previous characterization choices. But what their line of argument fails to engage with is the fact that individuals who disagree are not engaging with whether her actions made sense in canon. Rather,

they are questioning the implications of the creators' choices in writing her a certain way. Therefore, the two parties cannot engage in a productive discussion because they are not debating the same issue.

III.   A Fandom Example

Before exploring how one's understanding of the canon fundamentally affects remix, I first need to show how canon affects how fans interact with a fandom. There are as many methods of tackling canon as they are fandoms and users, but there are a few patterns that deserve attention here. First, there are fans who strive to adhere to canon whenever possible, and whose fanworks and interactions with canon work from within that framework. On the other end of the spectrum, there are fans who essentially disregard canon and move forward as though canon does not exist or matter. Far more common, however, are users who work in the interstitial space where some canon elements are accepted and some are discarded. The contradictory space of fandom, and the decisions made and negotiated between fans on what elements should and should not be adhered to, reveals a great deal about these spaces. Therefore, I will turn to *All for the Game* to show how these ideas are negotiated.

Fans in the *AFTG* fandom hotly discuss many elements of characters and their actions. Much of the discussion on these issues comes down to a discussion about the author and their intentions or understanding while writing a scene. Therefore, I will discuss a scene that is particularly contentious in the fandom and the different strategies groups use to argue about their interpretations, and in particular how the argument is not in stasis. There is a scene in the third book in the series where, after Neil has been through a significant trauma, Andrew helps Neil shower in light of his injuries and the scene turns to a sexual encounter between them. The scene is contested in fandom based on a few factors: first, that the scene is problematic in its

representation of gay men; second, that it is problematic in its implications about trauma and consent; and third, that it warrants heavier criticism because it was a gay male love scene written by a self-professed straight woman. These different elements add together to express how identity performance plays a role in deciding who is allowed to remix and in what ways. Discussion surrounding the shower scene also shows, to perhaps a greater extent than the issues in the other chapters, just how heated conversations surrounding identity politics can get in fandom spaces.

To begin, the post that seemed to begin the conversations surrounding the shower scene read, "anyway hot (correct) take but the shower scene in tkm is not good. It's out of place and out of character and was onlg [sic] written bc I guess gay men are just horny all the time and sex obsessed" (transneiljosten). This post set off a chain of different users expressing their agreement or disagreement on the issue in ways that mirror discussions surrounding fan remix. However, the way the different disagreements were received by the different parties involved marked the surrounding conversation as different from others that centered around characters, ships, and fan activities, perhaps partially because it centered on the actual canon of the story.

Once the post was made, the first response was for individuals who agreed to reblog the post and state their agreement in the tags or for individuals to reply to the post. Interestingly, the original post has no reblogs from anyone who disagrees, and actually only 6 reblogs and 60 notes total, which seems strange for a post that caused the amount of backlash it did. The rest of the notes are comprised of people who liked the post (which does not necessarily denote agreement; people like posts for a multitude of reasons) or those who replied to the post. The replies were the first step in the conversation, where those who disagreed with the post came to the source of the disagreement and expressed why they disagreed. One user expressed their disagreement in a

long response essentially saying that the original poster was misunderstanding the scene and that it made sense with the plot and Andrew and Neil's overall arcs, pointing out in particular how their relationship was already sexual, and how the moment was not merely an unfeeling sex scene as the original user suggests, but rather that it was an intimate moment of feeling where Andrew and Neil got closer to each other and that it tracked with what we knew of Andrew and Neil's warped sense of intimacy. Here, I see the first threads of an instance where stasis has been disrupted because the responding individual answers in a way that assumes the original post was about canon. However, the original user was actually expressing an argument about authorial intention and representation of gay men in media. Therefore, the two arguments were incongruous.

In response to that answer, the original poster responded in two ways. First, they drew away from the plot and the characters and redirected the conversation toward the author, stating that "the scene was literally just there so she could fulfill whatever fantasy she had" (transneiljosten). The main opponent to the original post then went on to say that "nora has always treated her characters with respect and ur doing them a total disservice by completely overlooking who they are" (minyahrt). They go on to say that neither Neil nor Andrew react to their trauma in neat or healthy ways, so going out of the way to show an overly sweet or comforting scene as the original poster indicated would be inappropriate. Rather than answer any of these points directly, however, the original poster responded to their answer by saying, "jesus do you have any reading comprehension" (transneiljosten). From then on, the original poster did not respond further on the post itself.

Ultimately, the chain of events that occurred in the notes of the original post reveals how arguments on canon are often not in stasis. The individuals disagreeing on the post were simply

not having the same argument. The original poster was arguing an issue of defining the problem. They were stating that the issue was one of homophobia and problematic representations of trauma. Rather than question the original poster on the point made, however, the respondent instead brought up an issue of fact. The respondent didn't say that a different issue was going on in the scene; they outright denied that there was a problem to be considered at all. Thus, rather than actually dealing with the points at hand, they indirectly insinuated that the original poster was creating a problem where there was none. By not engaging with the argument being made by the first user, the second user trivialized the original poster's argument, which made it effectively impossible to reach agreement or understanding on the argument at hand.

After the first two posts, another user expressed their disagreement by making their own post rebutting the original point. They begin the post by stating, "I'm seeing some things going around stating that the shower scene in TKM is out of character and reinforcing some sort of cliché about gay men and it makes me realize that people maybe don't understand all the roles sex can play in a relationship" (fuzzballsheltiepants). The move of making a post to answer trends they dislike is a common move on Tumblr, as has been expressed with the popularity of reminder posts and the like. However the original poster did not even want to engage with the issue further. When they eventually reblogged the post, their only comment was "Hi if you're going to vague about me, then @ or dm me instead of being a coward ☺" (transneiljosten). They did not comment on the issue further, at least not in a public manner. Their response calls back in some ways to Crowley's characterization of stasis, in that if individuals do not hold respect for other views, no argument can take place. However, when considering how marginality plays a role in discussions of media, one can better understand why someone would be unwilling to engage with individuals who, because of their own life experiences, may not fully be capable of

understanding the points being made. What's more, Crowley states that "people do not enter into argument because they do not wish to risk having their minds changed. Argument entails the risk because of its requirement of exchange" (30). In terms of the conversation at hand, then, individuals on both sides did not view the other's argument as a valid argument and, seeing that there would be no way to change their mind, the original user simply abstained from commenting further.

The act of removing oneself completely from the public discourse is not wholly unusual in my experience (fandom discourse is ever present, but individual disagreements tend to fizzle fast). What was unusual was outright referring to someone engaging in common community practices as cowardly. The frustrated reaction brings up another example of users not having the same conversation and therefore talking around each other. One user seemed to be arguing about canon and the characters, while another user saw the post as an attack on them. Part of the reason for frustration is the identity politics that permeates the discussion of the scene. The original poster was not criticizing the characters as the respondent seemed to indicate. Rather, they were commenting on the author and the story they were telling and whether they made responsible decisions with the story they were conveying. In this way, there is a disparity between individuals who are arguing about the work as a piece of literature versus people who are arguing about real world issues as seen through literature. The line between these two is thin, but it is an important line to draw moving forward. To examine how these arguments break down, I will examine the post in question in terms of four areas that comprise typical fandom arguments.

IV.   Identity, Authorship, Site, and Context

The first dimension of typical fandom arguments is identity and who has the right to speak on certain issues. While the original poster did not comment further on the issue, others came in

expressing their point of view. Interestingly, the conversation moved away from the scene itself and on to who was qualified to speak on the issue of gay male representation in the books. The original poster made the argument that individuals who were not part of the group being represented (or misrepresented) were not able to comment on the issue because they were not part of the group being discussed. In short then, this was an in-group conversation and those in the out-group did not have the necessary means to discuss the issue. When all parties agree that the argument they are having is over responsible representation, their argument makes sense, even if individuals disagree with the point being made. Reasonable people can disagree on who is qualified to enter into the discussion on representation. In other words, stasis can be achieved on the topic of representation as long as individuals are all making points regarding how certain scenes or remixes affect individuals who are part of the group being represented.

However, for individuals who are not discussing that issue, but rather how the scene works as a piece of fiction, the answer given is not helpful. Looking at the rebuttal post, instead of dealing with the question of how gay men should be represented in fiction, the answering user instead deals almost entirely with the question of whether Andrew and Neil's actions make sense to them as characters. For example, they say "that's why it's the first time Andrew lets himself get off with Neil still there. Neil doesn't totally understand it, though he's obviously really happy about it, because sex means different things for him than it does for Andrew" (fuzzballsheltiepants). They go on expressing their viewpoint for the remainder of the post, in essence trying to explain why the scene is in character.

However, for all the writer's best intentions, their point is not taken up by those they are attempting to reach because it is not answering the question that the original post was asking. Instead of addressing the question of "does this scene responsibly portray gay men?", it is

answering the question, "did this scene make sense for Andrew and Neil?" The distinction between the two conversations is important because as long as users are not answering the same question, nothing can be done to advance the argument in any meaningful way. Instead, both parties simply remain angry because they are not being understood. However, the effects of that lack of stasis are different. For those discussing canon, they are just convinced that they are being told they are wrong for seeing characters a certain way. For those discussing representation of their professed identities, though, there is a feeling of having their experiences and views dismissed on their own marginality.

As such, the conversation remains stagnant until two users continue the conversation in the notes of the post. One user begins by saying, "as a mlm [man-loving-man], I agree with OP" (raggedadler-skullandreskull). The move of identifying themselves as part of the same identification group as the creator of the originally contested post (who identified themselves as a mlm in another reply not discussed here) is important because it establishes them as on equal footing for the actual question being considered by the original poster. It also eliminates the possibility of using the argument that the user is unqualified to comment. Then, the user lays out their reasoning for why they didn't object to the scene personally. The addition of a voice from the same professed identity helps move the argument into stasis first because it meets the original poster on the point they are actually arguing, which is representation of gay men. Second, it helps because the two individuals can see each other on equal footing, instead of one user having to trust that their identity will not be belittled or mocked.

From there, another user interjects to say, "I'm also a mlm…but I'm also allowed to express discomfort lol?" (orgasmicmilkshakes). Their answer once again uses personal identification as a way of establishing ethos in relation to the conversation being had. Once

they've done this, the two users have been able to assure each other that they are having the same conversation in regards to representation. Because they agree on the point of disagreement, the first user is able to say, "trying to invalidate someone with a reasonable argument just because they're not 'one of us' doesn't seem very fair." In response, the second user answers, "myself and other mlm friends spoke about how the scene made us uncomfortable. And I made a simple point about how it was inappropriate that op, who made this post in response to us doing that, was policing us and dismissing our discomfort as entirely unfounded". In this way, the two users are now having the same conversation, and they can still disagree, but they can do so in a more constructive manner.

Additionally, the exchange between the above users also reveals how the performance of identity works in these kinds of arguments. Many arguments about who has the right to comment on representation, or who has the right to remix characters and in what ways, ties back to what questions are being asked and to whom. It's understandable that fans would be frustrated to feel excluded from a conversation that is purely based on the events of a book series. However, coming from the vantage point of individuals from one group connecting on shared issues of frustration within that group, it is also understandable to see why these individuals would be upset at others commenting on their in-group conversations. Therefore, until the issue is in stasis, very little can be done to resolve the argument.

The next overarching theme of the disagreement seemed to hinge on whether the author's intentions matter in the discussion of canon at all. Those who thought the scene was in poor taste called the author's intentions into question, saying that her positionality as a professed straight woman made it difficult, if not impossible, for her to write a sensitive depiction of gay men. The profession of identity, or one's perceived identity, is important when considering internet

discourse because there often is no way to tell if someone is who they profess to be online. Therefore, identity online is all about the construction of said identity and performing that identity in order to achieve certain goals. In online contexts, profession of identity is sometimes seen as insidious, but performance of identity is something done in everyday contexts all the time.

In terms of the author of a work, then, the issue of identity can become particularly fraught. The writing community (particularly in YA/new adult spaces) has become focused lately on Own Voices, in which priority is given to stories told by authors who are members of the community they are representing. While this movement does a lot of good in terms of increasing the visibility of marginalized authors, it can also create problems in terms of increased pressure for authors to out themselves in terms of their marginalization, which is particularly problematic for those with queer identities because it forces people into a position of public marginalization they may not be equipped to face. Therefore, the blanket statement that only those with a professed identity are fit to write those narratives is one that is contested, depending on the screen through which an individual is operating.

