QUEER AND UNUSUAL SPACE:

WHITE SUPREMACY IN SLASH FANFICTION

by

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Abstract

My thesis exposes the ubiquity of white supremacy in the ostensibly queer practice of writing slash fanfiction.[1] Slash fandom is often characterized as a queer online space that foregrounds women's pleasure and functions as resistance to hegemonic ideas about gender and sexuality. Absent from this conceptualization is the presumption of whiteness that pervades fan imaginings. I undertake a critical discourse analysis of slash fanfiction to reveal the homonationalist and white supremacist ideologies that underpin much creative fan work. Utilizing the framework of affect theory, I then perform an intertextual analysis of comments from white fans that reveal the possessive investment in whiteness that is a powerful undercurrent in fan communities. Finally, I examine critiques from fans of colour to theorize anger and creativity as strategies of resistance that have the potential to open up fan spaces so they may better realize their radical emancipatory potential.

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[1] My title is taken from a quotation by fan Julad (quoted in Tosenberg, 2008, p. 190) who characterizes fandom as "strange and unusual."

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Chapter 1

Introduction

> What is significant about fan fiction is that it often spins the kind of stories that showrunners wouldn't think to tell, because fanficcers often come from a different demographic. The discomfort [with fanfiction] seems to be not that the shows are being reinterpreted by fans, but that they are being reinterpreted by the wrong sorts of fans – women, people of colour, queer kids, horny teenagers, people who are not professional writers, people who actually care about continuity … The proper way for cultural mythmaking to progress, it is implied, is for privileged men to recreate the works of privileged men from previous generations whilst everyone else listens quietly. That's how it's always been done. That's how it should be done in the future, whatever Tumblr says. But time can be rewritten. Myths can bend and change. Something new and exciting is happening in the world of storytelling, and fans are an important part of it.
>
> - Laurie Penny, 2014

I read my first piece of fanfiction over twenty years ago. It was poorly written, the characterizations were off and the grammar was atrocious, but I immediately fell in love with the genre. Not because that specific story was in any way great literature or particularly compelling, but because of the *possibilities* that it opened up. Instead of stories being closed archives, dictated solely by their creators, I had discovered a world where stories had seemingly limitless potential – a world where story parameters were not set based on special effects budgets, time constraints or corporate decision-making, but were controlled entirely by fans. As Henry Jenkins, a fan scholar, explains, fanfiction is "a way of the culture repairing the damage done in a system where contemporary myths are owned by corporations instead of owned by the folk" (Jenkins quoted in Harmon, 1997, para. 9). It is a way of fixing injustices, improving on stories and diversifying characters. Fanfiction was where I first found the space to contemplate the

idea that I might be queer and it provided the queer sex education I never received in school. Many authors publish their first stories on fanfiction archives – archives that house some of the most beautiful and compelling literature I have ever read. Yet, in spite of all the potential inherent in fanfiction, it often leaves so many fans wanting *more*.

It is the space between the infinite possibilities of fanfiction and its frequently disappointing reality that provides the impetus for this thesis. My project exposes the white supremacist ideologies in fanfiction that elide the radical possibilities it offers. While fanfiction may be, as Jenkins describes, the people taking back control of cultural mythmaking from corporations, the myths told in fan stories are still overpoweringly white. Even, or perhaps especially, fanfiction written about queer characters fails, repeatedly, to explore the infinite potential intrinsic to the genre and instead remains obsessively focused on white men. We as fans love to express our pride at how fanfiction accomplishes what mainstream media does not in terms of representation of queer characters and/or women, but fail to acknowledge how our stories do nothing to challenge the pervasiveness of whiteness. White characters predominate in fanfiction and characters of colour are pushed to the sidelines or erased entirely. Any critique of the encompassing whiteness offered by fans of colour is also habitually ignored or dismissed outright. Fanfiction excites and disappoints me in equal measure. As there cannot be improvement unless the problem is exposed and acknowledged, I write this thesis so that I may lend my voice to those of fans, largely women of colour, who are actively engaged in exploring fanfiction as a genre of limitless political and creative possibilities.

Background

Fanfiction, like any other genre, has its associated terminology and so I begin with a brief overview of fan-specific language. It is not possible to provide universally accepted definitions for, as Kristina Busse and Karen Hellekson (2006) explain, fan terminology "continue[s] to evolve and [is] always in dispute" (p. 9). As fan communities evolve, definitions change and fans are constantly engaged in discussions and debates over terminology. Consequently, I make no claim that the definitions I offer here are universal or unchanging, but simply that they provide a useful introduction to fan terminology as it pertains to this thesis.

Creative fan works are built around understandings of *canon*, or "the events presented in the media source that provide the universe, setting, and characters" (Busse & Hellekson, 2006, p. 9). Canon is the source material – what is presented on screen or on the page. It is a term often used to delineate "official" information from fan-created material in *fandom*. Defining fandom, as Mark Duffet (2013) explains, is no easy task as it "can indeed involve different experiences, concern different practices and mean different things in various contexts" (p. 19). What I offer here is a definition based on the work of a number of fan scholars (Duffett, 2013; Busse & Hellekson, 2006; Hills, 2002; Reid, 2009) and my own extensive experience. Fandom is a collective entity, a community of people, or fans, that actively, and often creatively, engage with a particular canon text; the canon texts (and their attendant source information such as plots, characters, contexts, and settings), for the purposes of this thesis, refer specifically to particular media texts, such as television shows, movies, comic books, anime, gaming or science fiction and fantasy literature. Fan engagement with source material can involve,

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among innumerable other activities, discussing, debating, critiquing, transforming, expanding and/or creatively interpreting it. The term fandom is sometimes used specifically to define a particular community. For example, there is a *Lord of the Rings* fandom, a *Harry Potter* fandom, a *Doctor Who* fandom, and so on. At other times, it can be used very generally to define all fan communities and fan activity as one enormous, nebulous collective.

Although creative activity in fandom varies enormously and can include creating art (fanart), videos (fanvids), playlists (fanmixes – compilations of songs inspired by a fan-related source like a TV show, character or pairing), GIFs (Graphic Interchange Format images), etc., the focus of this thesis is on fan writing, or *fanfiction*. Fanfiction (fanfic, fic) is a broadly defined term for stories written by fans using characters and settings from an original work – such as books, visual media or celebrity culture (Reid, 2009). One of the attractions of fanfiction is that it can involve engaging with familiar characters and settings in a wide variety of genres. While there are far too many to include here, Busse and Hellekson (2006) list a number of fanfiction genres that provide a good illustration:

> *[H]urt/comfort,* or *h/c*, stories, which, as the name implies, revolve around a character being injured and another character comforting him […] *deathfic*, where a major character dies; *curtainfic*, or fic so domestic that the main characters, often a male slash pairing, shop for curtains together; *episode fix*, a rewriting of an event provided in canon to a deliberately noncanonical, preferred conclusion; *episode tag* or *missing scene*, a continuation of a canonical scene that provides

more information; *AU* or *alternate universe*, where familiar characters are
dropped into a new setting (which, depending on the media source, may or may
not be canonical, because many of the source texts have fantastical components
and not a few have played with the multiverse); *crossover*, combining two
different sets of characters from two media sources into a single story […] *fluff,*
an often light story that usually seeks to make a tender emotional impact rather
than put forward a plot*, PWP*, which gets spelled out either as "porn without plot"
or "plot? what plot?"; and various forms of sexually explicit stories that revolve
around *kink* (p. 10-11).

Fanfiction is also typically organized into three categories: *gen, het* and *slash*. Gen (from
general) denotes a story with no romantic or sexual relationships (relationships,
particularly those in canon, might be mentioned briefly but are not the focus of the story).
Het, as the name implies, are stories about heterosexual relationships, while slash fic, my
object of study, involves queer relationships (Busse & Hellekson, 2006). While the term
slash ostensibly covers stories written about all queer relationships, it almost always takes
the form of a relationship between two cisgender men. Fanfiction written about two
women, although rare, is typically called femme-slash. The act of supporting or wishing
for a particular intimate relationship between characters (whether het, slash or femme-
slash) is known as *shipping* (derived from relationship – the term itself originated in the
X-Files fandom). It is also important to note that, while fanfiction and fandom are global
experiences, my experience and this thesis are focused on Western, English-speaking
iterations and thus cannot be simply extrapolated to fandom universally.

Most academic and fandom sources agree that organized, English-speaking, Western slash fandom had its beginnings in the early 1970s, where it centered on the original *Star Trek* television series and specifically the pairing of Kirk and Spock (Coppa, 2006). The term slash, in fact, has its origins in the punctuation mark between Kirk/Spock, written as such to denote a romantic and/or sexual relationship. Fandom convention typically differentiates between pairings written as Kirk & Spock (denoting friendship) and Kirk/Spock (denoting a slash relationship). Early slash fandom, before the advent of the Internet, took place mostly in the form of *fanzines* (fan-made publications containing fanfiction and fanart). Consequently, participation in early fandom was limited to those who had the ability to attend fan conventions and purchase fanzines and, as such, was highly class-based. With the introduction of the Internet, fans moved online and began to organize mailing lists and Usenet discussion groups to discuss and distribute fanfiction. As a result, pairings and plots that were not popular enough to warrant printing in fanzines could now appear and the amount of fanfiction being posted grew rapidly (Falzone, 2005).

As web technologies evolved, fandom moved off of mailing lists and began to disperse onto other websites, including Livejournal, which had a significant fandom presence for many years. Although Livejournal still contains a large number of fandom blogs, many fans have moved away from it and onto new platforms such as Tumblr, Insanejournal and Greatestjournal, Dreamwidth, and the Archive of Our Own (Ao3). Ao3 is a fanfiction archive created by the Organization for Transformative Works (OTW) (Hellekson, 2009), a non-profit, fan-created organization that, along with Ao3, also collects and archives fandom history (Fanlore), provides legal support to fans being sued

for copyright infringement, and runs an academic, peer-reviewed journal (*Transformative Works and Cultures*). The names of both the Archive of Our Own and the Organization for Transformative Works were chosen specifically to reflect a certain politics. In 2007, in response to the website FanLib, a profit-driven fanfiction archive, Livejournal blogger and professional author, Naomi Novik (who uses the online pseudonym astolat), proposed the creation of an archive that was owned and run by fans for fans (astolat, 2007). The name Archive of Our Own was chosen to reflect the fan ownership and to "clearly state our case for the legality of our hobby up front, while not trying to make a profit off other people's IP [Intellectual Property] and instead only making it easier for us to celebrate it, together, and create a welcoming space for new fans that has a sense of our history and our community behind it" (astolat, 2007, para. 4). Similarly, the Organization for Transformative Works was named in response to legal threats, specifically copyright and ownership issues that have long plagued fanfiction communities. The term *transformative* was "specifically chosen to highlight in the nonprofit organization's name one of the key legal defenses for fanworks of all kinds (including real person fiction): that they are transformative of original source materials" (OTW, 2014, Organization for Transformative Work section, para. 4). Currently, fandom is dispersed across many online platforms, but the OTW has begun to provide a certain amount of organization in terms of advocacy and accessibility to fanworks (Hellekson, 2009). Specifically, the OTW is engaged in legal advocacy work that attends to both a broad defense for the legality of fanworks under fair use laws, and aid for individual fanfiction authors facing copyright claims and other legal issues.[2] Simultaneously, the

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[2] "Fair use is the right to make some use of copyrighted material without getting

OTW promotes the accessibility of fanworks, in terms of preventing the loss of fanworks

or fan history as a result of an impromptu deletion of other platforms (like the 2009

shutdown of Geocities that resulted in a significant loss of fanworks from the 1990s and

early 2000s), having a central location for fanworks so that they may be more easily

found, and maintaining and improving compatibility with assistive technology for people

living with disabilities, such as screen-readers, screen magnification software and Braille

terminals (OTW, 2014).

Fanfiction housed on Ao3 is one of the two major research sites for my thesis.

Tumblr, the other focus of my research, was launched in February 2007 and is a location

of significant fan activity. While fanfiction is sometimes posted directly on Tumblr, it

most often serves as a place to link to stories posted elsewhere (typically on Ao3).

Tumblr is a popular location for discussion between fans about canon, shipping,

characters, fanfiction, etc. It can be challenging to explain Tumblr to those unfamiliar

with it and so I borrow this concise explanation from blogger nerdshares (2009):

Tumblr is a community. Similar to Twitter, you can "follow" people whom you

find interesting and their entries will appear on your homepage or "dashboard." In

the upper righthand corner of each post that appears on your dashboard are two

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permission or paying. It is a basic limit on copyright law that protects free expression.
"Fair use" is an American phrase, although all copyright laws have some limits that keep
copyright from being private censorship. Fair use favors uses that (1) are noncommercial
and not sold for a profit; (2) are transformative, adding new meaning and messages to the
original; (3) are limited, not copying the entirety of the original; and (4) do not substitute
for the original work. None of these factors is absolutely necessary for fair use, but they
all help, and we believe that fanworks like those in the archive easily qualify as fair uses
based on all these factors" (OTW, 2014, Legal section, para. 3-4).

buttons – one in the shape of a heart, which you can click to indicate that you

"like" that post, and one that says "reblog," which allows you to post that entry to

your blog, while giving credit to the original blogger (para. 2).

Posts can contain essentially any type of multimedia and are typically organized by *tags*.

Tags are words or phrases that allow users to quickly classify the content of a post

(individual blogs or the entire Tumblr website can be searched by tag). Tagging makes it

easy for others to find a post about a particular topic and, on both fanfiction websites and

Tumblr, fans habitually use tags to signal to other users a post that is about a specific

fandom, character or ship.

Literature Review

Much early research on slash fanfiction was focused on puzzling out what drew

people to write, read and discuss these stories so passionately (Bacon-Smith, 1992;

Jenkins, 1992). Studies of pre-Internet and early Internet fandom were based on data that

indicated that the population of slash fanfiction writers was primarily made up of

heterosexual women. Consequently, academics interested in fan studies and slash

fanfiction advanced a number of theories to explain the seeming incongruence of

heterosexual women dedicating their time to writing stories about characters, mostly

male, engaged in same-sex relationships (Tosenberger, 2008). These theories included:

fanfiction as pornography for women (Russ, 1985), as a way for women to express a

desire for equal relationships between equal partners (Lamb and Veith, 1986), and as a

reaction to the lack of fully formed female characters, particularly in science fiction and fantasy (Bacon-Smith, 1992; Jenkins, 2006; Penley, 1998).

Although several recent studies on fandom and fanfiction still rely on one or more of these theories (Davies, 2005), the clear presence of significant numbers of fans who are not heterosexual women, and the ubiquity of slash fanfiction even in fandoms with strong canon female characters, resulted in new theories about slash (Lackner, et al, 2006). Specifically, fandom is conceptualized as a queer online space that functions as a resistance to hegemonic masculinity, a place to explore gender and sexual identities, and a participatory culture that engages in creative and critical ways with source texts (Bury, 2005; Busse, 2006; Dhaenens, 2008; Flegel and Roth, 2010; Reid, 2009). Julad (online pseudonym), a *Harry Potter* fan, expresses the theory of slash fanfiction as a queer online space:

> [S]lash is not so much queer in the act as it is queer in the space … Slash is a sandbox where women come to be strange and unusual, or to do strange and unusual things, or to play with strange and unusual sand. The women may be queer or not, strange or not, unusual or not. The queerness may be sexualized or it may not, and what is sexual for one woman may not be for another. The space is simply that: a space, where women can be strange and unusual and/or do strange and unusual things (Julad quoted in Tosenberg, 2008, p. 190).

Robin Anne Reid (2009) suggests that online space that "masks the body and foregrounds discourse," (p. 472) allows for a different performance of gender and a "queer female

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space in which complex deconstructive performances of all aspects of identity can take place" (p. 472). This practice of queer reading is not necessarily undertaken with the intention of "making texts queer but rather as trying to understand how texts might be understood as queer" (Dhaenens, 2008, p. 342). In this way, queer reading in fandom answers Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's (1997) call to examine literature through a queer lens that seeks out potential queer nuances. Becoming aware of the potentially queer way that words resonate allows the reader to see queer idioms even in ostensibly heteronormative literature (Sedgwick, 1997). Attending to the queer nuances in canon texts "produce[s] alternative temporalities by allowing [participants in queer subcultures] to believe that their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life-experience-namely, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death" (Halberstam, 2005, p. 2). Slash fanfiction, consequently, is part of a long tradition of queer reading that opens up the possibility for queer lives and experiences to emerge from heteronormative structures. The queer lives that emerge, however, often necessitate the universalization of the white male subject and the subsequent erasure of queer people of colour (Halberstam, 2005). Other fan studies scholars (Hodges, 2011; Hunting, 2012) further argue that fanfiction often works to reproduce heteronormative narratives and to bolster normative sexuality in its emulation of common tropes of romance novels. Additionally, some researchers point to the misogyny apparent in much slash fanfiction in its erasure of female characters (Scodari, 2003).

Despite the fact that many researchers point to the significant gap in scholarship on race in fandom (Gatson & Reid, 2011; Gray, Sandvoss & Harrington, 2007; Jenkins, 2013), academic work that attends to these gaps and erasures remains scarce. In one of

the few works that looks at race in fandom, Stanfill (2011) discusses the construction in popular media of the average fan as a white, straight man and the way in which fan engagement is conceptualized as a failed, white heterosexuality. Through narrative representation of fans as white men failing at normative sexuality, the deviance of fan behavior is constructed as something that can be overcome so that fans can be recuperated into white heteronormativity. The result here is to reinforce privilege as the natural product of white, heterosexual masculinity, thereby erasing non-white fans. Other scholarship on race in fandom looks at the role of social media in global cultural circulation (Jung, 2011) and the ways in which fans can use creative works, such as a web series, to resist dominant cultural narratives of whiteness (Christian, 2011). However, all of these authors point to the significant amount of research left to be done on race in fandom.