Because queer marginalization is a type of marginalization that in many cases requires the bearer of the identity to profess that identity, as opposed to gender or race, which are typically more visible (though this is not universally true), the issue of queer identity and authors can feel different because it requires authors to be open about their identities in specific ways. As such, readers can only take the author on what they publicly profess their identity to be. In terms of *AFTG*, then, readers take author Nora Sakavic at her word that she is a straight woman. In itself, I don't believe this is disqualifying in terms of writing queer narratives, but I do think that writing narratives about characters whose identities you do not share requires an added element

31

of sensitivity, and as such, those who are of the identity being portrayed have the right to express their displeasure with the depiction, which is where remix comes into play. Their criticism comes from a place of wanting to articulate their experiences and seeing it reflected. In other words, criticism and remix bring to light experiences that have been deflected under certain screens.

What's more, the author, as the creator of the world and characters being explored by fans, has a great deal of power over the narrative. In early fandom, when creators did not support certain portrayals of their characters (*Star Wars*, *Game of Thrones*, Anne Rice, *Outlander*), they would sometimes take legal action against fans ("Cease and Desist") in more extreme cases, or in milder ones, would express disgust with the idea of fanfiction ("Diana Gabaldon"). Often, these reactions would be in direct response to fans creating queer remixes of their characters. Once fandom became more mainstream, however, the power began to shift away from the creator and onto the fans. Therefore, canon became a way for fans to do the work of gatekeeping themselves, with the help of things like bonus content, or social media engagement, because it allowed fans to call back on content outside of the source material to do the work of shutting down marginalized views on the work, or remixes that attempted to see the work through a new lens. The status quo is then sustained because the types of terministic screens that are allowed into the community are limited to those that align with the norm.

Third, the site the discourse occurs in is also important to how identity plays into the disagreement. One of the difficulties of navigating Tumblr is its simultaneously public and private nature. Unless a user makes a post privately (in which case, the post is only viewable to the user), posts are public and anyone can see them, even if they don't have a Tumblr account. However, the pseudonymous nature of Tumblr, combined with the blogging nature of the website, makes it difficult to create boundaries in the same ways as other social media. For

example, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other similar social media are all typically tied to the user's "real life" identity, and therefore have audiences that the user can reasonably expect to see in person in their everyday lives. On Tumblr, however, users have no such expectation that their profiles will lead back to their everyday lives. Therefore, the construction of their identity in a space is necessarily different because they can express themselves in ways they may not be able to in other contexts where their expression could have more material consequences.

Similar to the ways that fans disagreeing on whether legitimacy matters when considering ships, whether a user sees Tumblr as a public or private space also has an effect on how users enter into disagreements with other users. For example, some users will make posts and tag them as "don't reblog" or "personal post" as a way to keep their followers from spreading around posts that are about their personal lives, or that they know could be misconstrued. In my own experience, there have been times when I've used this tag on posts expressing an unpopular opinion about fandoms I've been in. In these cases, I was trusting my followers, who generally are people who hold similar views on fandom issues, to agree with me and to respect the request I had made. The problem with this trust is that not everyone holds the same view on whether Tumblr can be used as a private space on any occasions. Therefore, in many cases, even if the user expresses their wishes, at least one user will ignore them and reblog the post anyway. When this happens, it is easy for the post to gain a life of its own and spread around to people who, seeing the post as public, will feel free to show their disagreement, possibly against the original poster's wishes.

In context with the original shower scene post, such discomfort does not seem to be the case, as the post was tagged with both #*AFTG* and #andreil, implying that the user did want others in the fandom to see the post. The user's decision to increase the potential reach and

33

velocity of the post through tags then stands in contrast to their later reaction in saying that an answering post constitutes "vague posting". If one makes a post with the understanding that everything posted is public and therefore up for discussion, it initially can seem strange when they then express offense with others taking up that idea and expressing disagreement. However, by seeing the difference in how the two posters understand what conversation is being had, it becomes easier to see how a user would become irritated to see their point be misconstrued and changed. As long as the discussion was not in stasis, no amount of argument could move the matter forward.

When viewed through a certain terministic screen, however, the reaction of the original poster exemplifies how identity plays into disagreements on Tumblr. When viewing the original post through the lens of the user making a commentary not on the actual events of the story as they pertain to the characters, but rather as a commentary on how gay men are portrayed in fiction, having someone make a post without including the original user they are building from can seem insidious because it takes a voice away from that user. From this viewpoint, it can seem like the secondary poster is remixing the original post and changing it to make a point outside of what was originally being discussed.

The effect on the original user is further exacerbated by how tied to identity the original post was. If the original user professes to be a gay man who is making a post about how they felt their identity was undercut by the narrative, seeing someone who does not publicly claim the same identity taking up their point and tearing it down, to much greater public reaction, without including them in the conversation, could be seen as insulting and belittling. For example, I saw the reaction post before I saw the original post. The matter of context is important in how a user understands a post because when I read the post saying that "people have been saying x," I

interpreted it initially as a group of people trying to disparage a work that meant a lot to me. Once I found the original post though, I understood that the discussion was not about that work at all; it was about marginality.

V.   Gatekeeping and its Effects

The act of using remix to essentially take a post out of context and rework it can be an act of gatekeeping. Therefore, the fourth consideration is that context is important when considering what is fair game to be remixed and what is not. If the point of remix is to interject into problematic hegemonies of power (Banks), it seems reasonable to state the inverse, that remix should not be used to take away representation or reaffirm the status quo. Therefore, remix of the source material that interjects into canon feels different than the reappropriation of other fan's criticisms of the canon, because it is being used to shut down criticism and create a situation where those in power in the fandom (popular blogs with large followings) control who can speak on certain issues. The times when I have used the "do not reblog" tag, it has been out of fear of backlash from larger blogs. Fear-based tagging is tied to fandom (and online culture in general) being prone to using personal attacks and even threats of violence as a means of controlling dissenting opinions. Before these extremes, however, lesser forms of bullying within fandoms, ranging from harassment to larger blogs encouraging their followers to unfollow other blogs via black lists, to the point of running them out of the fandom, help encourage the gatekeeping of remix and criticism in fandom.

In this way, I have two main takeaways about how canon affects remix. First, canon is used as a means of social control, because it is a safe way to shut down any criticism individuals receive. Instead of engaging critically with how fandom can perpetuate the very norms they seek to question, individuals can maintain the status quo by pointing to how it "wouldn't be in

character" for a remix to exist or how certain pairings "come out of nowhere" in terms of canon. The decision of which remixes are accepted and which are rejected is a testament to the norms within a fandom and which views hold power. Even in a space with the capability to be subversive, like fandom, problematic notions about gender, race, sexuality, and disability still persist.

Additionally, the performance of identity is critical to understanding how remix is used in fandom spaces. In order to engage in conversations about representation, a certain kind of ethos building is required, in which individuals' arguments are received in more productive ways if they profess to be part of the group being represented. If they are not, the conversation tends to shut down more quickly, as the interjection of those outside the affected group do not have the experience to back up their arguments. As such, those without the identity in question often retreat back to canon as a way to avoid the implication that they have done something objectionable, whether in terms of their own remix or in enjoying a creation that has been deemed problematic. Since the characters and stories users identify with and enjoy become a critical part of our identities, it can be difficult to admit that we have furthered a problematic ideal. Therefore, it is easier to shun those who disagree rather than finding ways to understand one another.

At the same time, marginalized individuals cannot be blamed for wanting to distance themselves from those espousing harmful beliefs. On social media, we are called to curate our own experiences, including who and with what content we engage. In this way, disagreements in fandom spaces are one medium through which we can see how identity and perspective affect our ability to engage with disagreement online. Though this is by no means an extensive or complete overview of how online disagreement occurs, understanding these longstanding

discussions can go a long way in understanding how such arguments utilize ethos and identity to either question or uphold social norms. By utilizing stasis theory and terministic screens, I can see how questions of power are viewed and understood differently because of the unique lenses that exist for different groups. As such, when the life experiences of marginalized groups in particular are not understood, it is difficult for different groups to meet each other at the same stasis point. Without mutual understanding and respect, argument on the issues that breed hostility in these spaces is not possible.

CHAPTER III: THE CHARACTERIZATION BLUES: DISAGREEMENT AS BOTH

COMMUNITY BUILDER AND GATEKEEPER IN FANDOM SPACES

I was scrolling through Tumblr one day and was met with the usual deluge of content. A

gifset here, a text post there. I pause. Here, I find a post that seems…more intense than a usual

headcanon. It reads, "Remember how x is bisexual, even though fandom likes to forget that

fact?" I look into the notes of the post, even though I know it's mostly going to be the same tired

argument. I immediately regret my life choices once I see the familiar binary: either "everyone is

forcing diversity these days! Why does it matter how they identify? The author didn't say it, so

stop trying to see things that aren't there!" or "the author's opinion doesn't matter, it's just a

headcanon I made for fun. If it doesn't affect you, ignore it!" I sigh. I close out of the notes.

Rinse. Repeat.

Over time, though, I've stopped to wonder if that binary is really all there is. I've been a

part of fandom communities for most of my life. I started becoming involved in fan forums at 12

and wrote my first fanfiction at 13. I joined Tumblr in the summer of 2010, when I was 15.

Therefore, I've spent a lot of time embroiled in the particular stew of fandom discourse that I

describe in the above paragraph and eventually began to see it as just an inevitable. Now, at 24, I

see in fandom discourse echoes of discourse on other platforms (Facebook comment wars?

Political echo chambers? Roundabout arguments where no side wins?). Seeing these similarities,

I wanted to look at how these binaries are reinforced and how users in a particular context utilize

particular language and rhetorical strategies in order to appeal to the community. In short, how

do people form communities around particular interpretations of characters, and what language

and strategies do they use to signal their allegiances? In this chapter, I argue that disagreements

around characterization on Tumblr act in a way that builds communities and creates boundaries within the fandom space on the site.

These boundaries are not necessarily all bad. Boundaries form naturally in any space, and regulation emerges in social spaces all the time. Without this regulation, community couldn't form at all because there would be no standards. Instead of questioning the formation of boundaries, then, I mean to point out how boundary making acts in fandom as both a community builder and a dividing factor. It isn't only one or the other. Additionally, disagreement within fandoms can act to affirm one's position in a community and create allegiances and therefore a sense of belonging and identity within that group. However, it can also be used to harass and threaten those who disrupt the status quo. Furthermore, remix can be used as a tool for subversion, but it can also be used to reinforce problematic ideologies, which in turn alienate marginalized members of the fandom communities. Because of the risk of harassment, marginalized members may not want to open themselves up to the often racist, sexist, ableist and homophobic harassment that they may be faced with if a popular blog disagrees with them. By allowing this recreation of problematic power dynamics, fandom goes against its core principle of questioning problematic depictions in media.

I.   Theories of Remix

To begin, some contextualization of dominant ideas about remix is necessary, because while a great deal of fandom scholarship (though not all) deals with remix, the terms different scholars use to describe fandom activity are not altogether agreed upon. Therefore, I want to be transparent about which descriptions align with my ideas of remix. Digital scholars Andrew Whelan and Katharina Freund caution users against viewing remix as a good/bad dichotomy, describing two prevailing, but false views about remix, saying:

Remix is some kind of intervention in the cultural economy, whereby audiences become

liberated into participation in cultural production. This participation in cultural dialogue

through remix is heralded as a new era of democratized consumer activism. The converse

argument suggests that remix is wholly incorporated as 'playbour': users generate content

for free, used by others for profit. Remix as 'resistance' seems to occur solely at the level

of the sign, overlooking the extent to which vernacular creative work is rendered an

integrative cultural commodity. (9)

Whelan and Freund go on to describe how neither of these characterizations accurately

describes how remix works, and point out that remix is no different than any other text in that it

can question cultural norms, but can also affirm them, as well as the fact that remix exists within

specific contexts with their own norms (9). This characterization of remix supports the idea of

fandom discourse as boundary making because it shows how norms within the capabilities and

social climate of Tumblr, and the fandoms themselves, can bind what kind of remix is acceptable

for users to engage in. In short, fandom creates its own cultural context that users must be aware

of, and it is these ecological considerations that are missing in fandom studies currently.

At the same time, I don't want to imply that Whelan and Freund's second

characterization of fandom is true, i.e. remix being a neoliberal construction of false agency. I

believe fandom creates a space for genuine interjection into oppressive cultural norms. The

problem is that all remix is not created equally and there is a great deal of disagreement on what

remix is and whether it can be neatly defined. In an attempt to start this definition process,

Dustin Edwards splits up remix into five categories that correspond with the five ideals of

invention under ancient rhetorics. Of these five categories, fandom is best understood to me to fit

under the idea of reappropriation, in which creators, "make tactical changes to an existing text

(or set of texts) to signal resistance or offer a critique of the original text or the concept for which it stands. That is, reappropriation is often used to challenge, invert, counter, or draw attention to oppressive discourse (Edwards 47-48). In other words, under my estimation, fanfiction and the ensuing discourse falls under this facet of remix because they are often used in order to "fix" the perceived injustices of a source text. For example, if a character is perceived as gay by one viewer, but the canon text does not support this, fandom provides a space for users to come in and reappropriate the text to fit their worldview. By doing the work of remixing, fans can create a space through which to challenge the status quo of the media they consume, thus increasing their power of the story.

II.   Looking at Fandom Studies

The problem with uncritically stating that fandom is a utopia where remix is always used to disrupt harmful power dynamics is that not every user in fandom wants to reappropriate the text in the same way, and each user or group of users has different goals in using reappropriation. Therefore, discourse ensues when disparate factions within a fandom try to establish boundaries on what kind of creation is and is not allowed. Fandom scholar Victoria Gonzalez supports this idea in her examination of fandom boundary making in the *Once Upon a Time* fandom. She makes the point that arguments about conflicting interpretations often come down to fan debates about "legitimacy" and whose interpretations are more deserving of attention. (4.9) For example, when pressed on how fans want to interpret characters as LGBTQ+ in order to add representation to a field lacking diversity, one fan said that instead of "changing" the sexualities of existing characters, they should instead ask creators for more explicitly stated LGBTQ+ characters (4.12). The problem with this model, as shown by Gonzalez, is that it implies that "more LGBT representation on television should not take the form of altering a character's established

sexuality but can only be brought about through the introduction of characters that are already LGBT" (4.12). Proclaiming this view on fandom, though, completely eliminates the ability for fans to perform certain kinds of remix. If a remix that changes a character's sexuality is deemed illegitimate, and the creators are unwilling to create representation, fans who adhere to an alternative interpretation are stuck.

Gonzalez goes on to say that fanfiction serves two purposes. "The first function is that it allows those interested in exploring certain narratives the ability to do so, and the second function is that it allows those who have a problem with such narratives the ability to remain ignorant of them." The gatekeeping described in both the *AFTG* and *Once Upon a Time* fandom disrupts both of these functions. First, it makes clear to individuals who want to portray a character differently from canon that their interpretation is undeserving of being explored, because it implies that fans must always bow to canon. Second, if fans want to ignore the erasure of LGBTQ+ identities in mainstream media, then proclaiming that fanfiction must always adhere to canon is a counterintuitive proclamation. This issue becomes even more complicated when you consider characters whose sexualities are never confirmed in the canon text. In this way, fandom exists in a kind of liminal space where the author is both dead and alive. Fans call upon the creator of a text when it suits their argument and ignores them when it contradicts them. In terms of power dynamics, then, it varies from fandom to fandom and subgroup to subgroup how much canon will be taken into account, and those rules are often governed by the popular blogs in that group.

What's more, fans are left to police themselves. As fandom studies scholars Alen Rios and Diego Rivera point out, fans make the rules of what is allowed and not allowed within the fandom space. They state that "this construction relies on the existence of Others who do not

follow these rules, either by not classifying the content properly or by enjoying content that should not be enjoyed or, if approached and liked, should be reveled in carefully, both within and outside the fandom" (34). While their study focuses on trigger warnings and complex content, it provides a solid example of how fandom discourse operates. It is the work of the different factions to define what should or should not be allowed within the space, and posts like the ones I have examined are examples of the constant negotiation and boundary moving that happen in the process of defining what is acceptable and not. Often, blogs with a greater number of followers, who therefore have more reach and therefore more power, will use their influence to draw attention to those characterizations they adhere to. As such, the characterizations that get more attention tend to be those that popular blogs in the fandom ascribe to.

There can be many reasons for debates surrounding character interpretation, but most of them boil down to a few common elements. First, they can center on a character's identification. This refers to issues of sexual orientation, gender identity, disability status, neurotypical status, and other issues that involve naming or labeling a character. In this case, one segment of a fandom may see a character as gay, while another segment sees them as bisexual, while yet another sees the character as straight. A more subtle disagreement can stem around how the character is depicted as acting in fan works or headcanons. These disagreements typically involve a character being referred to as written "out of character," which simply means that the way a fan creator has depicted them is not in line with how they would act within the canon. This could mean writing a canonically guarded character as "too outgoing" or having characters say phrases they would never say in canon. Being out of character or "OOC" is one of the harshest criticisms a creator can receive for their work.

However, it becomes tricky because the line is necessarily subjective. Therefore, the term "OOC" is often used as a form of gatekeeping for what character interpretations are deemed acceptable. I say often, because there are situations when fans will acknowledge that something they are writing is out of character and thus label their post or fic in this manner. In my experience, there are two main reasons for fans labeling their work in this way. First, fans will do this in order to write in an alternate universe (AU) that appeals to them, but will significantly change their characterization. For example, if an AU is written where a character is raised by someone different than in canon and therefore doesn't experience the same kinds of trauma they experienced in canon, it can be expected that the characterization in that work will be OOC when compared with the canon work.

On the other hand, fans sometimes also label their work this way in tags as a kind of defense mechanism. For example, on posts I have made in the past where I know my characterization does not match up with a popular fan interpretation of a character, I will add a tag saying something to the effect of, "I know this is OOC but I don't care." Adding a tag of this nature can sometimes ward off criticism of a user's post because it signals that the user is not necessarily trying to represent a canon interpretation of the characters, but their own wish fulfillment. Potential disagreements crop up not when users acknowledge themselves as writing OOC, but when users disagree about whether or not an interpretation is OOC or not. Disagreements between fans of a character and those that dislike that character are often analyzed, but disagreements between fans of the same character are less examined.

The general progression of such debates in fan spaces is for a headcanon (a personal belief about a character or world) to be made, and then either a contrary headcanon is made or someone writes a meta post detailing why the conflicting headcanon is wrong or offensive.

Discussion can then continue in the comments of the post, but more often, there is a trend in fandom where conflicting sides simply make contrary headcanons vaguely directed at the other side, rather than confronting the issue directly, which can create a hostile environment where users who are less popular are afraid to post out of fear of retribution from larger blogs. Another aspect of Tumblr culture that contributes to how disagreements work on Tumblr is the use of the tagging system. People will tag posts so that they show up for interested parties to find the post. This has led to the common courtesy rule where users are not supposed to put posts that are expressing dislike of a character in that character's tag. However, this rule becomes problematic when considering conflicting interpretations of characters. Posting a differing opinion isn't hate and therefore belongs in the tag, but doing so can create more space for disagreement between fans.

III.   Character Behavior Disagreements

To provide an example of what this looks like, I turn to the example of *All for the Game (AFTG)*. This series is popular with individuals who enjoy complex narratives and characters surrounding issues of trauma and sexuality, with characters displaying aspects of these concepts that are often marginalized or ignored in the larger literature community. One character in particular whose identity and identification are the subject of much dispute is the protagonist, Neil Josten. Neil grew up on the run from a mafia father and spent much of his childhood being abused by his father and mother. He spends much of the series trying to overcome his paranoia and trust issues, not wanting to get close to his teammates because he believes he will only be with the team for the year. This mission fails and he becomes extremely close with his teammates and enters into a relationship with one of them. Ultimately, he does stay with the team after the year is up and by all accounts moves on to a typical adulthood with his partner, Andrew.

Two particular character debates that surround Neil are his sexuality and how domestic his future self is allowed to be in fan depictions. In the book, Neil tells us of how Andrew is the only person he's ever been sexually attracted to, in part because any experimentation with people growing up was struck down by his mother, sometimes violently, because she wanted him to believe that it wasn't safe to trust anyone. Many fans were led to ask the author of the series if she saw Neil as demisexual (a term on the spectrum of asexuality where an individual only feels sexual attraction to those they have formed a significant emotional bond to). Sakavic confirmed that this is how she saw the character.

Some fans protested, though, claiming that the abuse and trauma Neil suffered meant that his lack of attraction was a reaction to trauma and stating therefore that Neil's demisexuality was not a significant aspect of his character. The purpose of this chapter is not for me to claim allegiance to one side or the other (though I have my opinions). Rather, I intend to show how these debates play out in a fan space, the consequences these debates have on fandom discourse, and speculate as to what this reveals about fan identity.

To get a look into what kinds of posts surround this issue and what these posts look like, I will examine a few examples. First, I will address how headcanons are used in this fandom space. "What a great day to remember x" is a common way of expressing displeasure with certain fandom trends. For example, in the *AFTG* fandom, one post read, "What a great day to remember my favorite demisexual, Neil Josten" (dirrtyhands-brekker). This kind of post acts as a kind of reminder device in fandom spaces. Fandom wouldn't need reminding of these concepts, in short, if they weren't behaving in ways that ignored whatever point the user is bringing up. Additionally, posts that begin with "friendly reminder" are rarely ever actually friendly. Instead,

it's worded in the passive aggressive tone that implies that the post is coming from irritation on the part of the user that led to the post being written.

For example, in the *AFTG* fandom, these kinds of posts tend to crop up when people start making posts referring to Neil as gay, or shipping him with individuals he didn't show interest in during the books, or calling Neil oblivious for not understanding when people showed sexual attraction towards him. These posts tend to be made by individuals who ascribe to Neil being demisexual, and fans become irritated when individuals ignore these facets of Neil's characterization, which in turn leads to the creation of these kind of posts.

Another debate surrounding Neil's identity involves fan depictions of Neil's future with Andrew. The two are presumed to continue their relationship, with extra content from the author (for whatever that's worth; some fans adhere to it and others ignore it) stating that they continue to live with each other and maintain a steady relationship. However, within that sphere, fans differ in how they portray Neil in these future fics. I will refer to this schism as the "hard Neil/soft Neil" debate, as this is the language used in the fandom to discuss this issue. "Soft Neil" refers to fan works that portray Neil in the future as having worked through a lot of his trauma, to a point where he is comfortable displaying affection in public, saying "I love you" and other typical romantic gestures. Fans of "hard Neil," by contrast, argue that writing Neil in this way erases his trauma and that while Neil could certainly begin recovery, some aspects of his personality will never change.

To exemplify the ways that people within the fandom argue for either the hard or soft interpretation of Neil, I point to two contrasting posts. The contrast between the posts is in that they both employ similar moves, yet advocate for two different interpretations of Neil's character. The first post is entitled "Neil Josten is not soft" (theordinaryvegan). The post begins

by questioning a supposed fandom norm, saying, "I feel like sometimes people try to paint Neil as the soft complement…and that is not the case." They go on to describe some actions that Neil has taken within the book that would, in the post author's mind, categorize Neil as "hard." These actions include things like keeping a gun under his pillow, living in hiding for years, being kidnapped and other events within the books. This is a common tactic in meta posts, because this type of post is basically a miniature, informal literature analysis, so creators will call on evidence to support their interpretations.

In a contrasting post, another user proclaims, "do u ever cry because neil has been through so much abuse from both his parents and yet he's still kind. i know people will lose their goddamn minds if you claim that neil is soft but like y'all gotta understand that softness =/= weak or nice" (vvhymack). In saying this, they are commenting (somewhat humorously) on the tone of the fandom discourse surrounding Neil's personality, since saying people would "lose their minds" refers to the arguments that often ensue when someone comments on a divisive fandom topic. Therefore, while the post does not specifically respond to another post, it exemplifies the indirect nature of disagreement on Tumblr. In many of these cases, posts are worded in such a way that it calls out segments of a fandom, or a general trend, rather than responding to specific posts.