The pervasiveness of whiteness in fandom, and slash fanfiction in particular, is one part of a much larger racial story. Heteronormativity, as Roderick Ferguson (2003) notes, is racialized as white, and deviance as non-white. Following this, homonormativity, which Lisa Duggan (2003) defines as "a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them," (p. 179) correspondingly contains an inherent presumption of whiteness. Accordingly, mainstream gay rights movements are infused with queer liberal ideologies that replicate white heterosexual life scripts and remain focused on heteronormative institutions like marriage (Eng, 2010). Representations of queer lives, including fictional ones, are often similarly built on queer liberal ideologies that emulate what Audre Lorde (1984) calls the "mythical norm" – people in society who are "white, thin, male, young, heterosexual,

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Christian, financially secure" (p. 116). Those outside the mythical norm tend to attribute their oppression to only one of these differences while ignoring and diminishing other causes. Gay rights movements and fictional representations of queerness center the lives of people who most closely emulate the mythical norm while attributing their oppression only to their departure from heterosexuality. Any intersectional view of queer lives that accounts for other aspects of oppression is foreclosed and the white, gay male subject remains central to representations of queerness.

Centering the white subject in queer representations is the result of the persistent tendency of white people to think about race and sexuality as fundamentally different analytic categories (Somerville, 2000). Patricia Hill Collins (2004) argues that historical views of black sexuality imagine the black body as having a "naturalized, normal, hyper-heterosexuality" (p. 80), which simultaneously constructs the black body as sexually deviant, yet impossibly queer. When race does emerge, Jasbir Puar (2007) contends that queer bodies of colour are contrasted against homonormative, white, productive citizens and are characterized as dangerous and in need of state-control. Queering race is therefore not as simple as adding race to queerness, but must take into account how queerness and race are not separate social structures that act independently, but work to "mutually construct one another" (Hill Collins, 1998, p. 62).

My thesis further draws on critical white studies to expose the centrality of whiteness to slash fanfiction. Whiteness is the invisible, unmarked category that serves to mark and subject others to examination (Chambers, 1997; Frankenberg, 1993). Ross Chambers (1997) contends that whiteness is, in fact, the "primary unmarked and so examined" (p. 189) category, the effect of which is a built-in privilege (Lorde, 1984).

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White people are taught to think of whiteness as the default, and thus natural and normal, (McIntosh, 1988), resulting in what Joe Feagin (2010) terms the "white racial frame" – the deeply embedded ideology that whiteness is superior and that white control of power structures is the natural order. The unmarked category of whiteness and the white-as-default perspective are the basis for the naturalization and perpetuation of white supremacy – the foundation for much of my analysis of slash fanfiction.

Methods and Methodology

In order to analyze the white supremacist ideologies that underpin much of slash fanfiction, I undertake a critical discourse analysis of fanfiction and ensuing discussions in the fandom of *Teen Wolf* on the websites Tumblr and the Archive of Our Own. I begin from the same premise as Mel Stanfill (2011) who contends that both fandom and whiteness are discourses. According to James Gee (1990):

> Discourses are characteristic (socially and culturally formed, but historically changing) ways of talking and writing about, as well as acting with and toward, people and things. These ways are circulated and sustained within various texts, artefacts, images, social practices, and institutions, as well as in moment-to-moment social interactions. In turn, they cause certain perspectives and states of affairs to come to seem or be taken as 'normal' or 'natural' and others to seem or be taken as 'deviant' or 'marginal' (e.g., what counts as a 'normal' prisoner, hospital patient, or student, or a 'normal' prison, hospital, or school, at a given time and place) (p. 200).

Ruth Frankenberg (1993) argues that the "discursive environment" (p. 78) we inhabit is as tangible and hard to change as the material environment. Discourses are "one of the prime means by which we have any knowledge of reality" (Dyer, 1997, p. xiii) and how we think and feel about a thing is directly related to how it is represented and spoken about. Further, discourses "make us intelligible to ourselves and others as subjects" (Stanfill, 2011, para. 2.2). Through what Louis Althusser (1971) terms interpellation, an individual comes to realize their subjectivity through a call and recognition – when they "hear and recognize a cultural story and understand his or her place in it" (Sandell, 1997, p. 218). It is in this way that "discourse not only constructs a concept of fan and a concept of white, which are socially real, but also – through that moment of call and recognition – produces subjects to occupy those positions" (Stanfill, 2011, para. 2.2). Critical discourse analysis is both a theory and a method that is "not only a description and interpretation of discourses in social context but also offers an explanation of why and how discourses work" (Rogers, 2004, p. 2). By looking not only at how a text is produced and consumed, but the wider social practices surrounding it, critical discourse analysis allows for consideration of the ideological effects of discourse and how it contributes to unequal power relations and social inequalities (Phillips and Jorgensen, 2002).

I further draw on the concept of intertexuality, or the idea that each individual text draws on discourses and elements from previous ones (Fairclough, 1992). Paul Booth (2010) argues for the importance of intertexuality in the new Web 2.0 and suggests that we study texts and stories *with* user and fan comments (that appear after or below the

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original text). Tumblr differs slightly from Booth's original meaning as not all comments exist on the same "page," but I argue that they can still be considered as one text and that they should be read with and alongside the original text. Comments and blog posts discussing race in fandom build on each other and are mutually influential. Fanfiction, like all writing, does not happen in a vacuum and is heavily influenced by trends in wider fandom, and elsewhere. The "truth" of a text comes from a plurality of voices, which create a plurality of meaning (Booth, 2010). Any analysis on the workings of whiteness in fanfiction thus cannot be complete without paying attention to the larger text—comments, commentaries, posts—that exist beyond, yet are also responding to, the original fanfiction stories. I thus draw on both discourse analysis and intertextuality to read racial and queer narratives across sources – the canon text, fanfiction and broader fandom discussions – to expose the workings of white supremacy in slash fandom.

To accomplish a reading of racial and queer narratives across sources, I attend to three analytical sites. The first is a critical discourse analysis of three pieces of *Teen Wolf* fanfiction on the Archive of Our Own. Close readings and a discourse analysis of plot, dialogue and characterization allow for a consideration of the politics of writing queerness in the context of white supremacy. I focus on the racialized narratives within the stories to expose how white normativity and white supremacy are discursively preserved in a fictional primary source. Examining three pieces of fanfiction from within the same fandom also allows for an analysis of the discursive environment of fandom wherein specific, and often racialized, tropes are concretized and naturalized.

The diffuse and interconnected nature of fandom, especially after its move onto the Internet (Hellekson, 2009), necessitates consideration of conversations and

commentary that happen outside of fanfiction text – my second analytical site.   Tracking

fandom trends on a diffuse and splintered site such as Tumblr is inherently difficult.

Fandom itself has provided a solution to this challenge that I take up here. As a response

to developments in the *Teen Wolf* fandom, a blogger, who calls herself B, created the

Tumblr *Shut Up Teen Wolf Fandom*, with the mission statement of "calling out those in

the *Teen Wolf* fandom that are racist, ableist, sexist, that fetishize/erase queerness/queer

characters or are complicit or supportive of any of these things" (Shut Up Teen Wolf

Fandom, 2013a, About section, para. 1). The blog itself acts as an archive of posts from

the wider *Teen Wolf* fandom that epitomize racist, sexist, ableist and homophobic trends

and responses to them. B herself self-identifies as a white queer woman, however, it is

not necessarily her commentary that my analysis attends to, but rather the content of the

posts she collects and archives. I make no claim that this blog is representative of the

entirety of *Teen Wolf* fandom but it does make a concerted effort to collect and call out

posts that are representative of fandom trends as they exist on Tumblr. Consequently,

Shut Up Teen Wolf Fandom provides fertile ground for intertextual readings and a critical

discourse analysis of fandom conversations involving race, gender, sexuality, ability, etc.

Building on Joe Feagin's (2010) white racial frame, this method allows for a

consideration of how white fans interact with fandom as a space of comfort that is

intertwined with normative whiteness. Alexander Doty (2000) and Matt Hills (2002)

argue that most academic theorizing about fandom misses the emotional perspective of

fan engagement and call for more research undertaken from within fan communities to

better reflect practices of actual authors and readers. Drawing heavily on Sara Ahmed's

(2004) *Cultural Politics of Emotion* and my own considerable experience in online

fandom, I attempt to answer this call and consider fan identity formation as tied to emotion, shame and protectiveness.

I further attend to the politics of emotion in my third analytical site – critiques of race, racism, and whiteness made by (mostly queer) women of colour. Tracing a genealogy of RaceFail '09, a pan-fandom discussion of race and racism, I theorize responses from fans of colour alongside Patricia Hill Collins' (1998) notion of the "outsider within" and bell hooks' (1989) strategy of "talking back" to consider anger and creativity as sources of strategic resistance. As critiques from women of colour are again widely dispersed online, I return to blogs like *Shut Up Teen Wolf Fandom* that collect and archive racist posts. Rather than examining only the archived posts, I consider instead the responses of fans of colour to these posts. Using an intertextual reading of *Shut Up Teen Wolf Fandom* and the similar blog *Fandom Hates PoC*, I consider the responses of fans of colour to racist posts in the context of Audre Lorde's (1984) conceptualization of anger as a strategy of resistance.   Critical discourse analysis, which links discourse with subject formation, further allows for a consideration of creative resistance to racism in the form of what José Muñoz (1999) calls "disidentification" – a strategy that comprises neither wholly opposing or wholly aligning oneself with dominant culture.

As I note later in this thesis, my first exposure to feminism, and more relevantly, anti-racist feminism, occurred through fandom, specifically through the writings of queer women of colour. In reading with and across women of colour as a white identified queer woman in this project, I am mindful of the tendency of white feminists to enlist black women writers "to bestow a cultural authority that derives in part from their enforced experience of embodiment" (Abel, 1993, p. 479). I draw upon Mariana Ortega's (2006)

discussion of "the dangerous terrain that white feminists traverse when they claim to be concerned about women of colour, and the possible dangers that lurk even for well-meaning white feminists interested in issues about women of colour" (Ortega, 2006, p. 58). Ortega insists that knowledge about the experiences of women of color cannot simply be attained by reading stories or writings by or about them (Ortega, 2006). Rather, there is a need to build relationships, a need for a more active stance on the part of white feminists to learn about the experiences of women of colour, and a need to understand the importance of praxis and the relational nature of knowledge about the so-called other (Ortega, 2006). My attempt to answer this call is grounded in my long-standing history as a reader and writer of fanfiction and the interactional nature of fandom that creates fertile ground for the possibility of the relational knowledge advocated by Ortega.

Chapter Outlines

The chapter following this introduction, "Narratives of Whiteness in Slash Fiction," reveals narratives of whiteness in fandom via an analysis of the repetitive, obsessive tendency of slash fanfiction authors to only write stories about two white men. By undertaking a critical discourse analysis of *Teen Wolf* fanfiction, I expose how the repetitive return to pairings of two white men serves to resituate whiteness as the invisible norm that works in the service of white supremacy. In looking at specific tropes and conventions in slash fanfiction, I also reveal the homonormative ideology underpinning ostensibly apolitical fan writing. I argue that the erasure and disparagement of characters of colour in slash fanfiction constitutes a project of queer liberalism and

homonationalism whereby particular queer bodies are celebrated and folded into the nation-state while others are excluded and produced as dangerous and uncontrollable. In so doing, my analysis of *Teen Wolf* slash fanfiction contradicts notions of fandom as a space free from racism and reveals instead how it is suffused with white supremacist ideology.

I turn my attention in my third chapter, "Possessive Investment in Whiteness," to the frequent perception of online fandom as a queer, female space where sexual and gender norms can be consciously resisted. Many queer fans describe slash fanfiction as one of the first places where they were able to explore a queer identity and read about a sexuality that does not subscribe to heteronormative imperatives. As a result, many queer fans feel invested in fandom as a queer space that is linked to ideas of identity, community and safety. Additionally, queer and non-queer fans frequently associate their participation in slash communities as indicative of their support for queer rights and thus use this participation as suggestive of their positive moral standing. When racism in slash fanfiction is critiqued and addressed, many white fans respond with vehement negative reactions. Charges of racism disrupt internal narratives of morality as linked to support for queer rights and are often read as attacks on the safe, queer space of fandom. In this chapter I expose how white fans are invested in their own space as being safe for them, while actively ignoring and denying how this perpetuates the erasure of fans of colour and reinforces fandom as a space of white supremacy.

My final chapter, "Resistances and Reimaginings," considers strategies of resistance, undertaken mainly by fans of colour, to the pervasiveness of whiteness in fandom and slash fanfiction. I map a genealogy of RaceFail '09 to reveal how it provided

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the impetus for many current projects of resistance in fandom. In an analysis of blogs created to call out racism and those that house creative responses to white supremacy, I consider anger and creativity as complementary strategies of resistance that attempt to reimagine fanfiction as a site of limitless potential.

Chapter 2

Narratives of Whiteness in Slash Fanfiction

Slash is the sound of white men fucking.

- Aja Romano (2012, para. 2)

Writing fanfiction is a transformative act. By taking an existing media text and creating a new story from it, fanfiction authors creatively reinterpret pop culture in ways that often produce new insights into characters, plots and settings. The transformative, creative nature of fanwork, however, does not mean that it is always progressive, politically conscious or radical, particularly when it comes to issues of race.[3] As a long-time member of fan communities and an avid reader and writer of fanfiction, I often see utopian conceptualizations of fandom as a space that destabilizes gender and sexuality and allows queerness to flourish. Tumblr blogger lierdumoa (2013) describes slash fanfiction as "a valid and effective form of queer advocacy…because subverting heteronormativity is the fundamental premise of slash" (para. 14).[4] However, in taking a closer look, it becomes obvious that, contrary to fandom's claims of accessibility to all queer-oriented people, there is an enduring racism underlying much fan work. In contradiction to the frequent perception of fandom as a radical queer space, fan-created work habitually reproduces hegemonic ideas of white supremacy and the universalization of white queer experiences. This chapter explores the inherent racism underlying the

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[3] This does not mean that fanwork *cannot* be progressive, politically conscious or radical, as I discuss in detail in Chapter 4.

[4] See also Penny (2014), *Mapping Queerness in Fandom* (2012), and idyllspace (2013).

ostensibly queer nature of fandom by examining narratives of whiteness in *Teen Wolf*

fanfiction. By focusing on racialized discourses in *Teen Wolf* fanfiction, I disrupt utopian

imaginings of a queer fan space and demonstrate that fandom often replicates queer

liberal ideologies of white-as-default and the erasure of queer people of colour.

The Invisible Norm

> White supremacy is the great silence of our world, and in it is embedded much of
> what ails us as a planet. The silence around white supremacy is like the silence
> around Sauron in *The Lord of the Rings*, or the Voldemort name which must never
> be uttered in the Harry Potter novels. And yet here's the rub: if a critique of white
> supremacy doesn't first flow through you, doesn't first implicate you, then you
> have missed the mark; you have, in fact, almost guaranteed its survival and
> reproduction. There's that old saying: the devil's greatest trick is that he
> convinced people that he doesn't exist. Well, white supremacy's greatest trick is
> that it has convinced people that, if it exists at all, it exists always in other people,
> never in us.
>
> <div align="right">- Junot Díaz (Moya, 2012, para. 11)</div>

It is the invisibility of white supremacy that Junot Díaz describes in the above quotation

that underpins my analysis of whiteness in slash fanfiction in this chapter. Race, as

Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1994) conceptualize it, is a "preeminently

sociohistorical concept … racial categories and the meaning of race are given concrete

expression by the specific social relations and historical context in which they are

embedded" (p.60). The "historical, ideological process" (Somerville, 2000, p.7) of

racialization, defined as "the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially

unclassified relationship, social practice or group" (Somerville, 2000, p. 7), produces the

ostensibly natural category of race. The fact that race is socially constructed, however,

does not mean that race has no significance. Quite the opposite for, as Kimberle

Crenshaw (1993) explains in her discussion of identity politics, it is not that "certain

<div align="center">23</div>

categories that are socially constructed" are "take[n] as natural … but rather [that] the descriptive content of those categories and the narratives on which they are based have privileged some experiences and excluded others" (p.1298). Racial ideologies involve "systems of representation and cultural assumptions about race through which individuals [understand] their relationships within the world" (Somerville, 2013, p. 220). The social construction of race, because it privileges the experiences of white people, consequently allows power to be "clustered around" (Crenshaw, 1993, p.1297) the category of whiteness.

Whiteness, in contrast to other racial identities, remains an unmarked, unexamined, invisible category that marks, examines and makes visible other identities. Ross Chambers (1997) explains that although "there are plently of unmarked categories (maleness, heterosexuality, and middle classness being obvious ones)… whiteness is perhaps the primary unmarked and so unexamined – let's say 'blank' category" (p. 189). The effect of the invisibility of whiteness is to create the "privilege of whiteness" (Lorde, 1984, p. 117-18), which Peggy McIntosh (1988) describes as the process by which "whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work that will allow "them" to be more like "us"" (p.98). White privilege and the invisibility of whiteness mean that white people are perceived first and foremost to be individuals, rather than as marked with a racial identity. Whiteness thus becomes the invisible norm to which all else is compared (unfavourably) (Chambers, 1997). The hegemonic nature of whiteness as the invisible norm makes ostensibly neutral spaces, such as fandom, synonymous with white spaces. Simultaneously, the unmarked category of whiteness allows for a

disavowal of ongoing racism under the auspices of "colourblindness," the popular

assumption that not only does racism no longer exist, but also that race itself is no longer

relevant (Joseph, 2009). Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2003) defines "colourblind racism" as

the process by which racial inequalities are explained as resulting from non-racial

dynamics (such as market dynamics or natural phenomena) and goes on to describe how

colourblindness is used as "ideological armor for a covert and institutionalized system in

the post-Civil rights era" (p.93). Colourblindness allows white people to deny being

racist while articulating ideas that "protect their racial interests" (Bonilla-Silva, 2003, p.

93). It is through the logic of colourblindness and the unexamined nature of whiteness

that white supremacy remains "the great silence of our world" (Díaz in Moya, 2012, para.

11) and it is how this silence permeates the seemingly queer space of fandom that I turn

my attention to in this chapter.

Two White Guys

> Well. It works like this:
> When a white penis meets another white penis, and both penii are attached to
> white men of at least an 8 on a 1 to 10 conventional attractiveness scale?
> The connection between those white penii is more powerful, deep, meaningful,
> and compelling than anything else. At all. Plot, characterization, logic, none of
> these things matter.
> There is a pair of white cocks at stake, and their needs must be met
>
>   - anonymous (fail-fandomanon quoted at Fanlore, 2014, para. 2).