In cases of character behavior, there is possibility for seeking middle ground. For example, on the hard vs soft Neil debate, a user posted, "it always amazes me when people don't understand what a multidimensional [character] Neil Josten is" (darkelegance). In this way, users are able to contest the binary that has been set up by fandom and introduce an intermediate solution to the issues made by fandom. The answer, according to some users, is that Neil is not only one thing for all times. Instead, he is a combination of so-called hard and soft behaviors that

add up to a complex individual, which is what draws many readers to his character in the first place.

In general, then, the use of the term "OOC" creates a vague boundary that can at times create binary "sides" in a disagreement over characterization, where users are prompted to choose one over the other. The bond over choosing a side strengthens each community, but at the cost of strengthening themselves against each other. While creating different communities in itself is not a problem, it can becomes problematic when the two sides become emboldened to harass and bully others who disagree.

IV.   Problematizing Disagreement Further

One might want to believe that finding a middle ground will stop the harassment and vitriol. After all, much of our cultural norms emphasize compromise as the golden solution to all conflict. However, despite attempts at compromise, disagreements such as these have not ceased in fandom spaces. The reason for this could be chalked up to stubbornness on the part of users, but experience has led me to think this trend is more complicated than that. Therefore, rather than simply advocate for compromise and move on, I instead want to look at the discourse style of Tumblr and investigate how the trends of Tumblr fandom enable specific kinds of disagreement and how to work within that framework, rather than attempting to quash disagreement altogether. This second half of the chapter will discuss another strategy of boundary making and disagreement in fandom.

One trend that should be understood that contributes to this kind of discourse is "flanderization" and its close companion, "woobification." These are slang terms in fandom that refer to common ways of portraying a character as supposedly out of character. Flanderization is the process through which a character becomes reduced to one popular trait. This term came

about from the character Ned Flanders on *The Simpsons,* where he started out as a character who was intended as a foil to Homer because of his strong family values and commitment to being a good neighbor. Over time, though, the writers simplified Flanders to where his religious beliefs became his only personality trait, presumably because they could make more jokes that way. From the beginning to the later seasons, then, Flanders is an entirely different character, but these differences are not due to well explained character development ("Flanderization").

 Here's another example scenario. Character A makes an offhand comment about liking to run. Fandom might find this concept funny or interesting, so creators begin to depict the characters as always running in their fan creations, to the point where the character ceases to be shown in fandom as more complex than that one trait. Then, there is a reaction, in the form of the posts I just discussed, which lashes back at this trend, attempting to bring the character back to their more complex depiction. In short, fandom discourse acts as a kind of ebb and flow between extremes in an attempt to find equilibrium.

Flanderization, while annoying, is a mostly harmless fandom concept. On the other hand, woobification is a term that refers to a phenomenon when audiences see a character go through something that creates feelings of sympathy, which in turn causes an influx of content featuring the woobified character being comforted or coddled. The word "woobie" comes from the name of a security blanket, implying that the audience wants to wrap the character up and protect them ("The Woobie"). To the extent that much of fandom is wish fulfillment, this trend is not immediately harmful or problematic. However, when one looks at who is most commonly given this treatment, we begin to see how identity plays a role.

Two mainstream characters come to mind when I think of a woobified character: Loki from *Marvel* and Kylo Ren from *Star Wars*. They both fit what I have found to be the common

mold of this type of character: a conventionally attractive, white male antagonist with a reasonably tragic past. This is not necessarily a problem. What is a problem is when individuals in a fandom ignore the racist, misogynist and otherwise problematic traits in favor of portraying the character as in need of protection. Conveniently, it is very rare for a woman or character of color to be given the same kind of sympathy. In this way, fandom can be seen as reproducing the very kinds of hegemonies that it claims to resist. Trends like these are why I am hesitant to state that remix is always used for subversion.

Flanderization and woobification describe two main reasons individuals become frustrated and wary of certain portrayals of characters within a fandom. Therefore, in the case of the *AFTG* fandom, it is reasonable to assume that people would be concerned about a character's violent past and actions being ignored in favor of treating them as in need of protection. The rift between fans, then, potentially has to do with differing reasons for using fandom as a form of remix. Adam Banks necessitates that those creating the remix are interjecting into a cultural conversation that subverts or questions a cultural norm. If we take this definition of remix at face value, our next step becomes defining which conversations individuals are interjecting themselves into.

In the case of portrayals of Neil, fans are using remix, whether intentional or not, to make a claim about how they believe characters who have experienced trauma should be portrayed. Strategies for making such arguments come through the language used, the evidence provided, and other strategies mentioned in my above analysis. Importantly, regarding the language individuals use to signal their allegiance, the very words used in the posts I've chosen to analyze — hard and soft — become identity markers within fandom to signal to other users their position in this argument. This is where the use of Tumblr's tagging system becomes so important in

building fan communities. Since users have to choose which words to include as the tags to their posts in order to be seen by other users, presumably ones that share their interests, users have to be very intentional about their choice of language and who they are signaling to in their post. This becomes complicated when disagreements arise from within the fanbase of one character, because the tag exists for all fans of that character, welcoming disagreement, both productive and hostile. For example, in cases where one segment of fandom likes a character and another faction does not, "anti" tags emerged so that the two fanbases could avoid each other and thereby avoid fights. However, when users agree on their enjoyment of a character but disagree about the character, there is no clear cut way as of yet to differentiate between users. Because of this, any time a user posts in a tag, the greater risk (provided the user has tagged according to Tumblr etiquette) is not getting angry messages from those who don't like the character the post is about, but from those that do. In terms of boundaries, then, the "anti" tags emerged as a way of keeping fans away from each other to minimize harassment. Without a similar structure for arguments about one character, disagreement is enabled, and with it, harassment.

Another concept important to understanding how fans disagree on Tumblr is the fact that all fandom creation is always, by definition, remix. Therefore, under Banks' characterization of remix, all fandom depictions of characters are out of character, insofar as they are being written outside of the canon text. Since all individuals interpret canon differently, it is impossible for any outside creator to depict a character exactly the same way as the original author of the text would have.

It follows, then, that all fanworks made are an argument or statement on how that creator views a character as depicted in canon. This is not necessarily a revolutionary idea, but viewing fandom as a matter of argument and dueling ideology frames fandom as a space of grounded

debate through posts, rather than setting up an unsolvable binary, where individuals are doomed to remain on opposing sides forever. What's more, it explains how users have a stake in the argument they are forwarding. To go back to Neil, if a user is making an argument for soft Neil, the implicit argument is that Neil can and should grow in the future and move on from his trauma. I cannot claim to know why users make the arguments they do, but, instead, I propose that at the very least, users are making arguments about identity and that they are seeking solidarity with individuals who align with their argument.

V.   Character Identity Disagreements

In light of the fact that individuals form communities around arguments about characters through the use of specific language usage and tagging, it should be noted, then, that the goal of such disagreements is not always homogeneity among fandom, or to come to agreement based on some nebulous middle ground. Rather, individuals can treat discourse as a kind of community building exercise. Making a post proclaiming one argument, since Tumblr is a social platform, invites those who agree to either like the post in agreement or reblog it, spreading it to their followers. These actions create a community around the opinion, while simultaneously inviting disagreement, which further solidifies the different sides' opinions.

When considering disagreements based on character identity, though, finding ways for two sides of an argument to relate isn't so easy. There isn't an "in between" to look for in cases of identification. Characters can't be "half bi" or "half disabled." Simply deciding to agree to disagree, while an option that is often offered up, is also often not a viable solution to disagreements of this nature. Individuals whose argument describes a character as part of a marginalized community have reason to be offended when another user suggests that they should

just allow fans to, for example, interpret canonically queer characters as straight because it takes away already lacking representation from those communities.

Furthermore, under Banks' model, remix is not a neutral action. He states, for example, that understanding cultures that lead to remix is critical. His works points to the DJ of black culture, saying studying remix in the writing classroom is necessary because it encourages, "looking for a greater appreciation of the multiple connected and diverging cultural influences on writing in a society that is (very slowly) becoming more genuinely inclusive and multicultural" (14). While Banks' work focuses on remix specifically in the African-American community, I argue that the fanfiction community, with its multitude of cultural backgrounds, including, but not limited to black members, is another community that uses remix in subversive ways worth studying. If marginalized fans use remix to interject their voices and experiences into conversations where they are typically invisible, then fans who contradict this interjection can be seen as attempting to maintain the status quo, for example, as will be explored in my next example. This issue, however, becomes even more complicated when considering characters who have not been explicitly stated as having a marginalized identity. When communities form around non-canon marginalized depictions of characters, disagreement becomes murkier and more hostile.

A case of direct disagreement, rather than independently circulating posts, in the *AFTG* fandom surrounds the character Renee Walker. Renee is a relatively minor character in the series, who is one of Neil's teammates. Renee is never given an explicitly stated sexuality in the books, nor is she shown in a romantic relationship with any character. Her romantic interests are only alluded to vaguely, and no past relationships or interests are discussed in the books either. Perhaps because of this lack of canonical orientation, certain fans have created a remix of

54

character where she is envisioned as a lesbian. Other fans have rejected this idea, stating that there is no evidence of this in canon.

As an example of one such disagreement, I point to the following example. One user made a post titled "Renee is not lesbian" (andthedreamsthatareanswered). The user goes on to use evidence such as the author stating that she doesn't see Renee as a lesbian and stating that she "clearly was into" another character. They end by saying, "quit warping a character into what you want her to be." The post is tagged as "renee walker" and with the tags for the book's fandom. By taking the time to tag the post in this way, the user was indicating that they wanted others to interact with the post, and that they were aware that they may engage with others who disagree with them. Additionally, the post is tagged "fight me." This phrase is difficult to discern in fandom spaces. On one hand, based on the tone of the post, it seems like an invitation for other users to come argue with them. On the other hand, the phrase "fight me" is often used in fandom spaces humorously to indicate that the user has a strong opinion on the subject, but doesn't necessarily want to enter into a conversation about it.

Regardless of the post creator's intentions, someone clearly took the post as needing a response, because another user responded to the post. They took a few steps to take apart the original poster's argument. First, they briefly stated how Renee's sexuality is never stated in the canon, clarifying that they meant the books. Therefore, this user does not include any extra statements by the author as canon. After making this blanket statement, however, the user breaks from tradition by not relying on canonical evidence to defend their interpretation. Instead, they go on to say "fiction is up to interpretation and a common interpretation is that Renee is a lesbian- so what?" (lailadermott). This "so what?" introduces a crucial question to fandom discourse. In saying "so what?", the user is asking the original creator of the post to examine

55

why the idea of others interpreting a character differently matters enough to them that they were willing to make a post about it, and, what's more, put it in the tags. I argue it has to do with community and identity building through disagreement.

On one hand, by tagging the post, and making the assumption that tagging the post meant the user wanted it to be seen, the tag can be understood as a kind of marker, indicating one's interest in a topic. The key lies in that term: interest. The tagging system doesn't differentiate between individuals who like that character and don't like that character, or between interpretations of characters. Instead, all users interested in the one subject of the tag are witness to any posts made about that character, thus inviting disagreement. In order to insulate oneself from arguments, posts can be made without tags, and therefore can circulate within one's own followers. Though avoiding tags does not keep all discourse from happening, it is possible. Thus, choosing to use a tag marks a user as wanting to enter into the conversation currently happening about that character on Tumblr.

Understanding this model shows how the user can identify themselves further. First, by posting in the tag, they may be greeted with likes, reblogs, or other positive interaction or feedback on their post. Such feedback tends to have two confirming effects for the poster. First, it affirms for the author that there are others on the platform who agree with them, signaling that there is a community out there for their interpretation. Second, users can follow individuals who interact positively with their posts. For example, when I first enter a fandom, one of the first things I do is go through a tag and follow people who post things relevant to me, and, the first time I make a post in that fandom, I typically look through the blogs of the individuals who like or reblog my posts. In this way, tagging acts as a community building construct.

What the case of the Renee post reveals, though, is how community is built by disagreeing with posts as well. Looking through the notes of the post, almost no one reblogged the post from the original poster. Instead, most of the reblogs were confirming the rebuttal post. Therefore, the post changed meanings in the space. What started as a post shaming people for interpreting Renee as a lesbian gained popularity as a post confirming the exact opposite. Therefore, in liking or sharing that version of the post, they are stating that they agree with the point of it, which shows users what "side" members of the fandom are on. This is an example of an interesting sort of rhetorical velocity, or "strategic theorizing for how a text might be recomposed" as proposed by Jim Ridolfo and Danielle DeVoss. In terms of this example, then, users on Tumblr have to consider how their work might be taken up by different audiences and repurposed. The user must always be prepared for their content to be reused or taken up by different groups.

While this instance shows a case where disagreement is working towards inclusion, other fandoms may not necessarily hold the same views. There are fandoms where a post proclaiming a popular character as a lesbian or as transgender, for example, may be met with vitriol. This acts as a form of gatekeeping for the reasons described in the last example. If a post is made and subsequently disparaged by a large part of the fandom, it sends the message to others that posts proclaiming alternative interpretations of characters will not be tolerated. Then, beginning creators may be less likely to post their opinions, for fear of being shut down by larger segments of the fandom.

VI.   Implications

The problem with such gatekeeping is that it reduces character interpretation and fandom experience to the false binaries I bring up in the beginning of this chapter, when I mention how

fandom resorts to either needing to reject the source text wholesale or having to accept it completely. Since remix exists in part to disrupt power dynamics and insert previously unheard group's experience into spaces where those voices often go unheard, the group with less power is more likely to fade away in fear of retribution. If a post is made, then, that portrays Neil as demisexual and that post is met with disagreement, then for every post made defending Neil's demisexuality, there are more posts that never see the light of the day because that segment of fandom does not want to open themselves up to the level of disagreement and disdain that come with presenting an unpopular or unseen interpretation of a character. When these voices are silenced, fandom goes against what remix is supposed to do, in that it insists on the rightness of one opinion and the wrongness of another. Fandom is often praised for its subversive nature, but the strict adherence to binaries shows that this is not always the case.

More than just stating that this happens, though, what camp a fan falls into within their chosen fandom, through the mechanisms of Tumblr, becomes a kind of affiliation which in turn informs how a user is identified within the fandom. In my experience in the *AFTG* fandom, and fandom at large, there are many posts made that forge alliances with other members of the fandom. On the tamer side, fans will make "follow forever" pages, which encourage other fans to follow the blogs they advocate for. This acts as a kind of vouching, where fans essentially say, "these people post content similar to me and agree with me, so if you fall on this side, you should follow these people." Such a construction helps to associate certain Tumblr users with each other. These groups are sometimes referred to in slang terms as "squads" or "networks".

On the more hostile side, when particularly heated fandom debates crop up, fans will sometimes make "block lists" where users advocate that their followers block certain users, claiming that their posts are illegitimate enough to warrant shunning the user altogether. This

action creates a sort of boundary between users, implicitly stating that those who want to be seen as real fans should not engage with the content created by another side of the fandom. The stakes of this kind of gatekeeping become evident when considering the pull more popular blogs have over a fandom. If a blog that is followed by a large number of people posts a block list that is taken uncritically, users on this list stand a chance of not only being symbolically censored, as seen when creators simply choose not to post, but actually censored because other users will not be able to see their posts at all. These practices, as supported by Rios and Rivera, act by othering certain segments of the fandom and creating an us vs. them environment within the fandom. The creations of these boundaries allow gatekeeping to exist.

Overall then, fans use several strategies, including strategic tagging, reblogging and commentary, building upon evidence and others, that exemplify how Tumblr's interface allows for both community building and gatekeeping within fandom. Disagreement in these spaces holds a valuable place for certain communities, but this comes with the cost of potential alienation of out groups. Therefore, Tumblr also shows that simplifying disagreement, especially in online spaces, to a search for middle ground is problematic and does not get to the heart of what such disagreements are really about.

CHAPTER IV: YOU SUNK MY BATTLESHIP!: POWER DYNAMICS IN SHIPPING

DISCOURSE

It's one of the most dreaded phrases in the fandom vocabulary: ship wars. I'm not talking about boats, here, by the way. Rather, in fandoms, a "ship" is the shortened form of the word "relationship" and shipping is the act of supporting a particular relationship as a fan. The idea of a ship war, and shipping in general, is one of the attributes of fandom that has perhaps led to its reputation as crazy, obsessive, and other less than kind adjectives. I won't deny that on some level these accusations are true. Many fans get overzealous in their defense of fictional relationships and even fandom itself is quick to point out that "shipping is not activism." However, at its most basic level, I would argue that every person has shipped something, at least a little bit. If you've ever rooted for a couple to get together at the end of a romantic comedy, or cheered when the hero gets the girl at the end of an action movie, you've engaged in shipping.

The difference when it comes to fandom spaces, then, is a difference in degree. Fandom also has a reputation for championing relationships that may be seen to the outside population as ridiculous, unlikely, or contrived. This was certainly the case in the 1980s, when William Shatner openly criticized and dismissed Kirk/Spock shippers. However, because of series like *Harry Potter*, *Supernatural*, and others, shipping has become less of a taboo subject and is openly acknowledged at many fan conventions and press events, such as the widely attended Comic Con. As such, then, my focus is not so much on outside perceptions of shipping, or its legitimacy, but how fans engage in ship wars and create divisions based on ships, and the effect these actions subsequently have on fandom spaces. Specifically, I want to show how many factors play into fan conversations on ships, including the so-called legitimacy of their ship in the eyes of creators, but also canon's role in fan creation. The nature of fandom is inherently

contradictory in that it both relies on and desires canon's approval of different remixes, while at the same time rejecting it. Therefore, what I argue is that canon matters not to the remix itself, necessarily, but in how different groups use canon. Those who hold power in the fandom space, mainly those who adhere to the dominant ideology of the fandom, will use canon to delegitimize what they see as alternative views on canon in the hopes of quashing these interpretations. By delegitimizing interpretations that go against dominant ideologies, the goal then is not necessarily to stop those that already ascribe to alternative interpretations, but rather to signal to undecided users that such interpretations will not be tolerated in these spaces.

I.   Legitimacy and Other Factors

As stated in the last chapter, and drawing from the work of Victoria Gonzalez, much of the fandom debate on shipping comes down to legitimacy and whether or not it matters, to both those that ship something and those who hope to see a ship eradicated. Fans often (but not always) want to see their ship validated in some way. This validation can come in many forms. Some forms of validation that Gonzalez brings up are being acknowledged by cast members or creators, ships becoming or being canon, and winning certain voting contests online on outside fan sites (such as Zimbio's annual March Madness, where ships from a multitude of fandoms go head to head to be named the top ship of the year). Many fans seek such validation while a ship is running, as it can add to the excitement of a season of a TV show, for example. Additionally, from experience, it can be exciting to wonder which ship is going to ultimately be the endgame for a show. Many showrunners know this and use this kind of hype to continue interest in the show, especially during hiatuses. The dynamic of interaction between creators and fans has been exacerbated by the easier access that these media afford and, as such, the more explicit search for validation is a factor that has changed the dynamic of fandom spaces by making it possible for

certain interpretations to get the proverbial seal of approval from showrunners, which in turn validates certain users in their beliefs.

Another factor that has changed fandom spaces and has perhaps led to more gatekeeping within fandoms is the increased social media presence and accessibility to authors and showrunners. For a popular example, J.K. Rowling has been active on Twitter, adding extracanonical material about the series, ranging from whether she would have changed which couples ended up together (stating she regretted putting Ron and Hermione together) to stating that in her mind, Dumbledore was gay, but it wasn't mentioned in canon because it "wasn't pertinent to Harry's story." While no one but Rowling can know her intentions in making these statements, one of the effects of this is validating certain fans' viewpoints and rejecting others. This gives some fans legitimacy in their claims and allows their arguments to hold some rhetorical weight and power in conversations.

What's more, increased creator involvement in fandoms obscures the line between what is canon and what is not, and therefore changes the nature of fan creations. Particularly when creators are answering fan questions in the style of the fandom, or when creators are from within fandom itself, fans may be more willing to accept these extra bits as canon. However, other fans are quick to insist that only information in the original material counts. Regardless, the push and pull of some fans seeking extra information and others rejecting this involvement leads to increased opportunities for remix and fan debate. Again, this ties back to the mixed reaction of *Harry Potter* fans to Rowling's extra-canonical additions. Some fans have embraced any additional information from Rowling, such as her statement that she always intended Dumbledore to be gay, while others rejected it. Those that questioned Rowling did not always disagree with the idea of Dumbledore being gay. Rather, their disagreement lay in whether these

statements could be considered canon, and therefore whether interpretations that ignored

Rowling's statements were valid interpretations or whether they were problematic. The divide

between fans that do and fans that do not view authors' extracanonical input as canon is the

source of many of the arguments over remix in today's fandom. Bringing the author into fandom

discussions about remix creates a power dynamic in which the author's personal opinions over

fan remix can hold sway in fandoms. Many fans then look to the authors of texts to settle fan

debates, which creates a new role for the author as mediator between fans.

Danielle DeVoss and Jim Ridolfo expand on the idea of a creators' role in mediating

remix in a discussion on remix and its implications for creators. They state that because of

remix's growing prevalence in our culture, "we have evolved to a culture of remix expectations.

Users expect engagement with and abilities to use media in ways perhaps not previously

imagined in a read-only culture" (62). While pieces such as this one have examined what the

expectation of remix means for consumers, DeVoss and Ridolfo's point brings up questions of

what remix culture means for authors who create so-called original content. In the same way that

users involved in fandom engage with content with the expectation that people will write

fanfiction about it, for example, authors now have to write with the knowledge that fans will be

taking their work and reusing it for varying purposes. Because of the affordances of the internet

and the increased availability of remix due to social media, artists also have to contend in some

way with the knowledge that fans will approach them on these spaces with questions about the

world. In turn, fans learn to expect engagement from the creator, and as such, while fandom was

once relatively separate from the author, many fans now expect the author to act as mediator or

authority in fandom spaces. When certain authors hold to dominant ideological beliefs, then,

those beliefs can end up being imposed on the fandom as a whole and affecting which remixes are allowed to hold weight.

In turn, authors' new role as fandom arbiter can make fandom debates available to a larger group of people, which in turn changes the argument's rhetorical velocity. In order to help provide a theoretical grounding for examining new rhetorical situations such as these, DeVoss and Ridolfo made a call for a new metric of looking at rhetorical velocity in the digital age, where remix is expected. They define rhetorical velocity as "a conscious rhetorical concern for distance, travel, speed, and time, pertaining specifically to theorizing instances of strategic appropriation by a third party" ("Composing"). I choose to use this definition of rhetorical velocity for this chapter because users on Tumblr are, consciously or not, constantly thinking about how their post may be taken up and appropriated by other users, as well as considering what strategies to employ in order to get their post the most distance, as fast as possible, as well as giving their posts staying power. DeVoss and Ridolfo refer to this thought process as "composing for strategic recomposition" ("Composing"). The idea of strategic recomposition is relevant because creators of remix are being led to think about how their work will be taken up by others. Whether other fans will see their work as legitimate is a concern for users on Tumblr because if someone takes issue with a particular remix, the creator of that remix runs the risk of being harassed and perhaps even driven from the fandom.

Before the internet, while shipping and fandom certainly existed, creators did not engage with the fans in the same ways, and the expectation of fans to communicate with the creator were different as well. Now, events like Zimbio's March Madness act as a marketing tool for showrunners, so they need to engage with their shipping base, while knowing some ships may or may not end up on the show itself. By encouraging ship wars to some extent, but ultimately

giving more legitimacy and priority to some ships over others, creators are led to fan the flames of these conversations in some ways.

Legitimacy, then, can motivate fans to discuss ships and surrounding issues in certain ways. Most fandom scholarship, though, seems to prioritize legitimacy above all else as the primary factor in fan disagreement. However, legitimacy is not the only factor that motivates interest in ships in fandom. For one thing, many fans, particularly those who ship rarepairs or crackships (pairings that hold little to no chance of becoming canon, or ones that only a small portion of fandom supports), often express no hope or even interest in their ship becoming canon, instead preferring to just explore different interesting character dynamics. Additionally, if legitimacy was the only reason for engagement in ships and its surrounding discourse, then fandoms whose source work is no longer in progress would cease to hold fan engagement, it seems. But this is not the case, as many fandoms are still active for finished series. Finally, the fight for legitimacy does not account for the disagreement that occurs between fans of the same pairing on how that ship is portrayed. Therefore, moving forward, an understanding that fans are motivated by different feelings toward ships they agree on should be examined.