In the above quotation, an anonymous commenter at the Livejournal community *fail-*

fandomanon humorously sums up one of the ways in which white supremacy permeates

slash fanfiction. Known as the Two White Guys trope (Fanlore, 2013), a term I also

employ in my work, the preference and focus on conventionally attractive white men is

ubiquitous in slash fandom. On the Two White Guys page on Fanlore there is a list of examples from a variety of fandoms, such as *Psych, The Avengers, Inception, Hawaii Five-0 and Teen Wolf* (Fanlore, 2013). Essentially, the Two White Guys trope foregrounds the experiences of conventionally attractive white men, regardless of the diversity of characters and any subtext or evidence present in the canon material. This occurs even when the two characters in question have little to no interaction or are enemies in the original material(s). Pairings that involve a character of colour are diminished or ignored regardless of whether the source material contains the type of evidence usually used to support slash pairings (Fanlore, 2013). Despite sustained criticisms from fans of colour, the obsessive, repetitive foregrounding of white men that forms the cornerstone of the Two White Guys trope continues to keep cultural hegemonies of race and gender firmly in place.

The history of Western slash fandom is overwhelmingly a history of the Two White Guys trope described above, beginning with the original *Star Trek* television series and the pairing of Kirk and Spock. It must be noted here, however, that the pairing of Kirk and Spock necessarily complicates the Two White Guys trope through the character of Spock, a half-human, half-Vulcan, played by Jewish actor Leonard Nimoy. Nimoy created Spock's iconic Vulcan salute from his childhood memories of the way kohanim (Hebrew for priest) held their hand when giving blessings (Pogrebin, 2007). Both in-universe characters (Dr. McCoy, for example) and fans also often read and represent Vulcan culture as static and alien, and Spock as robotic and consequently less human. In particular, the Vulcan capacity for extremely strong emotion and the Vulcan male experience of *pon farr* – an overpowering surge of emotions that necessitates sexual

intercourse to ward off insanity and death – result in Vulcan characterization in some fanwork as less civilized and more animalistic in their capacity to lose control. Taken in tandem with Spock's "mixed-race" heritage, this manner of reading Vulcan culture through an orientalist lens – as static, alien and less human – means that Spock cannot be thought of as unproblematically white. The subsequent de-racialization that takes place in fandom, where Spock's complicated racial status is rarely acknowledged, is in itself a type of whitewashing that reinforces the invisible norm of whiteness.

Although *Star Trek* fandom, and Kirk/Spock slash fandom, is ongoing and has, in fact, enjoyed somewhat of a renaissance with the release of the 2009 reboot of the film series (and the 2013 sequel), much of early *Star Trek* fanfiction was written before the existence of the Internet and was thus distributed mainly through fanzines (Coppa, 2006). As these fanzines grew in popularity, other fandoms began to be included and have their own fanzines created and produced by fans. Overwhelmingly, these new fandoms were also centered on Two White Guys pairings and often contained the "buddy-cop" formula, which almost exclusively consisted of two white men. These included *Starsky and Hutch*, *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* and *The Professionals* (Coppa, 2006).

With the advent of the Internet, fandom began to move onto mailing lists and UseNet groups with slash fanfiction being written about shows like *The Sentinel* and *The X-Files*. Both of these fandoms again focused on pairings involving two conventionally-attractive white men, with the *X-Files* fandom in particular focusing on an antagonistic pairing (Mulder/Krycek), while simultaneously ignoring or diminishing the central

canon relationship between Mulder and Scully. The treatment of Scully's character, which often involved grossly overemphasizing her negative characteristics or outright making her into a villain (a phenomenon known as "bashing" in fandom circles), was an early example of a common trend in slash fandom to make women into completely unlikeable characters in order to support a pairing of two men (Bury, 2005). The exclusionary focus on two white men continued in fandoms surrounding the television show *Stargate SG-1*, and the movie trilogy *The Lord of the Rings*. Today, slash fandom remains inordinately focused on pairings of two white men, even when women and/or characters of colour have prominent roles and offer significant moments of queer subtext.

While the Two White Guys trope can take a number of different forms, for my research purposes I focus on three that particularly illustrate the workings of white supremacy in slash fandom. Historically, slash fanfiction focused on white men has occurred in fandoms surrounding a canon source that contains significant queer subtext and canonical "evidence" of a slash relationship. Pairings like Kirk/Spock from *Star Trek* and Jim/Blair from *The Sentinel* exemplify this particular working of the Two White Guys trope. Both of these pairings involve two men who, within the original canon text, have developed a particularly close relationship due to exceptional circumstances; the narrative often involves the characters sharing close living quarters and emotionally charged scenarios that lead to a sharing of intense feelings and physical closeness that can be used as evidence for a deeper, sexual relationship.

A second Two White Guys trope that emerges when examining narratives of whiteness in slash fanfiction involves the pairing of two characters who have little to no

interaction in the canon. The popularity of fanfiction involving the pairing of Clint

Barton and Phil Coulson in *The Avengers* movie fandom is a striking example of this

trope. Clint/Coulson (as it is referred to in fandom) is the second most popular pairing on

the Archive of Our Own, with over 6100 stories written as of September 2014 (Ao3,

2014). It is second only to the pairing of Steve Rogers (Captain America) and Tony Stark

(Iron Man) who have a long-standing history in comic books and a great deal of

interaction on screen. In contrast, Clint and Coulson exchange a few short words over

communication devices and have no other interaction in canon. As certain bloggers

(spacetwinks, 2013) have pointed out, this particular form of the trope clearly

demonstrates the lengths to which many fans will go to in order to have a pairing of two

conventionally attractive white men about which to write fanfiction.

A third form of the trope involves the recognition that, even in canon texts where

there is evidence to support multiple pairings, including ones involving a character of

colour, Two White Guys pairings still receive the majority of fan attention. Returning to

The Avengers, the enormous popularity of fanfiction about the pairing of Steve Rogers

and Tony Stark can be compared to the paucity of stories about Tony Stark and James

"Rhodey" Rhodes, a black man. As of September 2014 there are over 9500 Steve/Tony

fics (short for fanfiction) were circulating on Archive of Our Own, as opposed to a mere

159 Tony/Rhodey stories (Ao3, 2014). As Tumblr user spacetwinks 2013) points out

> Rhodey's lack of popularity is not due to anything specific about his character, his
>
> personality. The same goes for other black main characters, or side characters.
>
> When we have seen slash fandom joke about 'Oh I'll ship anybody, even people

who've never been in the same room together!' but suddenly abandon fucking

ship when one of those people isn't white, to suddenly abandon any interest in

their friendships or histories, or on and on, we can know it's bullshit. When he

doesn't get put up with his best friend, who he even has a matching suit that was

hinted at being built for specifically him, when they have a massive history and

hug it out and hold hands and all the usual slashy bait people go nuts for, we

know those defenses as applied to fandom as a whole are bullshit (para. 24).

The pairing of Tony and Rhodey has a significant amount of canon evidence behind it,

yet it is drastically less popular than the main two pairings in the fandom (Steve/Tony and

Clint/Coulson), both of which involve white men.[5] Similar dynamics can be seen in the

Psych fandom where Shawn/Lassiter (both white men) fanfiction is over three times more

common than Shawn/Gus (Gus is a black man) fanfiction (Ao3, 2014) – despite the fact

that Shawn and Gus are extremely close and have professed their love for each other in

the canon. For the remainder of this chapter I examine the pairing of Stiles and Derek in

the *Teen Wolf* fandom as an example of this particular form of the trope – where pairings

involving two white men command the majority of fan attention while those involving

one or more characters of colour are erased and ignored, even when they are supported by

significant canon evidence.

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[5] As well as the pairing of Bruce Banner (the Incredible Hulk) and Tony Stark (the "Science Bros" as they are known in fandom), whose popularity has grown significantly in the wake of *The Avengers* movie.

***Teen Wolf* Fanfiction**

       Teen Wolf (Davis, 2011) is television show that premiered June 5, 2011 on MTV and is based on the 1985 movie of the same name. It centres on a fictional Californian town, Beacon Hills, and the character of Scott McCall, a teenage boy who is turned into a werewolf in the pilot episode. The show itself follows Scott and his group of friends as they deal with issues of the supernatural, drawn from a variety of cultural mythologies. Lycanthropy, however, remains the central focus of the show and a growing number of characters have been transformed into werewolves over the past four seasons. For the purposes of my argument here, other characters of note include Derek Hale, a man in his twenties who was born a werewolf and lost his family to werewolf hunters at a young age; Stiles Stilinski, Scott's best friend who remains one of the few non-supernatural characters; Vernon Boyd, a young man who is turned into a werewolf by Derek; and Danny Mahealani, a classmate of Scott's who also has no supernatural affiliation. Jeff Davis, the creator and development producer of *Teen Wolf* has described the show in multiple interviews (Halterman, 2012) as existing in a world free of racism, sexism and homophobia and has stressed the racial diversity of the cast as evidence of this. Scott McCall, Vernon Boyd, and Danny Mahealani are all characters played by people of colour (Tyler Posey, Sinqua Walls and Keahu Kahuanui respectively). Davis, a white man, has been repeatedly criticized for these statements by fans of the show (idyllspace, 2012; tyndalecode, 2013), particularly in the third season when a number of characters of colour were killed, including Vernon Boyd. In response to a fan defending the number of woman and/or people of colour killed off in the third season blogger shutupteenwolffans (2014) argues that:

So, sorry, I'm not going to applaud a man for doing a piss poor job or handling

things like representation in a show he claims exists in a world free of these very

issues. I'm not impressed when he treats queer representation as a bartering

chip/joke. I'm not here for more black folk being overlooked. Not her [sic] for

abuse being a running gag. Or women characters working on borrowed time. Or

only the white male villains getting the opportunities to redeem themselves, even

when they've shown they have no interest in redemption.

Jeff Davis is not a gift because he throws out scraps and expect [sic] everyone to

treat it like a meal (para. 19).

The phrase "Jeff Davis not a gift" in this post is in direct response to the common fan

refrain that existed in seasons one and two that "Jeff Davis is a gift" because of the

potential many fans saw in *Teen Wolf*. As the show has gone on and this potential has

been left unrealized, the tag jeff-davis-is-not-a-gift on Tumblr has seen an increasing

number of posts, mainly by fans of colour. As in the above quotation, these posts critique

the idea that a white man including any representation of people of colour should be

applauded. Davis' claims to a racism-free world are belied by the fact that the world of

Teen Wolf is still one where whiteness is the invisible norm. One of the effects of

invisibility or "unmarkedness" (Chambers, 1997) is that the unexamined category can be

equated with normalcy. Whiteness in *Teen Wolf*, where characters of colour continue to

be killed off and receive less narrative focus than white male villains, continues to be the

default and the "normal." Consequently, fans that post in the jeff-davis-is-not-a-gift tag

on Tumblr contest the claims made by Davis, other members of the production team and some fans that *Teen Wolf* exists in a racism-free world.

Nevertheless, claims of a racism-free world in the canon took hold early on in fandom circles; many fans of the *Teen Wolf* series claim this lack of racism extends to fanfiction and other fandom activities (uniwolfwerecorn, 2013). Damien Riggs (2006), in exploring white queer identity in Australia, argues that racism is foundational to the making of white subjectivities. This firm entrenchment of racism and a white supremacist worldview allows white fans to ignore the racism in the *Teen Wolf* canon and to maintain their attachment to the idea of a racism-free world. Accordingly, the same centering of whiteness that occurs in the ostensibly racism-free canon of *Teen Wolf* is replicated in fanfiction and other creative fanworks. This can be most clearly seen in the enormous popularity of the pairing of Derek Hale and Stiles Stilinski (often known by the portmanteau Sterek). As of September 2014 there are over 47,000 stories written in the *Teen Wolf* fandom on the Archive of Our Own. More than 28,000 of those stories are written about the pairing of Derek and Stiles (this number includes only stories written about Sterek, not the total written about either character). In contrast, there are fewer than 18,000 stories *in total* written about Scott McCall, the main character and titular "teen wolf," under 4000 stories about Danny Mahealani and less than 7000 about Vernon Boyd (Ao3, 2014).[6] This is notwithstanding noteworthy interactions in the canon that

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[6] It is important to note that Boyd was on the show for three less seasons than Stiles, Derek and Scott. Danny, while having been on the show for its entire duration, has been relegated to the status of a minor, recurring character and these factors likely influence the amount of fanfiction written about each character. This is not to say that race plays no factor as the character of Isaac Lahey (a white man introduced at the same time as Boyd) has over 12,000 stories involving him on the Archive of Our Own (2014).

would typically be taken as evidence of slash subtext by fandom. For example, Stiles and Scott have a very close friendship and Stiles has offered to kiss Scott on at least one occasion (Passmore, 2012). Comparably, Stiles has questioned Danny as to his attractiveness to gay men (Vlaming, 2011). The immense popularity of Sterek in relation to pairings involving characters of colour makes *Teen Wolf* and Sterek fandom an excellent example of the Two White Guys phenomenon. Accordingly, my analysis of Sterek fanfiction exposes how the potentially transformative spaces of fandom fail, repetitively, to realize radical queer possibilities and instead uphold and reinforce hegemonic ideologies of white heteronormativity.

Narratives of White Supremacy

While identifying and exposing slash fandom's obsessive preference for white men is a useful starting point for unsettling white hegemonic structures in fanfiction, to take this further, I undertake a close reading of Sterek fanfiction. Doing so reveals the whitening of queerness – the imaginary that only white people can be queer by erasing queer people of colour (Hill Collins, 2004) – and the subsequent mobilization of white queerness in the service of upholding state-sanctioned heterosexuality. Patricia Hill Collins (2004) contends that the binary thinking (white/black, male/female, heterosexual/homosexual) underlying racism and heterosexism results in a master binary of normal and deviant. Consequently, normative ideas about race, gender and sexuality are tightly interwoven and, at the same time, uphold a core hegemonic white, heterosexual masculinity. This oppositional logic means that black heterosexuality and white homosexuality are both set against a normalized white heterosexuality. Anti-black

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racism relies on a primitive, promiscuous conceptualization of black sexuality constructing it as a "naturalized, normal hyper-heterosexuality" (Hill Collins, 2004, p. 80). Racist assumptions about "an authentic Blackness grounded in a promiscuous heterosexuality" (p. 80) have the effect of making black homosexuality impossible. Binary thinking and the construction of a deviant black heterosexuality thus effectively produce a "whitened" queerness (Hill Collins, 2004). Coupled with assumptions that problems related to race and racism have been largely overcome (Hesse, 2004), queer rights discourses are thus viewed as entirely separate from race, serving to recenter whiteness and foregrounding the concerns of white queers (Riggs, 2006).

Mainstream queer rights movements, those that are tied to whiteness and white privilege, are typically built on homonormative ideology. Lisa Duggan (2003) defines homonormativity as "a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (p.179). Slash fandom has a long history of producing fanfiction stories that uphold the aforementioned "dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions." Monica Flegel and Jenny Roth (2010), for example, discuss the segment of *Supernatural* fandom that writes real person slash fanfiction (RPS) about the two main actors in the show, Jensen Ackles and Jared Padalecki.[7] Within fandom, these stories are known as J2 fic (from the first names of the actors) and often reproduce conventional romance tropes that are explicitly tied to the idea of

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[7] RPS involves writing slash fanfiction stories about real-life celebrities (ie. pop music stars, actors in movies or TV shows, political personas, etc.). It is a controversial aspect of slash fandom with many debates occurring over questions of privacy (Busse, 2006).

happiness. Heterosexist romance tropes create stories that do not offer a queer critique or alternative to heteronormativity, but an idea of same-sex monogamous love that is analogous to heterosexual marital relationships (Flegel and Roth, 2011). Following Sara Ahmed (2010), these stories perpetuate the conception of marriage and monogamy as "happiness objects" that contain the promise of future happiness, which everyone is presumed to want. Alternative conceptions of a queer happiness (or unhappiness) are foreclosed. Assumed in these stories are the universal desirability of marriage and children and compulsory monogamy, all of which obscure any conceptualization of a relationship that does not follow the path of heteronormativity (Hunting, 2012).

As I argued earlier, the "dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions" that Duggan (2003) mentions are based specifically in *white* heteronormativity. Consequently, as Jasbir Puar (2007) contends, certain queer subjects (namely white queer subjects) are adopted by the nation-state so that they may become productive citizens. She names this inclusion "homonationalism" or the "collusion between homosexuality and American nationalism that is generated both by national rhetorics of patriotic inclusion and by gay and queer subjects themselves" (Puar, 2007, p. 39). Homonationalist discourses work to portray Western nations as sexually exceptional in their treatment of particular queer bodies. However, these sexually exceptional queer bodies only encompass those subjects who have their cause aligned with nationalist projects, specifically the emulation of white heterosexuality and the reproduction of the nation-state (Puar, 2007). Queer bodies that do not share these nationalist projects are left out of the accepting embrace of the nation and cannot be "good gay citizens" (Hill Collins, 2004, p.74).

To expose how the white queerness and homonationalist discourses are entrenched in slash fanfiction, I undertake a discourse analysis of a piece of Stiles/Derek fanfiction called "Last to Know" by author Never_Says_Die (2013).[8] The author's summary of the story reads:

… every werewolf and shapeshifter in Beacon Hills is aware that Stiles is pregnant before he is. And apparently the first baby!werewolf being born into the pack (their Alpha's, no less) is a big freakin' deal and excuse enough for everyone to lose their damn minds. When Stiles figures out why everyone's been acting so weird around him, he's not amused (Summary, para. 1).

Teen Wolf canon conceptualizes werewolf social dynamics as being similar to wolves in that they involve a hierarchical pack structure lead by an alpha (in this case Derek) and made up of beta members.[9] I discuss the effects of borrowing tropes from the animal kingdom, including the concept of "mates," later in this chapter, along with the use of male pregnancy in slash fanfiction. In addition to the compulsory monogamy that the trope of "mates" implies, and the production of children, this story replicates other heteronormative and heterosexist stereotypes, including the way that Stiles is characterized as the "pack mom," a trope that appears right in the author's notes (Never_Says_Die, 2013). The "pack mom" trope in *Teen Wolf* fandom involves Stiles becoming a pseudo-mother to the other pack members, often at the same time that he

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[8] Most fanfiction authors use online pseudonyms when publishing fanfiction. Writing fanfiction is often still a stigmatized act and carries with it associated feelings of shame.
[9] *Teen Wolf* canon also includes the status of omega – a wolf without a pack.

develops a romantic relationship with Derek. This pseudo-motherhood involves activities

and responsibilities conventionally assigned to women in familial units, such as cooking,

cleaning, emotional nurturing, and other forms of low-status labour. Inherent in this

trope is the functioning of compulsory heterosexuality, even in purportedly queer

couples. As Adrienne Rich (1994) asserts, heterosexuality is a compulsory institution,

constructed as natural, which reinforces binary gender roles and serves the interests of

male dominance. The compulsory nature of the male-female binary in romantic

relationships is evident in the very name of the trope, which explicitly names a queer

male character "mom." The heteronormative tropes and assumptions that underlie this

portrayal of the Sterek relationship mark Stiles and Derek as an example of

homonormativity. I turn my attention now to how whiteness is central to the functioning

of homonormativity in Sterek fanfiction.

Similar to many other pieces of Sterek fanfiction, this story depicts Stiles and

Derek developing a romantic relationship at the same time that the pack coalesces around

them.[10] Often implied in these storylines is that the formation of a core couple is

fundamental to the stability of the pack. As almost all of these stories involve a core

white couple (and a pack made up mostly of women and/or people of colour), this has the

effect of positioning whiteness and pairings of white men that emulate heteronormative

tropes as being an inherently stabilizing force. Particularly given Derek's status as the

"alpha" of the pack, this also allows for a positioning of Stiles and Derek as a sort of

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[10] *Teen Wolf* fanfiction, when talking about werewolf mythology, draws on a lot of
concepts from real wolves, including the idea that werewolves form packs that involve
intense emotional bonds and deep loyalty.

"royal" couple around whom everyone else is arranged.[11] Kimberle Crenshaw (1993)

contends, "power is clustered around certain identities and exercised against others" (p.

1297). In Sterek stories where the pack arrays itself around a core white couple, the way

power is "clustered" around whiteness is unmistakable. The hierarchical nature of this

pack structure is made explicit in the following excerpts:

> "It means he's declared you his *mate*." Stiles tries not to be insulted at the way
>
> Argent spits the word out. "You're just as high up in the pack hierarchy as Hale
>
> is. Still waiting for a point" (Never_Says_Die, 2013, Chapter 11, para. 70).
>
> Besides, no one is going to dare be anything but completely deferential to their
>
> Alpha's mate in front of strangers. He thinks he's showing admirable restraint by
>
> not taking shameless advantage and swiping his first cup of coffee in six months
>
> (Never_Says_Die, 2013, Chapter 13, para. 14).

In combining the insinuations of inevitability that inhere in the trope of (life)-"mates" and

the hierarchical nature of the pack structure, discourses of whiteness and queer liberalism

become apparent. Following David Eng (2010), trends in Sterek fanfiction that position

Stiles and Derek as a homonormative white couple that is essential to the smooth

functioning of the pack, are a form of queer liberalism or "idealized notions of queer

family and kinship" produced by "folding domesticated gays and lesbians into the liberal

project of the US nation state" (Eng, 2010, p.17). By replicating heteronormative values

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[11] Another way in which *Teen Wolf* fanfiction draws on common ideas about wolves is through the alpha/beta/omega designations that structure the hierarchy of the pack.

in Sterek fanfiction, authors produce Stiles and Derek as the type of queer couple that comes to symbolize "liberal freedom and progress, constituted by the racialization of intimacy and the forgetting of race" (Eng, 2010, p.10). As queer liberal narratives rely upon "the logic of colourblindness" and the "forgetting of race" (Eng, 2010), sexuality and race are discursively disassociated resulting in the universalization of white queer experiences and the erasure of queer people of colour.

Effects of the hierarchical social structure are also evident in the way the beta members are portrayed to be in need of a strong (white) alpha to keep the pack in order. Presenting the pack as bodies that are in need of control and governance – and also nurturing – from a central stabilizing white couple mobilizes homonationalist discourses. Building on Jasbir Puar (2007), queer bodies that are good, productive (white) citizens are discursively produced as an inherently stabilizing societal force, while other bodies, specifically queer bodies of colour, are dangerous and in need of control. By writing Stiles and Derek as a queer couple that replicates heteronormative ideologies of monogamy, domesticity and family, and by positioning them as the leaders and the (white) stabilizing force of a pack made up of women and/or people of colour, *Teen Wolf* fanfiction regularly reproduces homonationalist discourses of good and dangerous queer bodies and of whiteness as synonymous with good citizenship. The result here is the replication of whiteness as the invisible norm and the furthering of the "whitening of history and the human experience" (Grovogui, 2001, p. 440).

Every slash fandom has its own particularities that develop as a result of the source material. *Teen Wolf* fanfiction, and specifically those texts that revolve around Sterek, contain a number of tropes that emerge from the use of werewolves in the canon

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text. The use of alpha/beta/omega wolf pack dynamics and the idea of "mates" are

especially telling.[12] Both of these tropes are visible in "Last to Know" (Never_Says_Die,

2013). The concept of "mates" in Sterek fanfiction is a shared fan convention that

imagines that, because one or both members of the pairing is a werewolf and wolves

allegedly mate for life, every werewolf character has a "*life*-mate" that they are destined

to be with exclusively and forever. The following passage from "Last to Know"

highlights the discursive functioning of the concept of "mates" in Sterek fanfiction:

> "Ours is a love that transcends labels," [Stiles] says breezily, and this time Erica
>
> can't smother her laughter. Neither can Isaac, and Boyd's shoulders twitch
>
> suspiciously. This time, there is a warning in the pressure Derek puts on his knee.
>
> "I mean, I'm down with the werewolf lingo," Stiles amends hastily. "Mates.
>
> Life-partners. Wolf-married. Love muffins. Oh God, Derek, why aren't you
>
> stopping me? I thought we talked about this" (Never_Says_Die, 2013, Chapter
>
> 13, para. 27).

Drawn as it is from conventional wisdom about the animal world, the trope of "mates,"

along with the alpha/beta/omega hierarchical pack structure reveal the (white)

anthropocentrism inherent in human appropriation of animal behavior. Drawing from

animal studies, appropriating animal behavior for fictional purposes reaffirms human-

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[12] The "mates" concept is not unique to *Teen Wolf* and Sterek fanfiction and frequently
occurs in other fandoms, usually those involving the supernatural or in alternate universe
fanfiction that involves turning human characters into werewolves or other supernatural
beings.

specific cultural hegemony over "nature" and non-human animals (Best, 2009). As the "discourse of the 'human' has been constituted in dualistic, speciesist, racist, patriarchal and imperialist terms" (Best, 2009, Contributions of Mainstream Animal Studies section, para. 5), binary conceptualizations of the "rational" human and "irrational" non-human distinction serve to reinforce a white, Western, male version of humanity. The "multi-faceted and systemic" (Best, 2009, Commonalities of Oppression and Alliance Politics section, para. 12) nature of hierarchy means that defining animals as brute, savage, irrational "beasts" provides the "moral basement into which one could eject women, people of colour and other humans deemed to be subhuman or deficient in (Western male) humanity" (Best, 2009, The Animal Standpoint section, para. 1). Thus Sterek fanfiction, by appropriating animal behavior, reaffirms white anthropocentrism and the hegemonic perception of white, Western humanity as superior.

Also embedded in the trope of "mates" are the heteronormative implications that all romantic relationships are monogamous and lifelong, effacing any potential of a radical queer politics that reimagines romantic and sexual relationships. Taking the "mates" trope together with that of "mpreg," or male pregnancy, also present in "Last to Know," exposes slash fanfiction's reliance on heteronormative tropes of happiness. In this story, Stiles (a cisgender man) becomes pregnant as a result of both a rare recessive gene and his particular relationship with an alpha werewolf (Never_Says_Die, 2013). Mpreg fanfiction can be instructive (and worthy of more academic study that is beyond the scope of this thesis) as it has very different implications depending on how it is conceptualized. Male pregnancy can be a radical story element that blurs gender boundaries and works to be inclusive of trans and genderqueer people by foregrounding

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gender variance. Often, however, as is the case of "Last to Know," mpreg involves the replication of binary gender stereotypes and heteronormative narratives of the ultimate adult relationship involving a monogamous pairing that produces biological children. Sara Ahmed (2010) contends that heteronormative ideas of marriage, monogamy and children become ostensibly universally-desired "happiness objects." Correspondingly, the deviancy attached to particular identities, those that she names affect aliens (or those that challenge the happy family ideal), is seen to be the cause of unhappiness that threatens the social order. Happiness, envisioned as the normative family, community or nation, consequently becomes a moral imperative such that any deviation from happiness scripts must be corrected. "Last to Know," by presenting a queer pairing who achieve their "happy-ending" within the script of monogamy, marriage, and the production of biological children, reaffirms the seeming universality of heteronormative "happiness objects." In so doing, Sterek fanfiction perpetuates homonormative beliefs that relationships that most closely emulate heteronormativity pave the way to happiness and acceptance. By centering a pairing of two white men in a story that follows heteronormative happiness scripts, "Last to Know" preserves the association between whiteness and social order. The fundamental stability of the pack (and society) is presented as being maintained by reproducing white heterosexuality (and in literally reproducing whiteness in the production of children) and any potential for rethinking queer relationships and queer narratives is foreclosed.

Characters of Colour in Slash Fanfiction

Preserving the supremacy of white heterosexuality through homonormative representations in slash fanfiction is also frequently predicated on the active degrading, maligning or erasing characters of colour from the narrative. As I argued earlier, Two White Guys pairings are regularly found in fandoms that contain notable moments of queer subtext involving characters of colour. Slash fanfiction authors, however, not only habitually fail to realize such potential, favouring instead pairings of white men, but also seem to feel the need to erase characters of colour from the narrative—or spend significant energy disparaging them. Tumblr blogger ladystonehugs (2012) discusses this phenomenon as it relates to *Teen Wolf* fandom:

> Fans do this in every fucking fandom. This is a fandom with a POC lead, and "the fans" still found a way to make it about the white side characters and their nonexistent relationship, and to shout down anybody who dared interfere with their fun … Because see, it's not just not caring about Scott. It's twisting his characterization, dehumanizing him, taking all his character traits and relationships and GIVING THEM TO STILES (para. 5).

Teen Wolf fandom is an instructive site for analysis of the erasure and disparagement of characters of colour in slash fanfiction as it offers several striking examples of the process. Irrespective of moments of queer subtext in the source material experienced by the characters of Scott, Danny and Boyd, characters of colour remain comparatively invisible in the fandom as sexual partners. Furthermore, as the above quotation asserts,

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Sterek fanfiction stories repeatedly rely on the explicit disparagement of characters of colour and the reassignment of positive character traits from people of colour to white men.

The treatment of characters of colour in slash fanfiction exposes the way in which "representational and discursive elements of race are combined with structural and institutional ones" (Winant, 2000, p. 3). David Eng (2010) asserts that this is a political moment characterized by the "erosion of a public language for discussing race and racism" (p.3), seen notably in the post-race discourse surrounding the election of Barack Obama to the presidency of the United States. Such colourblind rhetoric results in "the cleaving of race from (homo)sexuality, and (homo)sexuality from race" (Eng, 2010, p.4) and has the discursive effect of whitening queerness through the "forgetting of race" (p.4). Given the ubiquitous yet invisible nature of white supremacy, existing as it does as the "invisible norm" (Chambers, 1997, p. 187), the discursive disassociation of race and sexuality results in queerness becoming synonymous with whiteness. Discourse, as Mel Stanfill (2011) argues, "produces what gets to stand as reality: it is performative, such that when a statement, broadly construed, is produced from within that regulated and authoritative space of the possible, the act of saying something makes it true" (para. 2.1). Representations of queerness in popular culture as being overwhelmingly white thus work to make the whitening of queerness "true."[13] It is important, however, not to view the "forgetting of race" as a passive occurrence, but to expose and analyze the active erasure of queer people of colour from political discussion and, in this case, narrative representation. An analysis of the treatment of the character of Danny Mahealani in *Teen*

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[13] See Muñoz, 2005.

Wolf fanfiction reveals how the active erasure of people of colour from a narrative

upholds white supremacy in slash fandom.

Danny Mahealani (played by Keahu Kahuanui, a native Hawaiian) is a secondary

character in *Teen Wolf* canon, but he is both openly gay and has a number of moments of

queer subtext with major characters throughout the show and an on-screen romance with

Ethan, an alpha werewolf, in season three. The following canon scene between Danny

and Stiles in season three is a good illustration of a moment of queer potential that occurs

between the two characters:

Stiles: You know who else is a virgin? Me! I'm a virgin, OK? And you know

what that means? That means that my lack of sexual experience is now literally a

threat to my life. OK. I need to have sex like right now. Someone needs to have

sex with me like today. Someone needs to sex me right now!

Danny: All right, I'll do it.

Stiles: What?

Danny: Come to my place at 9. Plan to stay the night... I like to cuddle.

Stiles: That was so sweet. Are you kidding?

Danny: Yes. I'm kidding (Sussman, 2013).

Along with fueling speculation about the potential bisexuality of Stiles, this moment

would usually be precisely the type of canon evidence that would be used to support a

slash pairing. [14],[15] Danny has further moments of queer subtext with the character of

Scott as, for example, when the latter knocks Danny down on the lacrosse field in order

to smell him to determine whether he had been turned into a werewolf (Cochran, 2012) or

when the two characters slow-dance together at junior prom (Macer, 2011). Significantly

less evidence is often sufficient to support pairings of two white men, yet little fanfiction

involving Danny as a sexual partner makes any significant showing in *Teen Wolf* slash

fanfiction. The most common, the Stiles and Danny pairing, has just over 600 works on

the Archive of Our Own as of September 2014 (Ao3, 2014) and many of these stories

involve Danny as a temporary romantic interest that eventually leads to a Stiles and

Derek pairing. When Danny is present in fanfiction he is predominantly shown as a

minor, background character only there to be a calm and grounding force or to give

advice to other characters (usually Stiles) about matters of queer sexuality.

Despite the presence of precisely the type of queer subtext that would have many

fans shipping two white men together, Danny's sexuality and potential as a romantic or

sexual partner is left unrealized, effaced. Here, the implicit favouring of white queer

bodies over queer bodies of colour and the construction of queerness as something

belonging solely to white bodies becomes visible. Returning to David Eng's (2010)

argument that the logic of colourblindness and the erasure of race allow queerness to be

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[14] The possibility of Stiles being bisexual has been an undercurrent throughout the show
and a point of contention for many queer fans. The producers and writers continue to
insert possible hints as to Stiles' bisexuality but have thus far not had the character
confirm anything, even when asked outright if he "likes boys" (Clark, 2014).
[15] Such evidence, colloquially called "slashy" moments in fandom, involve incidences of
close, deliberate physical contact, emotional intimacy or overt references to sex. For
example, in one episode of *Teen Wolf*, Derek throws Stiles up against a wall and they
have a conversation while pressed closely together. This moment is often represented
pictorially on Tumblr and used as evidence of the sexual potential of the pairing.

constructed as a feature of whiteness reveals how the exclusion of Danny from *Teen Wolf* fanfiction echoes discourses in mainstream queer rights movements that ignore queer people of colour and situate queer sexuality as purely in the domain of whiteness. The valorization of whiteness and erasure of queer bodies of colour expose the functioning of homonationalist ideologies whereby some queer bodies are folded into society and others are produced as impossible or dangerous and uncontrollable – and also undesirable (Puar, 2007). Sara Ahmed argues, "[b]oundary formations are bound up with anxiety not as a sensation that comes organically from within a subject or group, but as the effect of this ongoing constitution of the 'apartness' of a subject or group" (2004, p.51). By erasing Danny, and the potential for any sexual relationship involving Danny, authors tacitly perpetuate the "apartness" of queer people of colour from normative relationship formations and continue to discursively establish the existence of queer people of colour as impossible. This has implications beyond the realm of fanfiction as many fans have strong affective ties to fandom and often claim their engagement in slash fandom as the beginnings of their involvement in gay rights and social justice movements. The attachment of whiteness to queerness becomes what Sara Ahmed (2004) calls a "sign," and, as "the more signs circulate, the more affective they become," (p.45) the continued elision of characters of colour from slash fanfiction perpetuates the conceptualization of whiteness as default in fandom spaces and fans that first engage with ideas of queer rights in the overwhelmingly white spaces of fandom continue to replicate these narratives in wider spaces.

An analysis of the treatment of the character of Vernon Boyd (who goes by Boyd) in Sterek fanfiction reveals the specific antiblackness that is constitutive of the whitening

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of queerness. Boyd, as with Danny, is habitually erased from *Teen Wolf* fanfiction. He

was introduced in the second season of the show, along with the characters of Isaac and

Erica (both white) as a teenager that Derek approaches and turns into a werewolf in an

attempt to strengthen his pack. Although he was introduced at the same time and was

given similar narrative focus, Boyd appears in fanfiction considerably less frequently

than the characters of Isaac and Erica. As of September 2014, there are over 12,000

stories that feature Isaac as a character on the Archive of Our Own, 7000 that feature

Erica and only 5000 that feature Boyd.[16] Isaac and Erica, though not always the focus of

a story, are often included in ensemble fanfiction while Boyd is excluded. For example,

the ongoing series *The Sum of Its Parts* by KouriArashi (2012) is a retelling of *Teen Wolf*

canon that diverges from the show at the end of season one and situates Stiles as the alpha

(the leader of the pack). In the first few installments of the series, Stiles adds to his pack

by consensually turning other people into werewolves, paralleling Derek's same mission

in season two of the show. Unlike the show, however, *The Sum of Its Parts* devotes

whole chapters to the addition of Isaac and Erica, while Boyd does not show up for two

more installments and, even then, he is only referenced to in one paragraph (KouriArashi,

2012).[17] Throughout the rest of the series, Isaac and Erica play vital roles in the plot and

Erica develops a sexual relationship with Stiles. Boyd, however, only appears in scenes

that focus on groups of people; he is also referred to repeatedly as the "enforcer" of the

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[16] The significantly fewer stories featuring Erica as compared to Isaac is indicative of the sexism endemic to slash fanfiction (Reid, 2009, Hunting, 2012).