II.   Disagreements Within Canon

The idea of legitimacy is used by popular bloggers to leverage power against less popular blogs that go against the dominant ideas in the fandom, even in spaces where validation is not necessarily the end goal of a debate. To explain fans' differing feelings on the same pairing I return to *AFTG* to explore some other ways ship disagreements play out between fans of the same ship. First, I will discuss the relationship between protagonist Neil Josten and his canonical partner, Andrew Minyard. They will be referred to in this piece as Andreil, since this are the name that is used in the fandom to refer to the pairings. I use this ship because it is a canon ship,

which means that individuals who disagree about how it is portrayed in remix cannot be arguing about legitimacy, since the ship has already been validated by canon. However, even within a ship endorsed by the creator, fans can still create other kinds of power dynamics and hierarchies revolving around how the ship is portrayed outside of the canon text. Most importantly, I point out how canonicity and support from the author of the source text did not end this interfandom debate, and, in fact, may have heightened it. This is significant to the conversation about power in fandom because in a framework where legitimacy is the end goal of fandom fights, the author stating their opinion should have ended it. Instead, there was still something left unresolved, because certain users did not seek legitimacy. In this way, then, arguments are not necessarily about being "right" in an interpretation, but rather about which fans have the right to create remixes that defy the canon.

To begin, I will lay out the relevant background of the ships and the disagreements therein. Throughout the trilogy, Neil and Andrew seem at odds with each other and have a somewhat antagonistic relationship, but in the third book after Andrew has been away for a time and returns in a better mental place, they take the first steps toward a relationship. Andreil's relationship is unique because neither of them have a typical understanding of relationships because of their trauma: Neil, through his time on the run with his mother and his discouragement of his forming relationships or exploring his sexuality and Andrew because of sexual abuse he suffered in his childhood. As such, one of the core arguments in the fandom comes down to what is acceptable in portrayals of trauma, and as such, how characters (and people) should react to trauma, which creates a power dynamic where certain interpretations are deemed good because they represent "good victims." Because of these factors, many fan debates about the interpretation of their relationship center around how domestic they can or should be

66

portrayed in fic or art depictions of their relationship. Some example discussions include them marrying, saying "I love you," or holding hands, for example. These discussions are complicated by the extra content from Nora Sakavic, the author, stating her opinions on how she sees their relationship progressing in the future, in that she has created extracanonical content on her Tumblr page stating that she does not see them getting married or saying "I love you".

For some background on Andrew and Neil and their relationship, the two both have reservations about entering into a romantic relationship, and many fans have stated appreciation for this portrayal of a relationship where finding romantic love does not make trauma and its effects disappear. All of the characters in *AFTG*, to some extent, represent different reactions to trauma and the series is somewhat of an exploration of how different individuals deal with traumatic situations. Neil grew up on the run from his abusive father, and reacted by gaining an instinct to flee from danger and resist forming relationships with others, since he never believed he would stay anywhere for long. Andrew, by contrast, grew up in the foster care system and endured a history of sexual abuse, which he reacted to by becoming extremely touch averse and at times, violent. While Andrew is at times treated by characters in the novel as a "bad victim," the reader grows to understand and sympathize with his reactions.

Throughout the final novel, Neil justifies being with Andrew by saying that it doesn't break his mother's rules about relationships because it's only physical and rationalizes that he is not going to live much longer anyway. Meanwhile, Andrew is no stranger to physical relationships and keeps boundaries in place to ensure he is in control of all encounters between them (e.g., telling Neil where is safe to touch him, obtaining ongoing consent, monitoring his headspace) However, whenever their relationship verges on something more, Andrew is quick to remind Neil that there is nothing romantic between them. By the end of the series, though,

Andrew and Neil are still together and readers get the sense that their relationship is moving into something more permanent.

Because the series still ended on a somewhat open-ended note, though, fans were quick to ask Sakavic for clarification. Sakavic didn't seek out these questions, stating that fans found her blog and began asking her questions, to the point where she eventually disabled asks on her blog so she could move on from the series for a time. However, she did compile all the answers she did give into a page on her blog, which is referred to by the fandom as the "extra content."

The extra content on her blog gets more traffic both due to the disagreements over it, as well as the velocity of fans' comments directing newer fans to it after finishing the series to get "answers." In this way, the extra content and its accessibility create a hierarchy of fans— those who have read the extra content and those who have not. This acts as a tool for gatekeeping because it can create a divide between so-called real fans and casual fans. This hierarchy does not take into account the complex reasons why some fans might not engage with the extra content, however, including some of the information contained in it being graphic and potentially triggering for those with certain traumas.

The first major debate to come from the extra content is the conversation surrounding whether or not Neil and Andrew eventually say "I love you." The topic is contentious enough that some users refer to it and tag it as "the I love you debate." The impact of this tag rhetorically is that it signals the item to be of significance to the fandom. It names it as a topic worth discussing, instead of something insignificant to be dismissed. In this way, naming something as "discourse" in fandom tends to act as a signal that one must pick a side and justify it, potentially leading some to feel defensive. Moreover, the word "discourse" has become the latest in a string of words with an overall negative connotation, typically meaning that it is a popular topic with

strong opinions on both sides that has a tendency to lead to arguments. The word "discourse," in a fandom context, is used often in a way that dismisses the argument as legitimate, because users will say things like "I don't want to engage in fandom discourse" or "this is a discourse-free blog." In this way, discourse is often equated with "drama," rather than holding a legitimate argument. Therefore, being named has significance in this space because having an argument labeled as discourse leads users to see the argument as unimportant. Thus, when arguments about racism, sexism, ableism and other ideas are labeled as discourse, users who hold dominant ideologies hold the power through labeling of which arguments are deemed important enough to give attention. On the other hand, a debate that has been named and not called discourse is often seen as more important or worth discussing. The problem in many of these spaces is the fact that the power to name something as either a debate or as discourse lies in the hands of those in the fandom who hold the dominant ideology.

Returning to *AFTG,* fans on both sides of the debate must nevertheless acknowledge or contend with the extra content to signal that they are knowledgeable experts on the subject with enough credibility to speak. Therefore, the fact that the creator has spoken on a topic creates a certain level of legitimacy to certain fan interpretations over others. However, this need not disqualify other readings from gaining traction in fandom spaces. It simply must be acknowledged. For example, one anonymous user asked another whether they believed Andrew and Neil said "I love you," claiming, "nora said no but,, [sic]." The tone of the question comes off as hesitant, as though the words of the author have led them to feel as though a different opinion is somehow forbidden or taboo. However, the fact that they are asking at all shows that they believe there must be more to the story than what Sakavic originally stated on the text.

This particular user agreed with the asker, stating "I disagree with a lot of things Nora said and this is one of them" (2lix). They go on to describe a possible scenario where the phrase might come up. In the tags of their post, in addition to typical tags for organization, they go on to add their own commentary, saying "ofc they say I love you." OFC, an acronym for "of fucking course," signals that to this user, a reading of the text where Andrew and Neil say "I love you" is a given, regardless of what the author says. Therefore, while they do contend with the author's statement, to this user the extra content doesn't seem particularly relevant to the fandom experience or the discussion at hand. It is simply a piece of information to be taken in and either absorbed or dismissed as needed.

On the other hand, some users have a more hostile tone when considering the debate and the author's thoughts on the matter. One user made a post doing largely the same work as the previous one: disagreeing with the source material before going on to describe a scenario where the words might have been used. However, in the tags of this user's post, they went on to say, "andreil say they love each other fucken fight me" (kevineil). Therefore, this use showed that they may have wanted someone to contest them.

Yet another user had a different take on the situation. They seemingly accepted Sakavic's take as canon but sought to find another solution through remix. They stated that Andrew and Neil may not say the words, "I love you," in English, but listed some other languages they could say the sentiment in. The idea of Andrew and Neil using other languages to express important but emotional information is one that few fans would express as out of character, because it is already something they do in canon. Using the canon that fans would already be aware of to ease those who disagree into at least considering the idea of them saying "I love you." Furthermore, in their tags, the user concluded that while they could see Sakavic's reasoning in deciding not to

have them say the words canonically, they "still love to find loopholes" (minyardfluff). This

finding and exploiting loopholes is a prime example of how remix is used in fandom to express

disagreement with canon or pseudo-canon sentiments in fandom. Therefore, this expression

helps to create a compromise that many fans could be happy with.

Finally, one fan did express agreement with Sakavic's ideas. Rather than use remix,

though (perhaps because there would be no point in this case), the user expressed their views in a

meta style post, explaining why Andrew and Neil saying "I love you" would be meaningless to

the characters and why posts to the contrary, no matter how well meaning, were missing the

point. The fan goes on to explain their view that love, as generally described by society, is a

concept that, because of Andrew and Neil's unique life experiences, doesn't mean anything to

the characters, and that therefore an admission of love wouldn't necessarily be out of character,

but would mean something different to the characters because of the traumas they faced

(potterheaddoesnotquitecoverit). Here, the fan makes an interesting point in saying that love is

and isn't a factor worth analyzing in their relationship. I believe this contradiction points out how

fans are using the word "love" to describe the concept of love in relation to the mainstream

conception of marriage and the nuclear family. As such, the above post reveals how arguments

surrounding ships can be used to show how remix can be used to reinscribe dominant

hegemonies.

A discussion sprang up in the notes of this post, where some individuals claimed that this

post actually changed their minds on the debate, or, for those who agreed to begin with,

proclaimed it in a way that made sense or was different from others who expressed the same

sentiment. It is somewhat surprising to see a post be taken up in this way, without causing

argument, but I think certain strategies by the original poster helped lead to this reception. First,

the user began the post by acknowledging that both sides of the debate made good points and that both sides of the debate were missing the point. Additionally, they end the post by saying that they "happily read fics on any opinion" (potterheaddoesnotquitecoverit), but that this was their take on the situation. Finally, their tags on the post were fairly basic, with just the ship name, the character names, and the fandom name, as well as "the I love you debate." This may have mitigated pushback because they didn't have any inflammatory added commentary, nor did they have any tags that were off topic or able to lead to debate in themselves.

III.   Tags and Rhetorical Velocity

Whether or not fans individually value legitimacy and the authors' input on fan remix, creators still often contend with the issue in order to reach an audience on the website. As such, fans employ many different strategies in order to compose in ways that will gain them status and popularity. The different approaches to addressing the "I love you debate" had some similarities and reveal some important information on how disagreement is handled within fandoms. First, it again highlights the importance of tags in understanding how disagreement works in the Tumblr space. For most of the posts, the posts themselves were innocuous enough, simply providing an alternate viewpoint and letting the remix speak for itself in providing a situation other fans could decide to either agree with or disagree with as they chose. The tags, however, were where the creators of the posts chose to interject their own thoughts on the debate. This usage shows that the tags have a purpose beyond just organizing information and finding audiences. It also acts as a designated area for commentary and for revealing opinions beyond the post. In my experience, any commentary I house in the tags is information that I want my followers to know but isn't necessarily relevant to understanding the post itself. The information found in these users' tags seems to support that claim.

Continuing on the topic of tags, though, it is worth noting that a user's tags are only shown on the original instance of the post and are not transferred from reblog to reblog. Therefore, the commentary and perhaps some context on the user's post is lost when the piece is reblogged enough. This can allow the post to take on different meanings depending on who is taking it up. We also see this effect when users add onto a post, often in ways that contradict the original post's meaning. Then, if these arguments and refutations become the more popular iteration of the post, the original meaning of the post can cease to matter. By changing the meaning of the post, more popular blogs, which hold more power in a fandom, can take away power from the original poster by changing their meaning, or failing to recognize nuance that the original poster may have mentioned in their tags.