[17] In August 2014, after what the author said were several comments asking for "more Boyd," KouriArashi added an installment that detailed Boyd's addition to the pack and the process of his integration, including an exploration of issues arising from his lower class status than that of the rest of the pack.

pack. He receives little character development, no significant relationships, and rarely speaks. This example highlights the particular antiblackness that exists in slash fandom. As Tumblr blogger spacetwinks (2013) puts it:

> The fanfic, tumblr [sic] kind of side of fandom, though largely heterosexual
> women, feel entirely comfortable about writing gay males, but for some reason,
> freeze up when it comes to writing black characters, to the point that instead of
> trying to write them at all, they simply don't show up (para. 15).

I suggest that the dearth of fanfiction involving Boyd as a potential sexual partner is symptomatic of both the construction of black men as possessing a dangerous, uncontrollable sexuality and the impossibility of black homosexuality. Patricia Hill Collins (2004) argues:

> Historically, Western science, medicine, law, and popular culture reduced an
> African-derived aesthetic concerning the use of the body, sensuality,
> expressiveness, and spirituality to an ideology about *Black sexuality*. The
> distinguishing feature of this ideology was its reliance on the idea of Black
> promiscuity. The possibility of distinctive and worthwhile African-influenced
> worldviews on anything, including sexuality, as well as the heterogeneity of
> African societies expressing such views, was collapsed into an imagined,
> pathologized Western discourse of what was thought to be essentially African (p.
> 75-76).

Western views of black promiscuity closely linked black people and animals, particularly in the concept of "fucking" (Hill Collins, 2004, p. 77). Animals are not perceived to have erotic lives due to their lack of intelligence or culture, but instead merely engage in genital sexual intercourse, or, colloquially, fucking. As a result of European taxonomies of life that place black people in close proximity to animals, this perception has historically been extended to Western views of black sexuality that conceptualize it as deviant, wild and devoid of humanity. The gender-specific ways in which this ideology disparages black sexuality characterizes black men as dangerous and uncontrollable, and hence a threat to white women (Hill Collins, 2004, p. 77). Although black male sexuality is typically erased from slash fanfiction, and thus not *present* to be dangerous, I suggest that it is the characterization of black men as uncontrollable that produces their exclusion from fan work. The deviant, dangerous heterosexuality of black men precludes them from even being considered as viable sexual partners. Sara Ahmed (2004) contends that fear "opens up past histories of association … which allows the white body to be constructed as apart from the black body in the present" (p. 63). Fear of black male sexuality, created "after emancipation because Southern Whites' feared that the unfettered promiscuity of Black freedmen constituted a threat to the Southern way of life" (Hill Collins, 2004, p. 77), makes itself known in slash fanfiction in the active erasure of black men that sustains the construction of white supremacist views of queerness. Similar narratives about dangerous black sexuality, as I have previously argued, are constitutive of an ideology of deviant black heterosexuality that makes black homosexuality impossible (Hill Collins, 2004, p. 80). If antiblack ideology means that

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black queerness cannot even be considered as a possibility, the dearth of black characters in slash fanfiction must be understood as a result of white supremacy. Mike Hill (1997) argues "whiteness sustains itself ultimately on sexual grounds" (p. 157), and it is in the ideology of black hyper-sexuality and the impossibility of black queerness that white sexuality becomes constituted as normal and healthy. Consequently, slash fanfiction not only upholds and sustains white supremacist views of sexuality, but many stories are also often built directly on antiblack, racist narratives.

Formed as a result of racist narratives, white supremacist conceptualizations of sexuality in slash fanfiction further rely on the explicit disparagement of characters of colour to prop up pairings of white men. An analysis of the treatment of Scott McCall in the story "Here is the Deepest Secret No One Knows" by owlpostagain (2012) reveals the racist and colonial logic that underpins much slash fanfiction. Published in 2012 and set just after the second season, as of September 2014 this story contains over 5700 Kudos on the Archive of Our Own and over 2100 bookmarks (Ao3, 2014).[18] Again, following the conventions of many stories from that time period, "Here is the Deepest Secret No One Knows" tells the story of the pack integrating and becoming a cohesive unit at the same time that Stiles and Derek develop romantic feelings for each other and become a couple. Once again, this narrative implies that the cohesiveness of a familial unit (in this

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[18] Kudos are a function particular to Ao3, whereby a reader can send kudos to an author by pressing one button (in a similar fashion to the Facebook "Like" button.") It is commonly considered in *Teen Wolf* fandom that if a story has over 1000 Kudos, it is highly recommended and thus a popular piece. Bookmarks are a function on Ao3 that allows the reader to save the link to a particular story – similar to the practices of bookmarking links in a web browser. The number of bookmarks, however, is not as accurate an indicator of popularity as the number of Kudos. Many readers will bookmark a story to read later, while many others do not use the Ao3 bookmarking function, preferring instead to use other online platforms or web browsers.

case the werewolf pack) is determined by the stable relationship of the core white couple.

The trope of Stiles as the "pack mom" is also present as he cares for the other pack

members while Derek recovers from a trauma. Where this story goes further in its

reliance on racist ideology is in the explicit diminishment of characters of colour and in

the reassignment of positive character traits from people of colour to white men.

Specifically, the character of Scott McCall is repeatedly maligned throughout the story

and his positive character traits are reassigned to Stiles in order to center Derek and Stiles

in the narrative.[19]

Colonial logic that positions white individualism against an essentialized,

monolithic "other" is at the root of the disparagement of characters of colour in slash

fanfiction. Essentialism, Diana Fuss (1989) argues:

… is most commonly understood as a belief in the real, true essence of things, the

invariable and fixed properties which define the 'whatness' of a given entity …

Importantly, essentialism is typically defined in opposition to difference (p. xi-

xii).

Characteristics like race and gender are discursively produced as "essential" markers of

differences (Grovogui, 2001). However, as Uma Narayan (1997) argues, gender and

racial essentialism effectively function "to conceal their role in the production and

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[19] It should be noted here that the only other character of colour in this story, Boyd, is
presumed dead for the majority of the story, only to return injured without any
exploration of his experience or reactions, which speaks to the previous point about the
erasure of characters of colour.

reproduction of such 'differences,' presenting these differences as something pre-given and pre-discursively 'real' that the discourses of differences merely describe rather than help construct and perpetuate" (p. 82). Essentialist discourses reduce people of colour to "essential" characterizations that distinguish entire groups of people only by their race. Chandra Mohanty (1991) gives the example of "third world women" who are depicted by Western feminists as "a singular monolithic subject" (p. 51) characterized by a "third world difference": "that stable, ahistorical something that apparently oppresses most if not all of the women in [third world] countries" (p. 53-54). Differences produced and sustained by essentialist discourses are not simple characterizations but serve instead to maintain racial hierarchies. In discussing colonial England, David Cannadine (2002) explains:

> Hierarchy was the conventional vehicle of [the Empire]: it provided the prevailing ideology of empire, and it underpinned the prevailing spectacle of empire … It bears repeating that one aspect of this hierarchical-cum-imperial mindset was indeed the cultivation and intensification of racial differences based on post-Enlightenment attitudes of white and western superiority and of coloured and colonial inferiority … When, as they sometimes did, Britons thought of the inhabitants of their empire … in collective rather than in individualistic categories, they were inclined to see them, literally, in terms of crude stereotypes of black and white, and no-less crude relationships of superiority and inferiority (p. 122).

Accordingly, white identities, using such racist and colonial logic, are produced in opposition to negative characterizations of homogenous racialized "others." Stuart Hall (1992) explains that "it was in the process of comparison between the "virtues" of "Englishness" and the negative features of other cultures that many of the distinctive characterisations of English identities were first defined" (p. 297). It is this logic that is repeated in slash fanfiction through narratives that reassign positive character attributes from characters of colour to white men. As whiteness is defined in opposition to negative racial characterizations, in order to center white men in slash fanfiction, characters of colour must be given such characterizations and stripped of any positive character attributes.

As many Tumblr bloggers attest (biyuti, 2013; alphaunni, 2013; ladystonehugs, 2012), this practice of whitewashing is particularly evident in *Teen Wolf* fanfiction in the reassignment of Scott's positive character attributes to Stiles and/or Derek. The "pack mom" trope discussed earlier, along with its heteronormative implications, is a good example of this as it explicitly recenters Scott's nurturing and empathetic traits onto Stiles, usually disparaging Scott's character in the process. As biyuti (2013) explains:

> In many ways, it appears that a goodly portion of teen wolf writers simply cannot conceive of stiles as the main protagonist **without** taking a massive shit on Scott [1. similar is the massive amounts of misogyny that many people in the buffy-fandom needed to enact in order to write xander-centric fic, because most could not conceive of ways to centre a man without stepping on women]. And this is the sort of thing we actually see play out time and again in real life. That white

people establish themselves and centre themselves on the backs of PoC. That in order to become agents and heros [sic] they must necessarily work to tear everyone else down (para. 12).

The reassignment of positive character traits from characters of colour to white men in this story is indicative of a larger cultural pattern of colonial logic that can also be seen in films such as *Avatar.* One review of the film explains that:

> "[l]ike so many other films (Dangerous Minds, Last of the Dogmen, Amistad and The Blind Side), in Avatar, a white person is necessary to save a non-white individual or group. As in the other films featuring a white savior, Avatar's white savior, Jake Sully, comes to the minority group culture with no experience or understanding, yet manages to master all things Na vi', not only in a very short time, but to a degree better than any Na vi'. The Irving Berlinesque lesson learned here is that, as whites, we can do anything you can do, only better … Minorities are portrayed as limited but sympathetic characters and whites are portrayed as superior, with limitless potential, and most important, necessary to solving any problems experienced by minority groups (Ketchum, Embrick and Peck, 2011, p. 199).

Having a white person, with no experience of a culture, master cultural skills better than any member of that group not only reinscribes notions of white superiority, but in attempting to portray a type of universal humanity serves to sustain a system of

colourblind racism. Aman Sium, Chandni Desai and Eric Ritskes (2012) argue that this process sustains:

> "a Western styled humanism that proclaims, 'We are all Indigenous', conflating Indigeneity with humanity … We firmly reject this stance. Colonialism and its concomitant project of white supremacy have always seen and understood Indigeneity as different and threatening … A claim to a shared humanity is not decolonizing and works to reinscribe a racist framework of 'color-blindness'" (p. vi).

Claims to a "shared humanity" that ascribe indigeneity to white people ignore histories of colonial domination and serve the same function as queer liberal narratives that, by discursively positioning racism as happening only in the past, erase people of colour and reaffirms whiteness as normative and superior.

As with films such as *Avatar*, the reassignment of character traits or skills in fanfiction is patterned on cultural notions of whiteness as superior and naturally possessive of positive qualities. "Here is the Deepest Secret No One Knows" (owlpostagain, 2012) provides a number of examples of this practice. Returning to the idea of a "pack mom" or nurturing character, the entirety of the story focuses on Stiles as the emotional focal point of the coalescing pack. The story begins with Erica appearing at Stiles' window in distress and, in introducing this scene, the author remarks, "Stiles is a nurturer by nature" (owlpostagain, 2012). In canon, however, it is Scott, not Stiles, who

is overtly characterized as the nurturer and protector (amazonpoodle, 2013b).

Regardless, later in the scene the author writes:

> "You look out for us," Erica admits. "You do it without even thinking about it. Even though you're just … you're not … like that day in the library. Scott was so busy worrying about his stupid girlfriend, but you stayed with me. *You* made sure I got to Derek, *you* took care of me" (owlpostagain, 2012, para. 82).

It is in this passage that the explicit reassignment of positive attributes and the disparagement of Scott's character are exposed. The white man is "a nurturer by nature" and the man of colour is careless and selfish. Given that this is in complete contradiction of canon material (amazonpoodle, 2013b), the workings of white supremacy are particularly evident, specifically in the reference to "nature." In actively shifting positive character traits from a man of colour to a white man, the author is implicitly reinscribing the notion of whiteness as being naturally possessive of positive qualities and resituating whiteness as superior (Lipsitz, 2006). Working from Frantz Fanon (1986), reveals here the continuation of racialized discourses developed to justify and sustain colonial rule and position uncivilized racialized "others" against a civilized white "self." White fan authors perpetuate these colonial discourses by explicitly reassigning character traits that are read as "civilized" to white characters and away from characters of colour. As Darnell Hunt (2005) explains, overt racism is not necessary to perpetuate racist discourses as "the underlying ideological structure is so raced that representations can

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call upon it without being overt - simply by adhering to industry standards and conventions, the racial status quo is upheld" (p. 21).

A further example from "Here is the Deepest Secret No One Knows" (owlpostagain, 2012) exposes how overt racism is not necessary for white supremacist ideology to be inferred.

> He calls Scott. Not that he's expecting much; Stiles is pretty sure *he* knows more
> about being a werewolf than Scott actually does, but sometimes, on rare
> occasions, Scott picks up on a thing or two (owlpostagain, 2012, para. 27).

The casual derision of Scott and his intelligence here is carried throughout the story and is used as a justification for Stiles taking over Scott's leadership role in the pack. Referring to how Scott "sometimes picks up on a thing or two" paints him as not only unintelligent but also unfocused and imperceptive. The direct comparison in this passage between Stiles and Scott also serves to redistribute positive characteristics to the white character while maligning those of the character of colour. It is through these mechanisms that traits like intelligence and leadership are reaffirmed to be natural properties of whiteness, hearkening back to tropes of scientific racism that contend that people of colour are naturally less intelligent and able to lead (Somerville, 2000). Blogger 11ismyfavorite5ever (2013) sums up the effects of maligning characters of colour in the service of propping up pairings of white men:

Giving the traits and plotpoins of a PoC to a white character is quite literally saying 'he's not worthy of this, his accomplishments aren't worthy of this, here, lemme give to this white guy'. Further, they'll take virtues from Scott (such as wanting to take care of everyone, or a tendency to sacrifice and worry about others) and give them to Stiles or Derek. Stiles and Derek are both fine characters on their own, but those traits do NOT belong there according to canon. Stiles (initially) cared about Scott, his dad, and Lydia. Derek has, so far, almost entirely acted in self-interest and made decisions due to his own whims, emotional needs and desires. Stiles is NOT a 'pack mom' and Derek is not a 'good alpha'. That's just not in the text. And that fact that these traits are taken from Scott and handed off to these characters so frequently is really noxious and yes, falls in line with racist tendencies. Think back to all those posts going around on Tumblr where a woman scientist or PoC was erased from history and a white guy got the credit. Think of it like that. Preeeety [sic] racist (para. 8).

Making the link between discourses that erase of people of colour from history and patterns in slash fandom, 11ismyfavorite5ever clearly exposes the narratives of white supremacy that govern and underpin Sterek fanfiction and slash fandom more generally.

Conclusion

Slash fandom's obsessive focus on Two White Guys, built on the erasure and belittlement of characters of colour, repeatedly effaces the radical potential inherent in creating transformative works. As fans, we like to think of our creative work as existing

in defiance of corporate-controlled mass media and as revolutionary in its very nature. While work that is revolutionary, transformative and radical does very much exist, the prevailing ideology of white supremacy that underpins so much of slash fanfiction means that the majority of stories not only fail as radical texts, but actually work to support systems of colonial and racial domination. To return to Junot Diaz (Moya, 2012), like Voldemort and Sauron, the great silence of white supremacy poisons fan spaces while remaining invisible and unexamined. It is only by shining a light on it that the queer potential of slash fandom can begin to be realized. However, as all white people benefit from the "racial contract" (Bonilla Silva, 2003, p. 63) of colorblind racism, identifying and critiquing white supremacy in fandom frequently results in acrimonious, and sometimes violent, denial. It is to the "possessive investment in whiteness" (Lipsitz, 2006, p. 1) that fuels the hostile reactions of white fans to any critique of white supremacy that I turn my attention to in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Possessive Investment in Whiteness

> See but that's the thing, Spn[20] doesn't have to put a POC in every single
> episode ok, they shouldn't have to make a concerted effort to constantly make
> sure they a [sic] have a POC in EVERY SINGLE EPISODE just so that
> people like you think they're being fair. There are POC in Spn, and how do
> you know every "white" person we come across isn't actually a light skinned
> POC? They don't bring it up constantly because IT'S NOT A BIG DEAL,
> it's not what you should be fixed on when you watch an episode.

- anonymous quoted on *Shut Up Teen Wolf Fandom*, 2013c

As a young queer woman growing up in a small Northern Ontario town, I often

experienced disillusionment and disengagement with ideas about love, sex and sexuality

that surrounded me at school, at home, with my friends and in the media. I remember

quite clearly the first time I encountered a piece of slash fanfiction, shortly after my

family got access to the Internet. It was a short story about the characters of Cory

Matthews and Shawn Hunter from the television show *Boy Meets World*, and to me it

was a revelation. Here was a community that was not only telling stories about people

like me, but also reinterpreting characters that I loved to be more like me. I dove

headfirst into online fan communities and, though my choice of fandoms has changed

dozens of times since, I have never looked back. I credit fan spaces for not only

providing me with somewhere to explore my sexuality when I have felt alienated, but for

also being a driving force in the development of my political and academic identity. It

was fandom that first introduced me to feminism, to queer politics, to the politics of class

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[20] Spn is shorthand for the American fantasy television show *Supernatural* (2005-
present).

and disability, and to anti-racist feminism. Consequently, my emotional attachment to fandom goes far beyond a love of reading stories about my favourite characters to a much deeper association of fandom with my sexual, political and academic identity.

The affective link between fandom and identity is hardly unique to me. In my two decades as a member of fandom I have seen innumerable testimonials from fans relating their pride at being a member of a community that is not only creative, fun and collaborative, but also politically engaged and oriented towards social justice. As fan scholar (and member of fandom) Ann Jamison writes, "[f]anfiction transforms assumptions mainstream culture routinely makes about gender, sexuality, desire and to what degree we want them to match up" (2013, p.19). Lynn Zubernis and Katherine Larsen (2012) (again dual academics and fans) attest that fandom can be transformative on a personal level – it can change the way fans experience and actively engage with the world, politically and personally. While I share in fandom pride, this celebratory approach to fandom must be tempered with some very real criticism. As I argued in the last chapter, fandom is predominantly a white community in which white fans write stories about white characters. In this chapter I explore how the affective engagement of white fans to fandom is intertwined with a possessive investment in whiteness that works to preserve white supremacist and queer liberal ideology and results in vehement, derisive denials of racism and white privilege.

Fandom and Identity Formation

Every so often articles appear in mainstream media sources exploring "the weird world of fanfiction" (Alter, 2012, Title). *The Wall Street Journal* (Alter, 2012), *The*

Guardian (Gregory, 2011), and *Time* (Grossman, 2011) have all published articles within

the last five years about fan culture, and fanfiction specifically. While some of these

pieces (*The Guardian* and *Time* articles for example) take a positive, inquisitive view of

fandom, there are still articles being published that describe fanfiction as weird and

baffling (Alter, 2012) or as detrimental to "[author's] private lives, their social

development and their social interaction skills" (Downes, 2014, What's the Problem

section, para. 5). At least some of the unease in mainstream media about fanfiction is due

to ways in which fanfiction is threatening to the normative order. For example, one

author warns against "the dark sexual undercurrent to the majority of fanfic" (Morrison,

2012, Slash and K/S section, para. 3) and another sets up a binary between "boys" who

are interested in sci-fi and "girls'" interest in "erotic-paranormal-fantasy" (Downes, 2014,

Even Gender Split section, para. 1). While negative articles in the mainstream media do

not explicitly focus on the way many fanfiction authors actively destabilize normative

gender and sexuality, the framing of fanfiction as weird and baffling is evidently due, at

least in part, to anxiety produced by the way it involves women exploring non-normative

sexuality.[21] As Mel Stanfill (2011) explains "a failure of – or deviance from – sexual

normativity [is] built into the popular cultural images of fans" (para. 2.8).

The view of fandom as deviant and indicative of a lack of sociality exists in stark

contrast to recent academic work in fan studies (Hellekson, 2009; Zubernis and Larsen,

2012; Busse, 2006; Lackner, et al, 2006). This research, while still critical of many

aspects of fan culture, tends to cast fandom in a distinctly more positive light, a view that

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[21] The overall positive piece in *Time* about fanfiction (Grossman, 2011) does explore the
way in which fanfiction picks up on queer subtext and how it contains a level of diversity
not usually seen in pop culture.

is much more in keeping with how fans view themselves. This does not mean that fans and academics take a utopian view of fandom, rather that fan communities are, as self-described aca-fan Karen Hellekson puts it, "a community, communal, yet contentious" (2009, p. 5).[22] Fans, myself included, experience fandom as what Paul Gee (2004) calls an "affinity space," or "a place or set of places where people affiliate with others based primarily on shared activities, interests, and goals," (p. 67) where we can engage our love of fiction that, as Ika Willis (2006) suggests, valorize pleasure. As the valorization of pleasure exists in contrast to a wider society that pathologizes women's pleasure, Willis explains that fandom becomes a central location for women to explore their pleasure, particularly queer pleasure. This nuanced, yet overall positive view of fandom is a point of pride for many fans and forms an important part of the defensiveness that results after any critique of fandom. As I argue in this section, slash fandom is overwhelmingly a queer female space that is tied to identity formation (Sandvoss, 2005) and, as such, leads fans to be intensely protective of fandom.

Slash fandom as being populated predominantly by women is not a new concept and dates back to some of the earliest academic work on slash fanfiction (Jenkins, 1992; Bacon-Smith, 1992). The conceptualization of slash as a *queer* female space, however, is relatively new and I suggest not reliant on the identification of individual fans as queer, but rather of fan *space* as queer. In ""Yearning Void and Infinite Potential": Online Slash Fandom as Queer Female Space," Alexis Lothian, Kristina Busse and Robin Anne

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[22] The term aca-fan was popularized by Matt Hill (2002) and is used to describe people who identify both as an academic who studies fan culture and as a fan.

Reid engage in online conversations with fans about the queerness of fandom. As one fan, Lila, explains:

> I don't think queer identity is a necessity for participation in queer practices or for being in queer space. For me, one definition of queer space would be the space (a physical place like a bar or a cruising area or the world of a fictional text or a virtual online space, or whatever) in which things happen that challenge the way gendered and sexual identities and practices are defined and policed into rigid categories (Lothian, Busse and Reid, 2007, p. 109).

It is in challenging and disrupting dominant societal expectations and assumptions about sexuality and gender that slash fandom can be read as a queer female space. Although, as I argued in the last chapter, the disruption is not universal or complete, it nevertheless exists and, for many fans, it may be the only queer space that is possible. As Cat, another fan, attests: "[f]or my friend J., fandom was the only way she could express her queerness and she had to keep that completely hidden from her family" (Lothian, Busse and Reid, 2007, p. 104). In growing up in a relatively isolated, small community, fandom was for me, not only the only place I could express my queerness, but the only place where my queerness was possible. Prior to my discovery of slash fandom, I had not even considered queer relationships and queer sex as possibilities for me. Slash fandom, as an affinity space in which queer sexuality was not only allowable, but actively celebrated, was fundamental to my ability to call myself queer and the formation of that aspect of my identity. Jintian, a fan quoted by Lothian, Busse and Reid (2007), explains that the

permissibility given to queerness in fandom often "lay[s] the groundwork for nonvirtual queer acts and lives" (p. 107). A queer space thus does not have to be a space full of people that explicitly identify as queer but as Alexander Doty (1993) contends, a place where queer readings become possible.

Slash fandom, in explicitly focusing on writing stories about queer pairings devotes a lot of energy to queer readings of mainstream texts (Reid, 2009) and queerness becomes not only visible, but a focal point. Sara Ahmed (2006) theorizes that orientations to and against specific objects develop as a result of the nearness of that object. In terms of sexual orientation, the availability of certain people as sexual partners works to determine queer identity. If queer relationships are not part of an imagined possibility, queer orientations also become impossible. In making queer relationships a possibility (and a central focus), fandom makes queer orientations an option for fans who may otherwise find queerness discounted for them. Consequently, the queer space of fandom is fundamental to the development of queer identity for many fans (or, as I argue shortly, the development of an identity as a queer-positive activist) and becomes space of intense affective engagement.

Performative aspects of fandom further tie identity formation to fan activity, in this case an identity that is consciously created and developed. As Kristina Busse (2006) argues in her discussion of the real person slash (RPS) fan communities on LiveJournal, fans consciously construct public personas that become possible due to the public and mostly anonymous nature of fandom. Like celebrities, fans carefully mediate which aspects of their identity they highlight in fandom, creating adopted personas that are

performed through text and avatars.[23] Avatars in particular allow for a kind of fandom

shorthand that quickly communicate important identity information to other fans,

including favourite fandom, character, current mood and, potentially, a reaction to the

content of a post or comment. Through these performative aspects of fandom, it becomes

possible for fans to perform queer identities that may not be possible for them in non-

virtual life (Busse, 2006). Even if virtual identities do not move away from the Internet

for some, the investment in their formation indicates their importance to many fans.

In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Ahmed (2004) considers queer pleasure in

relation to bodily touching that is forbidden by compulsory heterosexuality and argues

that such touching creates "the possibility of social forms that are not constrained by the

form of the heterosexual couple" (p. 165). Extending this argument, and thinking about it

through online spaces where fans carefully construct queer identities draws attention to

virtual queer gatherings that allow for connections to be made between bodies otherwise

prohibited by heteronormative scripts – even if those gathering are not physically

touching each other. While not physically touching, queer fan identities and queer

interactions between fans, can allow for a similar experience to Ahmed's queer pleasure.

As fan Jintian explains, "it's not just about physical sex (or rather, imagined physical sex)

… it's also the relationship of creation and consumption, the bond that forms between the

writer and the reader" (Lothian, Busse and Reid, 2007, p. 107). Bonds between fans are

what Ahmed describes as alternate and non-heterosexual social forms.   Accordingly,

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[23] An avatar is a pictorial representation of a user that is displayed next to their post in an
online forum or blog (Lessig, 2000). Originally it involved a representation of the user's
physical form, but in fandom spaces it often involves images that related to the fannish
object (ie. a screenshot, a piece of fan art, a quotation, etc.).

queer interactions between fans contribute to the sense of fandom as a place of queer identity formation. As fan T. says, "[n]ot all slash fans identify as queer, but this space provides room for people to queer their identities … queerness isn't a mandate here – it's an open possibility" (Lothian, Busse and Reid, 2007, p. 109).

Queer identity is nevertheless not the only important aspect of identity that is formed through and within fan interaction. When fandom was centered on mailing lists and UseNet groups, content was often strictly monitored so that discussions stayed mostly on fan topics, whether that was fanfiction, a particular actor, a television show, etc. (Bury, 2005). With the move of fandom to social media, fan communities have changed so that most blogs are not run by a moderator or a committee, but by individual fans, and the content changed accordingly.   Most fans now use their blogs (or Tumblrs) as a place to discuss multiple interests making most blogs a "mixture of the personal, political and fannish" (Busse, 2006, p. 207). The result is that fans are increasingly involved in political conversations that go far beyond the fannish, sometimes erupting into fandom-wide discussions. The most striking example would be the months-long discussion about race in science fiction and fantasy literature, dubbed RaceFail '09, that sprung from a comment from a professional author and led to over ten million words being written on the subject of race in fandom (Gatson and Reid, 2011). I discuss RaceFail '09 in much greater detail in the following chapter, but suffice it to say that it serves as an important example of how the political has become increasingly integrated with the fannish in online fandom. As with the formation of queer identity, a growing assimilation of political dialogue into fan communities results in a development of political identity that is, for many, closely tied to fandom. As I have previously

explained, my own experience bears this out, and a number of other fan studies

academics have posited the development of political identity as tied to fandom (see

Willis, 2006; Busse, 2006; Dhaenens; 2008; Hodges, 2011). Louise Phillips and

Marianne Jorgenson explain, "the negotiation of self is an ongoing process of

construction through participation in narrative and other social interaction" (2002, p.101).

Fandom is a prime example of how fans, who often enter fandom in their early teens

(McLelland, 2011), participate in ongoing, sometimes turbulent, political discussions in

fandom that have the potential to contribute to the development of political identity.

The continued framing of fandom in some mainstream media as "weird" and

potentially pathological, coupled with the close links between fandom and identity

formation, has led many fans to be extremely protective of fan communities. Despite the

growing acceptance and awareness of fandom as a result of articles like those in *Time*

(Grossman, 2011) and *The Guardian* (Gregory, 2011) and the popularity of E.L. James'

Fifty Shades of Grey, many fans, particularly ones with a long history in fandom are still

wary of criticism and shaming from outside fan communities.[24] Fan history is littered

with occasions when fandom has felt attacked from outside forces. In 2007, Livejournal

suspended a number of fandom blogs after complaints by Warriors for Innocence, a

volunteer-based organization that works to eliminate child pornography on the Internet.

Specifically, Warriors for Innocence had issued complaints to the Livejournal

administration about fanfiction written in the *Harry Potter* fandom that contained sexual

interactions among characters under the age of eighteen. Livejournal responded by

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[24] Author E.L. James originally published *Fifty Shades of Grey* as a piece of *Twilight* fanfiction called *Master of the Universe* under the penname Snowqueens Icedragon.

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suspending and deleting blogs containing such fanfiction in an event known as

Strikethrough 2007, despite evidence that many such blogs were run by teenagers who

were themselves under eighteen and that nearly all the stories in question involved

characters over the age of consent (and who were engaging in sexual acts with characters

of comparable age) (McLelland, 2011).[25] Novelists George R.R. Martin (2010) and

Diana Gabaldon (Meadows, 2010) have repeatedly and explicitly banned fans from

writing fanfiction based on their books, going so far in Gabaldon's case as to write an

essay outlining how fanfiction is detrimental to professional authors and an act of theft.[26]

These events, along with ongoing copyright concerns, result in an ongoing feeling of

instability for many fans.

In an examination of the *Supernatural* fandom by Lynn Zubernis and Katherine

Larsen (2012), the authors write that although "much has been written to rehabilitate the

image of the fan, fans still have a pervasive sense of shame" (p. 1). Shame, again

returning to Ahmed, often has "loves that depart from the scripts of normative existence"

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[25] It was, in part, Strikethrough 2007 that precipitated much of the move of fandom off of Livejournal and onto new platforms, facilitating the growth of fandom on Tumblr. This was hardly the only factor at play, but it did provide significant impetus for fans to leave Livejournal and seek out more accepting spaces.

[26] This essay has since been deleted from Gabaldon's blog, but quotes from it and discussion emanating from it can still be found online. It is also important to note that the attitudes of most authors to fanworks have been shaped by the case of the late Marion Zimmer Bradley, an American fantasy author. From the 1970s to the early 1990s, Bradley actively encouraged fanworks, going so far as to professionally publish a fanfiction anthology based on her novels. In 1992 one fan, Jean Lamb, published a novel titled *Masks*, starring one of Bradley's characters and sent the novel to Bradley for feedback. Reportedly, Bradley then approached Lamb to offer her compensation for using some of Lamb's ideas in Bradley's upcoming novel, *Contraband.* When Lamb asked for either more money or clarification as to the amount of material Bradley was using, Bradley withdrew the offer and cancelled the novel. Citing a threat from Lamb to sue, Bradley's publishers cancelled her contract and Bradley subsequently dissolved her relationship with fan groups (Coker, 2011).

(2004, p. 107), or queer desires, as its source. Queer bodies, by taking on queer identities, are thus already inherently read as shameful and this shame is constructed as something that must be hidden from public view. Queer identification leads to a feeling of having failed at normative sexuality. Fannish identification, particularly of slash fans, has a similar relationship to normative sexuality in that fans fail at "scripts of normative existence" with their over-identification with and passion for fictional characters. The same mechanism by which shame becomes attached to queer identities ties together fandom and shame—as fans and fandom are read, as I note above, as deviating from the norm and thus reveals a shameful connection to the non-normative. Many fans experience the double-shaming of queer identification and fan identification, revealing that shame is a powerful emotional experience that results in affective relationships between fans, their sexual identifications, and fandom.

Examining fandom from an emotional perspective reveals, too, how shame works to lead fans to feel wary of any intrusion from the outside and thus protective of fandom – a protectiveness that extends to perceived attacks from the inside as well. Put differently, fandom, as a space of identity formation, coupled with a pervasive sense of shame, results in an intense affective engagement with fandom. These affective ties engender protective practices, grounded in online identity formation, that seek to make fandom safe. However, what remains to be considered is how whiteness is intertwined with feelings of protectiveness, resulting in exclusionary experiences for fans of colour.

Whose Queer Online Space?

Up until this point I have been discussing fans in much the same way they are represented in mainstream media – as one type of universal fan.   What is hidden in this framing is that the universal fan is synonymous with the white fan (Stanfill, 2011), foreclosing the consideration of the distinctive experiences of non-white fans. It is not so much that fans are consciously associated with whiteness, but that race is obscured and elided in discussions of the fan experience; with this, the "white racial frame," or the colourblind, white, default perspective (Feagin, 2010), kicks in and fans are automatically associated with whiteness. Concepts of a queer online space, or the formation of identity through fandom, become the property of white bodies. The affective engagement and sense of community of fandom therefore extends only to white fans, and many fans of colour express the alienation they feel when engaging in white-oriented fan communities. This is not to say that non-white fans do not experience fandom as queer or as a place of identity formation, but it does reveal the way racism and the white racial frame in fandom impacts their experience (just as whiteness, still, remains an invisible fan positionality). As Phillips and Jorgensen (2002) maintain, our ways of talking "actively create and change the world" (p.91), and I argue that the continued elision of race from considerations of fan experiences masks the racism and white supremacist ideology prevalent in many fandom communities. The result is contradictory and alienating fandom experiences for many non-white fans.

Fans of colour, especially queer ones, often express their ambiguous engagement with fandom. On one hand, like many fans, they do find communities in which they can enjoy things that wider society might find unacceptable; they are, for example, able to

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celebrate women's and queer sexuality and engage with popular cultural texts in a creative and fun way. On the other hand, they often find themselves alienated by the overwhelming whiteness of fandom and express the isolation of not having characters of colour written about in fanfiction. As Tumblr blogger amazonpoodle puts it:

> I've found that my tolerance for all-white fandoms is getting drastically lower and lower. I've *got* to see myself reflected in the narrative somehow- I've *got*to [sic] have regular characters of color that I can care about, because otherwise I'm devoting my fun, feel-good, soul-soothing time to world *without me in it*. That is HORRIFYING*,* do you understand? (amazonpoodle, 2013a, para. 7).

As I discussed in Chapter 2, even when canon material has one or more non-white characters, fandom overwhelmingly focuses on the experiences of white men. The erasure of people of colour from fanfiction and fandom is part of what many fans of colour find so alienating. The white racial frame, however, is extended even further in that fans of colour not only feel alienated by the lack of representation in fandom, but also often feel pressured to *not* talk about race online (Gatson and Reid, 2011). This amounts to, essentially, a closeting of race in fandom and results in fans of colour losing identificatory possibilities in online affinity spaces—unlike white fans who find the freedom to explore many aspects of their identities and identifications. It is worth repeating, then, that the forced erasure of racial identity online contributes to the image of the normative fan as white (Gastson and Reid, 2011).

Adding to this image of the normative fan, mainstream media depicts fans as being overwhelmingly white, straight men (Stanfill, 2011), further erasing any sense of racial diversity in fandom.[27] However, these depictions of white, male fans construct fandom as a kind of failed whiteness. As Stanfill (2011) explains, fans are constructed as white and as failing at normative sexuality, class (in securing successful employment), and heterosexuality. The effect of conceptualizing fandom as a failed whiteness is to also allow for a recuperation of fans back into normative whiteness by reducing their attachment to fan communities. It is the existence of white privilege that constructs the fan as deviant. Feelings of shame as associated with participation in fandom develop as a sense of *loss* of white privilege—yet it is the sense of a loss of privilege that actually serves to reinforce said privilege. As Stanfill (2011) states, "[t]he reason fans lack privilege is because they are failing at normative white sexuality – which still positions white heteronormativity as what is naturally privileged" (para. 4.6). The sense of shame felt by white fans as a result of their involvement in fandom is only intelligible if white heteronormativity is considered superior. The conceptualization of fandom as a failed whiteness effectively erases the presence of any non-white fans in fandom and reinforces white supremacy. The result is white fans interpellating fandom as the property of white bodies and positioning themselves as being persecuted for failing at normative whiteness. Many white fans then use this sense of failed whiteness (that can only exist because of

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[27] While this is in contradiction to the conventional fan studies understanding that fandom, particularly slash fandom, consists largely of women, I contend that both understandings of fandom perpetuate the image of the normative fan as, first and foremost, white.

white privilege) in order to erase and attack non-white fans that offer criticisms of the ways in which racism circulates in fandom.