Therefore, context is important to how users understand a post and the argument therein. For example, if I see a post in a later stage of its time on the website, where multiple users have weighed in, I miss the original iteration of that post, which may mean missing critical information. Ridolfo and DeVoss address rhetorical velocity in their article, pointing out that "the burden of reconstructing context for much of this past material may in some cases outweigh its negative potential if actualized by other actors" (66). For context, this quote surrounds a discussion about whether tweets should be archived or whether they are useless when removed from the original context. On this subject, DeVoss and Ridolfo state their position by saying, "We would argue that old tweets are not useless, but they have a dormant rhetorical potential to be resurfaced, recontextualized, and remixed in ways that may or not be advantageous to the original rhetor or rhetors" (66). Moving back to fandom, then, the ability to decide how much context is shown or discussed can become an issue of power, where original poster's lose their voice to more popular bloggers engaging with their content out of context.

For authors and showrunners engaging with a fandom, the expectation that their words and events portrayed in their works will have a life beyond their control, combined with the knowledge that they will be asked to engage with fans through social media, leads to new situations and considerations, and a no-win situation where one section of their fanbase will be displeased no matter what. While there is an argument to be made that any interaction is positive, not all creators agree. From a fan creator perspective, I have stepped back from creating when negative feedback becomes too great, as the reward of fan activity made for free is engagement and appreciation. From a showrunner perspective, some showrunners see disagreement as disrespectful to their art, as has been seen in reaction to negative pushback against the *Game of Thrones* finale. Sometimes, for better or worse, the effort of creation is not worth the emotional labor of engaging with negative feedback. As such, some creators, such as Sakavic, have taken actions such as closing their inboxes to avoid the hard conversations to begin with. Other creators lean into the controversy by trying to give shippers something to hope for, or using different competitions as a means of marketing.

At the fan level, different concerns arise when considering remix. Users have to consider the trajectory of their posts and how it will be taken up by different users on the site. One such consideration goes back to the subject of tags. Fans need to be strategic in a multitude of ways when it comes to tags in light of what we've explored. If one has a relatively low number of followers, tags are a way to expand the reach of a user's argument. However, which tags to use is a strategic decision and making the wrong one has consequences. One strategy, for example, is to post in several tags that receive high traffic, even if some of the tags used are only tangentially related. This has the benefit of reaching more people, but the chances of someone disagreeing with a post also increases, and with it, the potential for others to come in and reappropriate the

meaning of your posts. This reappropriation has consequences, in the form of becoming a source of mockery or having a version of your post with someone's rebuttal become the popular version of the post. Thus, the original meaning of the post is lost and the creator ceases to be the authority on the text. While this is not necessarily a bad thing from a consumer perspective, many creators, particularly in fan communities where interaction is the price paid for content, would rather not risk opening themselves up to criticism, particularly when that criticism often turns into harassment and bullying.

Another concern that comes with tagging is someone disagreeing with a tag used. For example, one of the largest sources of fandom tension in my experience comes from users objecting to a tag used in a post. So, for instance, if one user tagged a post expressing their dislike of a ship in that ship's tag, some users would object, stating that they were trying to stir up drama or that in tagging in this way was bad form. Others object, saying that tagging is to indicate the subject of the post and that is what they conformed to. While it is possible to be a new user and be ignorant to the conventions of the site, most seasoned users know that it is socially dubious to post hateful opinions in a tag and therefore know they will be accused of causing drama. Debates about what constitutes "ship hate," however, also vary between users on the site.

In terms of legitimacy, then, these posts can act as a form of gaining validation within the fandom space one occupies. Considering ideas about what tags are popular and which bloggers will get a post the most views can both add to a user's legitimacy within the fandom through new followers or notes and detract from it if the idea is not taken up well by the fandom. The nature of Tumblr and what will be taken up is unpredictable, and users are chasing the formula that will lead to the acknowledgement they desire. Since Tumblr is a public forum, the idea of reblogs and

followers as social acumen come into play and show how strategy factors into the performances of certain identities in fandom on Tumblr. For example, many users want interaction on social media, and the main way to get that interaction is by gaining followers. One way to gain followers is to create content that aligns with the trends of the fandom at the time. Therefore, large blogs with many followers tend to set the trends that others follow. As such, fans attempting to grow in popularity tend to create in line with those trends. If the popular blogs in a fandom space then use their power to create remixes that reinscrible problematic ideologies, then that is what tends to be created in that fandom. In the next section, I show the consequences that such trendsetting can have when certain identities are popularized in remix while others are not.

IV.   Crackships vs Rare Pairs: A Matter of Power

Since trends are decided in large part by popular blogs within a fanbase, the terms valued and used by different fanbases must be decided within that group. While the goal of one fanbase might be to achieve validation, other ships are perfectly happy to be non-canon. In this way, rather than striving for canonicity within the text, some fanbases simply want to be acknowledged as legitimate despite the fact that they will never be canon. One such couple in *AFTG* is Renee and Allison, or Renison as they're called. Renee and Allison are teammates of Neil's who are shown to be close friends, but whose sexualities are never canonically expressed. As such, some fans have created remixes where the two are in a romantic relationship.

Renee and Allison, in contrast to Andreil, are a couple whose romantic inclinations as a potential couple have almost no confirmation from Sakavic. In the extra content surrounding the future of the characters as she imagines it, both Allison and Renee end up marrying men. However, fan content has largely ignored these assertions and Renee and Allison have gained almost canon-level popularity within the fandom, despite the arguments made by Sakavic.

Therefore, the majority of the policing of interpretations on this subject comes from within the fandom. Fans don't necessarily have canon to back them up, so, oftentimes, discussions on Renison ignore canon altogether. Instead, many fans simply act with the ship as a given and create fanfiction and fanart assuming that fans who engage with their content already ship the couple.

Because of this disconnect from canon, fans prefer to make up their own interpretations of how the relationship could come about without consulting Sakavic, or ignoring the origin story entirely and just posting about hypothetical situations the couple could find themselves in. Since the creator has already stated that she doesn't see Renee and Allison as romantically involved, and since the books are finished, there is no legitimacy to be found in terms of engaging with the source text. Rather, the search for legitimacy comes from individuals in the fandom who believe it is disrespectful to see Renee as a lesbian, or Allison as bi for that matter. To return to a post from last chapter, where someone tried to point out that there was no canonical basis for Renison, another user shot this argument down by essentially saying, "we know that and we don't care." Because the users who ship Renison already weren't seeking validation from the creator, those outside the community still using those kind of arguments were unsuccessful since the appeal for legitimacy does not match up with the goals of this group.

As this demonstrated, the goals of a certain ship fanbase determines the direction of the discourse within the fandom. For topics where legitimacy to outsiders still matters, as in canon or potentially canon ships, the argumentation style is necessarily different from when an outsider attempts to come in and argue something outside of the goals of the in group. In this way, while legitimacy is still a pertinent factor in how different types of shipping are policed within fandom, I don't believe the conversation ends with a search for canonicity as the only metric for

legitimacy. Rather, different bases have different goals and the terms must be defined by the group itself.

The form of remix I am discussing here is reappropriation, where fans saw a lack of representation of female/female relationships and created one in part to show how Sakavic's interpretation of them as heterosexual is not the only interpretation. In terms of remix, then, I return to Edwards' definition of remix, specifically reappropriation. In his definition of reappropriation, Edwards states that reappropriation "[s]hows power relationships; [i]nverts/challenges dominant discourse; [and] [o]ffers commentary or critique" (3.0). These goals line up with the effects that Renison has in the fandom as well. First, the response of fans to essentially look at what the author has said and cast it aside as irrelevant to their goals works to disrupt the power relationship between author and fan. Stating that the author's opinion is unimportant to their understanding of fandom and shipping disrupts the idea of legitimacy as the key factor in fan remix and dismisses the author as the key audience to be reached. This inversion creates a new system through which power must be negotiated, which is where fan disagreement is a key aspect.

Under this new system, theoretically, power doesn't belong to one group. Instead, it is constantly being negotiated between different factions of a fandom. From there, new hegemonies are created within the space. Non-canon ships, such as Renison, are free to create their own rules, in a way, because they are free from the constraints of adhering to canon. Additionally, the existence of Renison and other non-canonical ships challenges a dominant discourse, particularly when that discourse has been pushed by the author. Just because fandom rejects heteronormative, racist, sexist, and other hegemonic beliefs does not mean that it exists separately from these beliefs. Fandom is still, like any societal structure, susceptible to these dominant social

ideologies. As such, fans wanting to question these beliefs must work to deconstruct them, which is sometimes done through remix. However, there is a common misperception of fandom which leads individuals to believe that fandom is primarily or even only made up of LGBTQ+ individuals. This perception misrepresents fandom and contributes to the idea that fandom is a homogenous space where all users agree on how a text should be interpreted and in turn reappropriated. However, as shown in posts about Renison in particular in other chapters, there are many in fandom spaces who still adhere to the dominant hegemonies of society. For example, just from looking at the basic breakdown of ships in various fandoms, although slash (male/male) shipping is still the most popular, heterosexual pairings are overall more popular than femslash (female/female pairings). This dynamic speaks to not only the demographic or statistical breakdown of characters in media, in terms of whose narratives are told, but also to who holds power in fandom, which is generally straight fans and men.

I do not claim to know what the breakdown is demographically in fandom. Indeed, I doubt such a census could ever be done accurately. What matters more than the actual breakdown of users' identities is how these identities are used to either build ethos in the fandom or to exert dominance over another group, even if these identities are purely performative. In particular, there is a prevalent phrase that "shipping is not activism," which expresses the idea that just because someone performs a certain identity online or supports certain ships does not necessarily mean that their actions in fandom spaces are particularly progressive. In fact, as I argue here, the actions of many fans, even those who ship queer pairings, can be damaging to different identities and can portray harmful ideas by supporting dominant ideologies as the norm or only option. This is not to say that it is not possible for shipping to be used in activism, but merely that it must be backed up with additional actions.

In the books, Renee's sexuality is never stated and there are no romantic or sexual relationships stated for her in the source text. The only mention of Renee being with a man comes from the extra content, which some readers count as canonical and some don't. Therefore, it can be assumed that many of the readers who did not read the extra content and still came to the conclusion that Renee was straight came to this conclusion based on their experiences with the dominant discourse, i.e. that all characters are default straight unless stated to be otherwise. In short, then, readers are appealing to heterosexual identities as normal and all other identities as departures from the norm.

V.   Status Quo Enforcement

The attitude that heterosexual identities are to be prioritized extends beyond *AFTG* to other fandoms as well. Indeed, in addition to being overall less prevalent than het or slash ships, femslash ships are more frequently treated as crackships by fandoms. Therefore, when considering what names are given to different ships, it is important to consider who is doing the naming, for what purpose, and which ships are given the term "rare pair" and which are called "crackships." For example, there tend to be different standards for non-canon male/male and heterosexual ships than there are for female/female ships, in that ships with a man are often viewed as more plausible than ships between two women.

For an example, we can contrast the treatment between Renison and another non-canon ship in *AFTG*, Jerejean (Jeremy and Jean). For context, Renee and Allison are established as close friends throughout the series. At one point, when Andrew attacks Allison, Renee is the first one to come to her aid, even saying at one point, "Andrew, give her back to me" (Sakavic). Additionally, later on, after the team has been involved in a riot, Neil comments upon seeing Renee's arm in a brace and Allison with bruises that he "hoped Renee had taken care of it for

her" (Sakavic). These are the kind of quotes from canon that generally get mentioned when users are trying to make an argument for characters being in a relationship.

However, despite having this kind of support for their interpretation, which is at least on par with the support for other non-canon ships, those who do not support Renison are quick to call on the extra content and the so-called "word of God" (in this case, Sakavic as the author), saying that in Sakavic's extra content, Renee and Allison both end up marrying men in the future, and therefore cannot be interested romantically in each other because of their extra-canonical relationships with men (or in Allison's case, a former relationship with a man in canon). Furthermore, when users want to discredit a ship or portray it as a crackship, they will often say it came out of nowhere, implying that it has no basis in canon. In this way, those who want to prove a ship wrong will combine the moves of calling on canon while simultaneously taking away or diminishing any support canon does give the ship. These moves, however, are only effective if those users who are trying to convince others are also concerned about legitimacy. Therefore, the goal of these moves is not necessarily to make those who already ship something stop shipping it. Rather, the goal is to wear down the ship in the eyes of those who do not ship it.