Fandom thus becomes a place of comfort for white bodies, including queer white fans that find the world outside of fandom a place of discomfort. As Ahmed explains, "[t]o be comfortable is to be so at ease with one's environment that it is hard to distinguish where one's body ends and the world begins" (p.148). Although Ahmed speaks here of physical bodies, I extend her conceptualization to the virtual world and equate bodies with the online personas created and nurtured by so many white fans. These personas fit seamlessly into fandom's self-perception of the normative fan and thus these fans do not experience dissonance between their identity and environment. White fans view other fans and characters as white by default (as I establish below). Comfort within fandom and fan cultures results in white fans being invested in the perpetuation of Joe Feagin's (2010) white racial frame –deeply embedded racial "knowledge" held by white people that normalizes systemic racism. Specifically, the concept of the white racial frame reveals how racist structures and understandings pass as unremarkable. Deeply held, normalized beliefs in the superiority of whiteness and the inferiority of the racial "other" means that white people consider systemic racism and the normativity of white-controlled power structures unremarkable. Whiteness thus remains "unseeable" even as it is integral to how white people understand and frame the world. Considered alongside Ahmed's theories on comfort, the racial understandings that make up the white racial frame are the source of the seamlessness with which white people experience the world – structures and institutions, including fandom, are viewed as "naturally" white so white people do not experience any dissonance with their environment. Any challenge to

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the white racial frame thus disrupts this seamlessness and thus becomes a threat to white comfort and safety. However, it is in disrupting the conceptualization of the normative white fan as naturally universal that we can "attend to how [structures] become meaningful – or indeed, are felt as natural – through the emotional work of labour, work that takes time, and that takes place in time" (Ahmed, 2004, p.56). Perpetuating notions of normative whiteness in fandom involves continual discourse formation – a project that takes time and labour. By understanding this project for what it is—as narratives that are invested in the workings of white supremacist ideology—the naturalness of the white racial frame can be disrupted.

One clear example of the project of perpetuating normative whiteness in fandom is in the discussion of character identity in the *Welcome to Night Vale (WNTV)* fandom. *WNTV* is an Internet podcast presented as a radio show for the fictional town of Night Vale, located somewhere in the southwestern United States. The radio show consists of news reports, announcements and advertisements and is hosted by its main character, Cecil Baldwin. What makes the show unique is the conceptualization of the town of Night Vale as somewhere where "all conspiracy theories [are] real" (Lynden, 2013, podcast). Strange happenings are commonplace and presented in a matter-of-fact manner. Throughout the course of the first season, Cecil is revealed to be in a relationship with the scientist Carlos who is described as having "a voice like caramel with oaky tones, dark and delicate skin, black hair with a dignified, if premature, tough of gray at his temples, and a strong square jaw and teeth like a military cemetery" (Fink and Cranor, 2012, podcast). In canon, Carlos is explicitly described as a character of colour, a Latino man, and Cecil is left racially ambiguous. Importantly, the creator of *WNTV*,

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Joseph Fink has unequivocally stated in interviews that Cecil was not intended to be white (Lynden, 2013). It is in the fan reaction to race in *WNTV*, and the portrayal of Cecil and Carlos in fanfiction and fanart, that the workings of the white racial frame become clear.

Despite the clear description of Carlos as a person of colour and the stated intention of the creators to have Cecil be a man of colour, *headcanons* of both as white abound. A headcanon in fandom terms is a piece of information about a character, setting or plot point that is not present in the canon material, but that a fan believes to be true. These often have to do with character backstory or motivation and, when a particular headcanon is believed by a significant number of fans, it becomes known as *fanon* and is often treated with the same respect as canon (Fanlore, 2014). In an op-ed piece for *The Rainbow Hub*, deputy editor Trie (2014) points out the extreme mental gymnastics white fans will undertake in order to see Cecil and/or Carlos as white or lighter-skinned than described. For example, in an anonymous submission to the Tumblr *Night Vale Headcanons* (2013), a fan writes: [28]

> Cecil is white, not as in Caucasian, but white like paper. all [sic] Night Vale
> citizens are born white, and change color based on corrupting factors. of [sic]
> course, it changes based on good and bad factors, so it's not that Cecil has never
> done wrong, but rather all the good and bad balance out. (also [sic], that's one of

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[28] A frequent part of many fandoms (*Glee*, *Teen Wolf*, etc.) is the presence of a blog for anonymous submissions or confessions. Although many of the submissions are benign or humorous, they often reveal the undercurrents of racism, sexism and homophobia in fandom.

the reasons he thought Carlos was so beautiful when he came to town. Cecil

always had a thing for the bad boys. and girls. and genderless entities that reside

in Night Vale) (para. 1).

Rosemary Jackson (1981), in her discussion of fantasy literature, theorizes fantasy as

paraxial, from paraxis, or "that which lies on either side of the principle axis, that which

lies alongside the main body" (p. 19). By this she means that fantasy narratives consist of

an imaginary world that is neither entirely real nor unreal. Fantasy, instead is grounded

in the real in that "its means of establishing its 'reality' are inherently mimetic but then

move into another mode which would seem to be marvelous were it not for its initial

grounding in the 'real'" (p. 20). Fantasy, even when it is "unreal" is inherently connected

to the real or as Jackson argues, "produced within, and determined by, its social context.

Though it may struggle against the limits of this context, often being articulated upon that

very struggle, it cannot be understood in isolation from it" (p. 3). Even when ostensibly

producing fantastic narratives, fans are grounded in the "real" of their social context and

thus often fail to see beyond themselves, resulting in a falling back onto certain

preconditions, including the white racial frame. Generalizing all characters as white,

despite evidence to the contrary, is indicative of how fantasy as an "excursion into

disorder can only begin from a base within the dominant cultural order" (Jackson, 1981,

p. 4). White fans, starting from a dominant cultural order of white supremacy, use the

fantastical setting of Night Vale to produce convoluted theories that compensate for their

hesitancy in confronting the supernatural by resituating the inexplicable world of Night

Vale into the social context of normative whiteness. In the quotation above, the fan has

developed an elaborate and unsupported theory in order to maintain the understanding, based in white hegemonic thinking, that whiteness is the norm, the default setting for everyone.

What becomes permissible as a result of the white as default frame is white fans turning the narrative of oppression back onto themselves. In discussing the emotion of pain, Ahmed (2004) posits:

Given that subjects have an unequal relation to entitlement, then more privileged subjects will have a greater recourse to narratives of injury. That is, the more access subjects have to public resources, the more access they may have to the capacity to mobilise narratives of injury within the public domain (p. 33).

Ahmed continues by establishing how pain is reduced to narratives of injury that require compensation. White privilege in fandom allows white fans greater access and more societal support to narratives of injury thereby providing the ability to deny others their pain. Narratives of injury come out when white fans respond with hurt, anger and denial to accusations of racism in fandom. The negative response by white fans to critique masks the presence of racism in fandom and the effects of white supremacist thinking, effectively turning attention back to white pain and allowing whiteness to remain unexamined. It is the masking of racism and recentering of whiteness that is the focus of the next section.

White Fan Response

Normative whiteness and the white supremacist narratives that saturate fandom, fanfiction and fan headcanons unsurprisingly elicit important critique. As is the case elsewhere, the work of doing such critique falls predominantly on the shoulders of women of colour in fandom. White privilege that shields white people from any experience of racism also allows us to ignore any issues of race unless we actively choose to engage with them. I discuss the effects of emotional labour on fans of colour more thoroughly in the next chapter, while the focus of this section is on the white fan response to these critiques. Returning to the importance of identity formation in fan communities, many fans use their participation in fandom, and particularly slash fandom, with its focus on queer issues, as a way of constructing an image of themselves as good, moral people. As one fan describes on her blog, " I can literally describe my genesis as a slash fangirl. First, it was because the sight of it made my stomach do that good kind of flip-flop that told me I liked what I saw. Then, it was because I thought it made me progressive, and pro-gay rights" (Baumgartner, 2013, para. 5). These self-images expose a similar logic being used by white fans to that of the practice of "pinkwashing." Jasbir Puar and Maya Mikdashi (2012) define pinkwashing as the process by which "the Israeli sate seeks to gloss over the ongoing settler colonialism of historic Palestine by redirecting international attention towards a comparison between the supposedly stellar record of gay rights in Israel and the supposedly dismal state of life for LGBTQ Palestinians in Occupied Palestine" (para. 1). While I do not wish to collapse the distinct experience of settler colonialism in Palestine and the whitewashing in fandom into one monolithic experience of racism, the similarity in logic can be instructive. In order to imagine themselves as

morally good people, fans point to their support of gay rights (a support that is ostensibly greater in slash fandom than elsewhere). Accordingly, any consideration of complicity in other forms of cultural domination is precluded. Slash fans support gay rights and are therefore good, progressive people and so fandom becomes "pinkwashed." Charges of racism directed at some fan sites and blogs disrupt these internal narratives of "goodness" and attendant queer rights narratives, and are often read as attacks on the safe, queer space of fandom. White fans are invested in their own community being a place of safety, while ignoring how this perpetuates the erasure of fans of colour and reinforces fandom as a space of whiteness.

In slash fandom, shipping two white men is habitually conflated with support for gay rights (Baumgartner, 2013; Lady Saika, 2012). In *Teen Wolf* fandom, this is taken to such an extreme that fans that do not ship Sterek have been outright accused of homophobia (11ismyfavorite5ever, 2013). Support for queer rights is actively associated with supporting a pairing of two white cisgender men. So, while participation in slash fandom is used as a marker for being a good person, what becomes obvious is that the queer rights that are being supported fall under a queer liberal and colourblind ideal. As Scodari (2003) argues, fans frequently appropriate resistant narratives, even when the fanfiction they produce replicates hegemonic ones. Here, fans use language of political activism while reproducing the type of heteronormative, white supremacist fiction that I discussed in Chapter 2. Barbara Heron (2007) names this a "race to innocence" (p. 10) in that white people—in Heron's case development workers and in this case fans—are highly invested in images of themselves as good, ethical people leading them to deny their complicity in racial subordination. Participation in slash fandom and the imagined

inherent support for queer rights is consequently intertwined with white fan identity as ethical and progressive; this (white) ethical and progressive identity, in turn, becomes central to fan discourse, eliding the matrices of racial domination that are collapsed when imagining a universal queer rights.

Accordingly, the link between slash fanfiction and a queer-positive politics permeates much of fandom. As the type of queer liberalism reflective in much slash fanfiction relies upon the "completion of the race project [that] makes way for the emergence of queer freedom" (Eng, 2010, p.8), support for queer rights in fandom is habitually divorced from discussions of race. Blogger warmlightforallmankind (quoted on *Shut Up Teen Wolf Fandom*) states:

> If I read one more post about people saying Sterek becoming canon wouldn't be a step towards equality because it's two white males I'm going to go off. The whole point of the concept of "equality" is that we're working for a society in which race, gender, sexual orientation and identity don't affect how people are viewed. That people will be judged based on their actions, not their predispositions. So it's more than a bit frustrating when people seem to think that any sort of LGBTQ character/pairing is less or more of a step forward (Shut Up Teen Wolf Fandom, 2013b, para. 1).[29]

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[29] The original post has since been deleted, but the nature of Tumblr means that it is reproduced in its entirety on *Shut Up Teen Wolf Fandom*.

Comments of this nature reinforce both the separation of race and queerness and also fortify the universalization of queerness as white and, at the same time, assume that racism is something that exists in the past, as constantly "disappearing … even as it takes on new forms that can signify as nonracial or even antiracist" (Eng, 2010, p.12). Racism becomes an issue of the past that can safely be acknowledged as shameful by white fans without disrupting current narratives of a queer rights movement that is separate from race. In speaking about the nation, Ahmed states "[b]y witnessing what is shameful about the past, the nation can 'live up to' the ideals that secure its identity or being in the present" (2004, p. 109). I would argue the same is true for fandom, as perpetuating ideas of racism as disappearing and separate from sexuality allows fans to feel good about acknowledging the shame of racism without having to confront it in the present and in fan affinity spaces. Thus, the self-image of the white fan as inherently a good person remains undisturbed.

Much of the underlying self-images and identifications of white fans become visible in the response to being called out as privileged and racist. Calling out the racism of white fans frequently leads to significant backlash involving vehement denials of racism and the sweeping of occurrences of racism under the rug. For example, in discussing the issue of the erasure and diminishment of the character of Scott McCall that I identified in the previous chapter, Tumblr blogger uniwolfwerecorn (2013) states:

> Since they know they have no ground to stand on when they try to tell people what they should or shouldn't do in their fanworks, they start looking for reasons to make sterek shippers feel bad. One of those ways is making "erasing" (or

neglecting, or misinterpreting, or degrading, or whatnot) Scott about something it imo isn't – latent racism.[30]   In their part of the world, where Teen Wolf is set, Tyler Posey is considered a PoC. This one virtue, based on his appearance alone, is so important to them that they deem it his most important character trait, and the sole reason they feel entitled to demand fans all over the world should treat Scott differently than, say Dominick Cobb (if you ship Arthur/Eames) or Harry Potter (if you ship Snape/Hermione) (para. 6).[31]

The belittlement of racism—denying its existence by referring to it as "latent," and the diminishment of race that accompanies calling it "one virtue, based on appearance alone"—is that white fans are centered in the discourse and constituted as the real victims. In the above quotation, the fan identifies what they see as undue demands being placed on white fans to recognize the importance of race in the treatment of the character of Scott McCall. In directly comparing Scott to characters from *Inception* and *Harry Potter*, all of who are canonically white, the workings of whiteness are elided and made invisible. As whiteness is what Ruth Frankenberg (1993) calls a self-invisible norm, comments like the above from fans that explicitly foreclose any discussion of the way in which race influences representation in fandom perpetuate a politics of colourblindness. Race becomes a concern for only people of colour while whiteness is allowed to remain invisible and unexamined (Frankenberg, 1993). Blogger rizuno (2013) illustrates how the

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[30] imo is an online acronym for "in my opinion."
[31] Dominick Cobb, Arthur and Eames are characters from the 2010 science fiction/ thriller film *Inception*.

invisible norm of whiteness allows for vehement denials of racism in her response to critiques of Sterek fandom:

> Shipping a ship is not fucking wrong. Hating people because they do is. You can NOT agree with us that's fine. But we're not fucking villains sitting around plotting the destruction of the POC. Stop treating us as if we are. As if we're all the same person. AS IF WE'RE ALL A HUGE COHESIVE AMEOBA OR SOMETHING. Because we're not. I'm sorry but every group of anything ever has its outliers and its nutballs. Stop using those few people as an excuse to stereotype us all (para. 33).

The anger that infuses this post again serves to belittle any accusation of racism and to cast the blogger, and other white fans, as the real victims of people who would characterize them as "A HUGE COHESIVE AMEOBA OR SOMETHING." At the same time, characterizing racism as something only "fucking villains sitting around plotting the destruction of the POC" feel not only invalidates the way people of colour experience racism, but obscures white supremacy by making even the thought of it seem like a ridiculous notion.

Whiteness as a "self-invisible norm" that does not recognize itself as white leads to a worldview that purports to see everyone just as human without the need to recognize race (Frankenberg, 1993). Fandom continues to keep whiteness an unmarked category (helped along some by the anonymity of the Internet) in that fandom is viewed as a

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"community, communal yet contentious" (Hellekson, 2009, p. 5) that faces universal

problems and threats from the outside. This viewpoint becomes apparent in the following

quotation from the blog tempestraven (2013):

> But liking or disliking a character just because you don't like the way they are written
>
> doesn't make you a racist or anything close. That's why as a fandom, we need to take
>
> care of other fans as well. We should be careful when it comes to portraying other
>
> characters. We shouldn't come across as insensitive and we should not come across
>
> as over sensitive either. We should not immediately tag anyone as 'racist' or a 'hater'
>
> just because they don't like a character we are passionate about (Throwing Terms
>
> Left and Right section, para. 5).

Critiquing other fans for racism is thus impossible while, simultaneously, a criticism of

those who do identify and name racism is necessary for the communal functioning of

fandom. Fandom becomes comparable to bell hooks' (1984) "universal sisterhood,"

where women's issues are produced as homogenous across racial, cultural, class and

physical differences resulting in a elevation of white, Western women's issues as

singularly important. In fandom, where whiteness is considered default and critiquing

racism becomes an attack on the community, white Western women's issues again

become central.[32] As Chandra Mohanty (2003) posits, the universalization of women's

issues actually requires making "women" synonymous with "white women" thereby

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[32] While exact numbers are difficult to come by, fan scholars (Jenkins, 1992; Hellekson, 2009; Busse, 2006) agree that slash fandom is predominantly made up of women.

eliding the effects of race and foreclosing the possibility of an intersectional analysis.

Any dissent or critique of the community is imagined as a betrayal of the wider cause and

cannot be allowed. Critiques of racism in fandom become the sole problem, rather than a

response to the problem, making the workings of whiteness invisible and fans of colour

responsible for damaging the communal nature of fandom. For example, blogger

uniwolfwerecorn (2014) writes:

> You know how it is. Some innocent, hopeful youngster creates a tribal artwork, is
> called a racist for a thing called cultural appropriation that they have probably
> never heard of before, gets anon hate in their inbox from *if a PoC tells you*
> *something is racist, you need to shut up and listen* to *die white cishet scum*, and
> since most people agree that racism is actually a vile thing, chances are that our
> poor little fan artist will start to *believe* this crap at some point (para. 3).

By imagining a burgeoning fan becoming disillusioned with fandom as a result of being

called out for racist fanart, uniwolfwerecorn characterizes critiques of racism, rather than

racism itself, as the real problem facing fandom. Accordingly, she places the

responsibility for sustaining fan activity and making fandom a welcoming place onto

those who would call out racism with the intended effect of silencing such critiques.