A contrasting experience exists for JereJean. This ship, between the characters of Jean and Jeremy, is arguably the most popular non-canon ship in the fandom, (at least on Tumblr-other pairings are potentially more popular on other platforms). However, this ship is unique because despite their popularity, the characters are never shown together in canon. In fact, by the end of the series, the characters have only spoken to each other once, off screen. However, especially when compared to Renison, there are very few posts that call out JereJean for being

implausible, and those that do usually call on Jean's character being attracted to Renee and therefore trying to delegitimize Renison rather than JereJean.

Additionally, many posts about JereJean directly reference the lack of canonical support for the ship, saying things such as "I'm honestly so glad we as a fandom just pulled jerejean out of our asses" (allisonreynods). The caveat, though, is that while this is a damning factor for Renison, for JereJean, it is treated as a benefit of the ship or a joke, with most people responding to the post by saying, "I love the fandom" or "I still love it though." What's more, when approached about whether JereJean could be plausible, Sakavic outright denied the existence of JereJean, just as she did with Renison. However, unlike with Renison, this has not been used as an argument against JereJean. In fact, fans will still tweet at Sakavic trying to get her to give extra-canonical information about JereJean, even when she doesn't take the bait. In other words, then, lack of canonical support or support of the author is basically a non-factor when it comes to shipping JereJean. However, despite the similarities between Renison and JereJean, JereJean has never (to my knowledge), been called a crackship. It has always been treated in good faith as a viable option.

Seeing the similarities between these ships and the differences in how they are subsequently treated in the fandom introduces a question of power in the fandom. Despite the work of some members of fandom to use remix to subvert heteronormative norms, the treatment of Renison vs JereJean shows that this goal is more complex and nuanced than it appears. This phenomenon of prioritizing ships involving men over ships comprised of two women is not exclusive to the *AFTG* fandom. What this reveals is that heteronormative and misogynistic norms still hold sway in supposedly subversive fandom spaces. Therefore, it complicates the notion that remix is always used for subversion.

Once again, then, the issue of remix and its role in fandom comes down to power and gatekeeping. Therefore, straight, cis, white, abled fans are given more power in these spaces. Those who hold power in a fandom space—typically, those who hold a dominant view on the fandom in question—will try to keep this power by attempting to delegitimize interpretations they don't agree with not necessarily to those that already hold the alternate view, but to those who are on the fence or questioning this norm. In this way, then, the move of using canon against those who present an interpretation outside of the fandom norm is a way of gatekeeping in order to preserve power and uphold the status quo.

While this chapter specifically explores how gatekeeping through disagreement occurs in fandom, I see many parallels to other online communication. Generally, comment sections on most websites can be fairly hostile sites, and it is frankly rare to see any disagreement resolved peacefully. However, when we start to look at the end goal as not compromise or reconciliation, but rather the upholding of the status quo through signaling to others who are unsure, we can see how disagreement can be used as a recruiting tool for dominant ideologies.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

Over the past three chapters, I have explored a few different areas where fans on Tumblr navigate different types of disagreement, between characters, ships and canon itself. But then, what are those outside of fandom to do with this information? What lessons can we take from learning about how fandom explores disagreement? In this chapter, I will explore how we can use fandom as a lesson for how to navigate disagreement on the internet, and how we can use these lessons in the classroom.

I. Major Takeaways

Identity as Screens

The first takeaway from this project is that in order to understand remix and the disagreement that stems from it, we need to understand perspective and consider how identities and marginality play a key role in discussions about remix, and about online disagreement in general. Once it becomes clear that individuals are not arguing over the same questions, we are forced to see that not all arguments are equal because not all lenses can be equally applied. In a conversation about canon in general, for example, more perspectives can be considered with the same weight. However, if the conversation is in fact not about canon, but about representation of marginalized identities, then the viewpoint of someone who experiences the type of marginalization being discussed must be prioritized over other lenses, because they are the ones experiencing the material harms of bad representation in media.

What's more, remix that furthers harmful norms and upholds the status quo, rather than question those norms, only serves to make marginalized people feel unwelcome in online spaces. Therefore, the discussions cannot be solved because the realities that the two parties are operating under are not same. The way we use language online can reveal the differences in how

we understand the arguments that divide us. Approaching future disagreements with an increased understanding of what is truly being discussed, and whether we have the necessary perspective on the issue to comment substantively is key. We must ask ourselves whether our engagement and the language we use are acting to break down boundaries and problematic ideologies, or reinforcing them, even when our intentions are good.

Power and Boundaries

As such, looking at how internet disagreement happens on Tumblr can help illuminate how disagreements about seemingly innocuous matters can help to create and maintain harmful power dynamics. By praising certain kinds of remix while rejecting others, users make statements about what behavior and identities are acceptable in these spaces. Further, the pseudonymous nature of Tumblr and other sites further exacerbates individuals' willingness to argue in specific ways because there is less risk of having their identities linked back to their offline lives. While this creates freedom in some ways, disagreements still have stakes, because individuals may feel freer to use tactics such as harassment, bullying and threats to curb certain users' involvement and standing in the fandom. Therefore, individuals, particularly marginalized users, may be driven out of these spaces or may choose not to engage at all for fear of being targeted.

Discussions of remix and how it pertains to marginalized individuals is highly personal and often tied to the same staunch belief systems. Remix, as a tool that many marginalized individuals use to subvert hegemonic norms, is also used by those in the majority to uphold the status quo. Where in the past authors and showrunners would use the legal system to shut down remix they found distasteful, the rise of social media and fandom has allowed this gatekeeping to be done by the fandom itself. Furthermore, because Tumblr is a space where many individuals

85

go because their interests and identities are not taken seriously/are not safe to reveal in more public spaces, Tumblr can be seen as one of the more liberal social media websites. However, this perception also allows users to remain relatively uncritical about their own presence in the space and how they may be contributing to making marginalized people feel unwelcome or unsafe.

II.   Implications

Remix as Rhetorical Argument

The idea of remix as inherently contradictory and a tool for both subversion and confirmation of societal hegemonies leads us to the next takeaway of this project, which is that all remix is not created equal, or created for the same reasons. Therefore, remix is rhetorical in that it is a tool used to further certain agendas. As such, the use of remix should continue to be looked into in other areas of rhetorical study. For example, the use of memes on social media is a form of remix in that it requires the reproduction of a certain format to hold new content. These memes, beyond being used for humor, have been shown to be a major factor in how people get their news and convey argument in online spaces. Therefore, as a space that has trafficked in remix as rhetorical argument for years, fandom, even for those not involved in it, can serve as an example of how boundaries are created and enforced through remix.

What's more, as a space with a reputation for being a relatively progressive space, it is worthwhile to study how societal norms can still be preserved, even in so-called liberal spaces. While fandom is often studied as a space where norms are subverted, particularly in the form of remix that challenges heteronormative fiction, there are still ways in which certain kinds of marginality are rewarded while others are deemed too far outside the norm to be allowed. For example, pairings of white males are often prioritized over interracial male/women pairings, and

female/female pairings are often ignored. This hierarchy of marginality in fandom spaces highlights the need for increased intersectionality in online spaces. An understanding of how many progressive spaces can lift up the very ideals they intend to disparage is a lesson to be learned from fandom and to be considered in further studies of fandom.

Nuance in Online Disagreement

Another factor that plays a role in how argument on remix and in online spaces interacts with identity is the idea of personal stake in argument. Often, arguments online become so heated because of a combination of strong personal feelings and users becoming emboldened by their anonymity. However, this alone is too simplistic to really capture the intricacies of how argument functions in many online spaces. Therefore, moving forward, when exploring internet discourse, it is important to understand that there is no one answer to why discourse online becomes as heated as it does. Calls for users to simply find middle ground or a compromise are often not satisfactory because for many of these arguments, there is no compromise. In fact, general calls for civility are often used to place blame on marginalized individuals for the way they react to treatment they feel rightfully disrespected or harmed by (Phillips and Milner). Furthermore, calling for marginalized individuals to compromise their identities, particularly with those willing to threaten violence against them, is deeply problematic because doing so requires already vulnerable people to give up power to groups for the so-called right to not be harassed or attacked, which perpetuates the cycle of violence.

III.   Pedagogical Implications

In terms of pedagogy, then, we have a few future considerations to take away from this project. First, clearly we know that the internet and social media are not going away, and in fact are only getting more and more prevalent in our lives moving forward. Therefore, it is our

imperative as teachers of rhetoric and writing to continue to use social media in our teaching, but more than that, it is our job to attend seriously to the teaching of how to argue on social media. While this project focused on fandom as one microcosm of social media discourse, in my own experience the behavior exhibited on Tumblr is similar to what I have seen on Twitter, Facebook and other social media websites. For example, when Sarah Huckabee Sanders and her family were asked to leave a restaurant because of her connection to the Trump administration, the restaurant was flooded with comments criticizing them and stating that administration members should be allowed to eat where they choose (Knibbs). Additionally, when Congresswoman Maxine Waters called for her constituents to continue engaging in civil disobedience, House leaders criticized her and accused her of asking her constituents to incite violence (Knibbs).

More recently, the US Women's National soccer Team have fallen under criticism for some members refusal to visit the White House after winning the World Cup, saying that their behavior is disrespectful, especially considering they represented the US. These criticisms have extended to analyzing the players' actions during the world cup, from swearing, to supposedly improper celebrating, to accusations of Megan Rapinoe dropping the American flag (Le Miere). Because of the rapid nature of online reporting, these criticisms are easier to levy, and in these cases, anyone calling for any kind of protest or civil disobedience is deemed disrespectful, which seems to be treated as a greater violation than the actions being protested against. Because these experiences seem to permeate our online lives, modeling these arguments, whether through fandom or other social media websites, can potentially be a good way to start the conversations about the use of argument online.

Similarly, through this project, we can see an example of how ancient concepts of rhetoric, such as stasis theory, can be applied in modern contexts. As Crowley states, "a

contemporary theory of rhetoric must do more than revive ancient notions, however; it must adapt old notions to address contemporary rhetorical situations" (47). Doing the work of connecting ancient rhetoric to the contemporary era is certainly not new (see Dustin Edwards' work in "Framing Remix Rhetorically"), but fandom is yet another example of how we can create opportunities in our classrooms for students to show what connections they can find between the kind of conversations they see in their lives and the kinds of rhetoric being taught in the classroom. These conversations are already happening in classrooms about Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and other social media, and Tumblr is another option for how to introduce this kind of work. Additionally, because of its pseudonymous nature and other differences from other social media, I argue that it can provide the opportunity for fruitful conversations about private and public discourse online.

Additionally, remix has become an integral part of our online experiences (if it ever wasn't). Things like memes are a kind of literacy that is needed when teaching contemporary rhetoric. Remix can be used as a tool for subversion or for reinforcing social norms, and therefore, being taught about remix can help start the conversations in the classroom about what a particular remix is being used for. Many people see memes and infographics online and take them at face value, so teaching about how information can be remixed and reused in ways that emphasize certain terministic screens over others is a valuable lesson. The impulse to present remix as either entirely subversive or entirely corporate is a tempting one, but the realities of remix are far more complicated than that, and fandom is a good way to introduce the conflicting nature of remix and the disagreements that spring from it.

Finally, the power dynamics we see displayed on Tumblr are certainly not restricted to this site alone. Hierarchies help create the unspoken rules about what kind of expression, remix

or otherwise, is allowed in different online spaces. If one of the goals of teaching rhetoric is to enable students to have the kind of conversations that desperately need to be had in society today, then addressing how power dynamics enable or hinder that discussion is vital. Therefore, creating a classroom space that gives students, and in particular marginalized students, a space to voice their experiences and tools to start these conversations is equally important. Tumblr and fandom was one such space for me to explore my voice and articulate my experiences. While this is not the only space that creates such opportunities, I offer it as an example of an online space that encapsulates all of the messiness and opportunity for discussion that is needed to teach contemporary rhetoric.

Looking to the future, then, I see several threads worth following up on in future work. First, I hope to develop the idea of identity-as-screen moving forward, examining how identity functions in arguments both in and outside of Tumblr. Second, continuing to make connections between Tumblr and other social media sites holds interest to me, particularly in examining comparisons to Twitter, because this is another space where fandom and social media collide, though with different constraints and affordances. Finally, in terms of fandom studies, I would like to look into some of the remixes themselves and how they function in terms of identity-as-screen, now that I have laid the groundwork in this piece.

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