The insular view of fandom as a community that needs to support itself, even in

its prioritization of white women's issues, allows white fans to see themselves as the "real

victims" of any discussion about race. White fans are already produced as being the

ordinary default fan (experiencing attacks from within and without), and fandom is being

cast as a site that engenders "ordinary in crisis" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 43). Put another way, white fans become "the ordinary which is already under threat by the imagined others" who are "assumed to 'cause' injury to the ordinary white subject such that their proximity is read as the origin of bad feeling" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 43). It is not the racism in fandom that is the issue or the cause of ill feelings, but the fans, usually women of colour, who actively critique and identify racism. In an ethnographic analysis of anti-racism workshops, Sarita Srivastava (2005) exposes how discussions of racism get turned around to focus on white women's feelings. White privilege and the structures that make white hegemony appear as natural allow white women to experience any critique as an attack. Sites that should be reserved for unveiling and deconstructing racism and racist structures consequently become sites where white women's feelings of victimization and guilt are prioritized. White fans similarly see themselves as under attack turning discussions of racism into pleas to be sensitive and respect the feelings of other (presumably white) fans. For example, blogger athenadark (2013) writes:

I have tried to listen, however no matter what I do I'm being called racist because my preferences don't feature Scott, and no matter what I do they just react with the response - you're racist. What it has taught me, because I have listened, is that they don't know what they're talking about - because I have seen them consistently, even as PoCs sideline other minorities (including myself, I am white, but I am a white minority who has suffered under consistent and persistent racial prejudice, one that continues to this day) … You know why that bothers me, because I have spent the vast majority of my adult life working towards equality, I

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have been an activist for equality, and I see a group of young people who want to make a difference who don't even realise that they are making things worse because they don't understand what they are arguing. They use their status as a shield and a bludgeon and it comes across as a giant chip on their shoulder. There is a huge difference between being angry at what happened to you and using that anger to fix something, because if you stand their railing and ranting nothing ever changes. you're an asshole … (para. 16).

In describing herself as "white minority who has suffered under consistent and persistent racial prejudice," athenadark actively refocuses the discussion onto the pain of white women, situating herself as the real victim. Just as in Srivastava's study, athenadark experiences being called a racist as an attack that causes an offense greater than being racist. At the same time, she casts the people making the critique as irrational, writing that they "don't even realise that they are making things worse because they don't understand what they're arguing," and that they are unreasonably angry in their "railing and ranting." In so doing, she draws on cultural imperatives—specifically politeness—that invalidate the critiques of women of colour and serve to cast her, and other white women, as the real victims.

In a manner that mirrors wider society's policing of the emotional response of women of colour to systemic oppression, and the "angry black woman" (Harris-Perry, 2011) stereotype in particular, white fans dismiss critiques as being too angry or not focusing on important issues. Working from Ahmed (2004), in her analysis of the

response to a speech made by Sunera Thobani, an expression of anger from women of colour allows for their message or words to be categorically dismissed as motivated by "purely negative passion" (p. 177) or as being unreasonable. Any emotional reaction or expression in discussing racism can thus be dismissed as lacking reason and demands made to provide reasonable justification. In one of a long series of replies written in response to a post theorizing Scott McCall's "racism" against werewolves, blogger derekhaleismyhero (2014) writes:

Part of why I thought her response was aggressive was her use of all CAPS to describe what she imagined my wish to be. The use of all caps is pretty standardly regarded as yelling, hence "aggressive". She also called me smug, which I am not, but I felt like it was insulting, hence "aggressive". You know a person's skin color isn't generally noticeable in text, so I honestly wasn't thinking about her skin color at all when I was replying, in text to her text. I kinda get that if you are a POC, you feel more sensitive to any perceived slurs. But for real, not every single thing is a slur. The word aggressive is not a freaking slur. Calling me out because I am white is just making this whole thing about something that it most ostensibly is not. If I thought, at all, that I had made a racial slur, I would apologize. But I am not going to apologize for using the word aggressive. That word, in no way, implicitly implies Angry Black Woman. You are being ridiculous. Aggressive is not a racial slur (para. 45).

In saying that the word aggressive, used in response to a critique by a black woman, does not perpetuate the Angry Black Woman trope, derekhaleismyhero invalidates the way black women are dismissed and silenced when people call on the trope. At the same time, she calls on the trope herself in calling the original poster "sensitive" and the black woman they are discussing aggressive and insulting. The use of the Angry Black Woman trope allows derekhaleismyhero to sidestep any discussion of her racism by characterizing women of colour as unreasonable in their anger.

Anger in many ways is a communal experience of fandom. Fans express anger about plot lines, character directions and who get paired off in canon and this is all not only acceptable but often taken as a form of community building.[33] The anger of women of colour, however, disrupts the communal conception of fandom and is subsequently not allowed to be a part of fandom community. Audre Lorde writes "[m]y response to racism is anger … Anger is loaded with information and energy" (1984, p. 124, 127). This construction of anger as not only a direct response to racism, but as a way of opening up future possibilities (Ahmed, 2004, p. 175) is erased when anger from women of colour is produced only as unreasonable. White fans can therefore determine what is important to discuss in terms of race. In discussing a post by a fan of colour critiquing racist representation of Scott McCall in *Teen Wolf* fandom, Tumblr blogger lunaradvent (2012) writes:

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[33] See Derek Johnson's (2007) discussion of anti-fandom.

Posts like this annoy me. Why? Because it takes attention away from real racism to focus on some bs like this. People tend to ignore/belittle/hate/demean Scott b/c throughout the 1st season he was a douchey, creepy twat (para. 1).

Along with the overtly misogynistic language present in the above comment is the inherent idea that some racism is "real" while some is petty or unimportant and that the different is determinable by white people. Racism is "real" when it involves easily recognizable and unambiguous actions and/or statements (cross-burning, for example, or the KKK), but racism that results from everyday structures of white privilege is unimportant or invisible (Giroux, 1997). White hegemonic thinking that informs how a character is portrayed in fan work cannot then be racism, as it does not follow these scripts of what "real" racism looks like. White supremacy in fandom is brushed under the rug as if it doesn't exist because it is not overt or easily recognizable and the category of whiteness remains unmarked and unexamined.

Conclusion

As a queer woman and a long-standing member of fandom, I am intimately aware of how fandom can be a space of queer, emancipatory potential. However, the ubiquitous and repetitive reinstatement of narratives of white supremacy belies the radical nature of fandom. As long as queer space remains synonymous with white space in fan communities, the type of radical participatory culture often envisioned by fans remains out of reach. An emancipatory politics is impossible when the overwhelming tendency in fandom is to praise white homonormativity and reestablish white supremacy. The active,

explicit denials and dismissals of racism by white fans in fandom prevent it from achieving its potential as a queer online space.

Yet, fandom, like other affinity spaces, is a complex, diverse community. There have always been fans, specifically women of colour, that resist; and this talking back has grown with the spread of fandom to new platforms. As I have established, talkback is hardly universal and often results in acrimonious arguments and vehement denials from privileged fans. Nevertheless, these narratives of resistance are ongoing and influential. It is to these sites of resistance and reimagining that I turn my attention in the next chapter.

Chapter 4

Resistance and Reimagining

"Not all of slash is politically conscious; not all of slash is progressive; not all of slash is feminist; yet one cannot totally ignore the progressive potential of the exchange."

- Henry Jenkins, 1992, p. 227

"[P]roducers of fanworks are in an enviable position to engage with these concerns, and not simply reproduce the systems of thought that functions as the canon (either in terms of the media itself or the society that produces it). They can interact with these, if not as equals then as new contenders, and actually produce a space where race and culture are thoughtfully and respectfully engaged."

- Samira Nadkarni, 2013, p. 352

Although slash fandom has evolved considerably in the time since Henry Jenkins wrote *Textual Poachers* (1992), considered one of the founding works in fan studies (Hellekson, 2009), I suggest that his words, quoted above, remain true. As I have established, slash fanfiction often serves to reinforce heteronormative and racist ideologies, yet there have always been fans that resist and these narratives of resistance are ongoing and influential. Moreover, there are occasional moments when these narratives spring to the foreground and become widespread, engaging fans from multiple fandoms across a variety of platforms. I begin this chapter with a discussion of one such moment, colloquially known as RaceFail '09. Although hardly the first, or only, pan-fandom discussion about race and racism, RaceFail '09 is significant because of the

immense number of words written, the length of time it remained central to fandom

discussions, and for the resistant fanworks and projects it sparked.

RaceFail '09 took place from January to May 2009, although resonances from

these debates and discussions continue to have considerable influence at the time of this

research project and thesis (Gatson and Reid, 2011).[34] It occurred "within a complex

network of discussions relating to the cultural makeup of fandom and is connected to a

history of work by fans of color and white allies" (Gatson and Reid, 2011, para. 3.4).

Where and how it began is a subject of considerable fandom debate. Some fans argue

that it began with posts by fans of colour about racism in fandom, others that it resulted

from responses by fans of colour to statements made by white fans and authors (Fanlore,

2014). Regardless, much of the crux of the early debates centered on a post made by

professional fantasy author Elizabeth Bear (2009), a white woman, in January 2009. On

January 12, Bear made a post on her blog entitled "whatever you're doing, you're

probably wrong," in which she offered advice for "writing the Other" (Bear, 2009, para.

1). Two of the central points of her post were to not think of "the other" as other, but to

see everyone as "just people" and to "consult people you know who live what you are

writing about" (Bear, 2009, para. 4). The following day, Livejournal blogger Deepa D.

(Fanlore, 2014) made a post that she characterized not as a direct response to Bear's

words, but an articulation of her personal emotional reaction. As an Indian reader of

fantasy, Deepa D. considered the Eurocentricity of fantasy literature and the

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[34] It is impossible to attach exact dates to RaceFail '09, as discussions did not abruptly
end in May 2009. However, fandom archivists who compiled links to the discussions and
debates generally agree that these five months were when the bulk of the discussion
occurred (Tablesaw, 2009; Wong, 2009).

corresponding trend in fantasy of appropriating African, Native American and Asian characters. On the same day, Avalon Willow (2009), a black woman, wrote a direct response to Bear in which she pointed out the racist portrayal of a black man in Bear's novel *Blood and Iron:*

> It's about my personal confusion that an author so highly spoken of by people I respect, would write about a magical, negro who gets bridled by a white woman after trying to kill and eat another white woman and, to my horror, becoming some sort of beast of burden/big buck protector; my horror at watching the humiliation of yet another black man so that a white woman can be empowered in front of her peers (Avalon Willow, 2009, para. 6).

These responses drew a lot of attention to Bear's post and her comment section filled up with responses, both positive and negative, and significant debate, which soon moved into the larger space of Livejournal (Fanlore, 2014). Discussion quickly grew to include voices of other professional authors, including MacAllister Stone, Patrick Neilson Hayden and Will Shetterly, several of whom were dismissive and insulting to Bear's critics (Fanlore, 2014), calling them abusive and insinuating a lack of intelligence. Conservative approximations of RaceFail '09 estimate that over ten million words were written in the space of four months (TWC Editor, 2009). A full analysis of the myriad threads of RaceFail '09 is thus beyond the scope of this chapter, but several themes and

initiatives emerged from the debates that are central to this thesis, and this chapter in particular.[35]

In an interview with *Transformative Works and Cultures*, fans Coffeeandink, Deepa D., Jackie Gross, Liz Henry, Oyceter, Sparkymonster, and Naamen Tilahun identified the way in which RaceFail '09 made visible the white privilege inherent in white fan responses to being called out on their racism.[36,37]

> Coffeeandink: People being checked on their privilege repeatedly have defensive reactions and have conversations about it in public – crying white women's tears. These reactions are natural – there's nothing wrong with the emotions, but in having them publicly, you're saying the entire world should be focused on you.
>
> Sparkymonster: It's a way for people to affirm their status as a nice white lady.
>
> Coffeeandink: It's a way of affirming the public space is white, as a space where white concerns are paramount (TWC Editor, 2009, para. 6.1).

As I established in the previous chapter, fandom continues these same patterns in discussions about race and racism wherein white concerns are central and the narrative is habitually turned around in order to construct white fans as the real victims, a process identified above as "white women's tears." The significance of RaceFail '09, however,

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[35] A detailed archive of RaceFail '09 and its varied participants can be found on Fanlore (2014), on the blog of Rydra Wong (2009), and among several fandom sources (many of which are archived on Fanlore).

[36] *Transformative Works and Cultures* is an academic, peer-reviewed journal about fandom produced by the Organization for Transformative Works.

[37] Some fans preferred to use their fandom names in this interview and others their given names.

does not lie only in the way in which it allowed discussion about white privilege and white hegemony in fandom to come to the fore it also, as fan Rukmini Pande attests, "became a way for fans of colour to find each other and build communities as well" (Pande and Nadkarni, 2013, p. 348).

By bringing together fans of colour, RaceFail prompted the creation of new forms of resistance to whiteness in fandom and strengthened already existing ones. I do not mean to imply here that fans of colour did not have communities or that resistance did not exist before 2009, but that RaceFail, in its widespread and sustained nature, brought these into focus, sparking discussions on fandom's potential for progressive, resistant action and the creation of spaces of resistance, including fic writing challenges, communities, archives, etc. (Gaston and Reid, 2011). The forms of resistance that exist in fandom and that propagated as a result of RaceFail '09 vary considerably, and it is toward the multiplicities of these resistance narratives that I turn my attention for the remainder of this chapter.

The "Outsider Within" and "Talking Back"

Given the depiction of the normative fan as white, heterosexual and male (Stanfill, 2011), women of colour, and in particular black women who are fans, exist as a type of "outsider within" in fandom. Patricia Hill Collins (1998) advanced the concept of the "outsider within" to describe marginalized groups who exist in the border space between groups. For purposes of this thesis, Collins' concept draws attention to women of colour and the broader fandom community that is conceptualized and reproduced as white. While the "outsider within" appears to be a member of the dominant group, in

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reality they are not afforded the privilege and rights of membership. The "outsider within," by virtue of their marginalized status can see patterns that those on the inside may not be able to see, allowing for the introduction of new paradigms. Although the concept of the "outsider within" was developed specifically in relation to black feminist thought, and not all fans of colour are black, I suggest that this concept is useful in examining dynamics of resistance in fandom. As fandom space is conceptualized and interpreted as being synonymous with white space, fans who do not identify as white already exist in the margins—although white fans would often claim the colourblind perspective that race does not matter in fandom. Exemplified in occurrences such as RaceFail, this marginalized perspective allows for recognition of the workings of whiteness in fandom that many white fans consciously overlook and vehemently deny.

RaceFail is also particularly apt example of how the "outsider within" perspective allows for what bell hooks (1989) calls "talking back" to systems of oppression, in this case white hegemony in fandom spaces. As hooks (1989) explains,

> Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible. It is that act of speech, of "talking back," that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of our movement from object to subject – the liberated voice (p. 9).

Talking back overlaps with Rukmini Pande and Samira Nadkarni's (2013) description of the building of communities of fans of colour during RaceFail: these practices of "talking

back" allowed for "new life and new growth" in the form of new fandom communities, alliances and creative endeavours of resistance. Along with the sustained focus on issues of racism and white privilege that existed during RaceFail, creative responses to white hegemony in fandom sprung up in subsequent years. Before I engage with examples of creative resistance, however, I turn my attention from the past to modern fandom and the forms of resistance that exist on current social media platforms. Anger is one such form of resistance that is particularly evident in many modern fandoms—including *Teen Wolf*—and one that is highly polarized and contested.

Anger is not a foreign notion in fandom, as work on the concept of "anti-fandom" demonstrates (Jenkins, 2010; Gray, 2003; Alters, 2007). As Matt Hills (2012) explains, "anti-fans are those who viscerally dislike specific texts, often without much experience of them, basing their distaste on trailers, textural snippets, or other paratextual sources. Anti-fans carry out 'distant readings' and perform their moral and cultural opposition to particular media products" (p.121). Performances of anti-fandom vary and can involve humour, parody, sarcasm and anger among other responses. Fan response to E.L. James' *Fifty Shades of Grey* provides a good illustration of the concept of the anti-fan. Many feminist, kink and fandom bloggers have engaged in in-depth critiques of the books, but some blogs, such as *Fifty Shades of Abuse* (50shadesofabuse.wordpress.com) do a more emotional reading based in anger. For example, blogger Alexis Bee writes: "[i]t's infuriating. If chapter 16 wasn't bad enough, Christian turns the entire beating and rape on Ana in chapter 17. I'm so mad at E.L. James for writing this garbage right now" (Bee, 2014, para. 2). Anger in the service of anti-fandom is a widely accepted, often communal activity in fandom. However, it is when anger is expressed by fans of colour in the

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service of calling out and venting about racism, as with the blog *Fandoms Hate PoC*

(fandomshatepoc.tumblr.com), discussed below, that white fans begin to characterize

anger as aggressive (derekehaleismyhero, 2014) with the subsequent implication that

anger from people of colour is somehow unsafe or threatening to the communal space of

fandom.

In discussing the concept of "safe space," Naamen Tilahun (TWC Editor, 2009)

offers the insight that such space often involves a different conceptualization for women

of colour. Rather than a space free from offense or hurt, safe space becomes a place for

communal activism and a place to air grievances. This communal activism often

involves what Rachel Griffin (2012), building directly from Audre Lorde, describes as

"anger as a productive force that fuels coming to voice … as an act of resistance" (p.

138).[38] Rather than allowing fandom to be a space of white privilege where, for white

fans, their "privilege is supposed to protect [them]" (TWC Editor, 2009, para. 6.4), if we

read fan narratives and critiques vis-à-vis Griffin's "productive anger," we can seek to

dismantle white hegemonic thinking and bring racism in fandom to light. Two such

communities on Tumblr are *Shut Up Teen Wolf Fandom* and *Fandoms Hate PoC* (People

of Colour).

Fandoms Hate PoC has as its mission statement:

This is a place for people of color to come and vent about racism in the media

they watch and the racism in fandom. White ppl please restrict your questions to

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[38] Griffin (2012) is speaking here about anger in Black Feminist Autoethnography, but I
suggest that this explanation can be extended to writings from women of colour in
fandom spaces, as this often involves elements of autoethnography.

variants of, "how can I help?" all other questions from white ppl will be our lowest priority (Fandoms Hate PoC, 2014a, Mission Statement).[39]

The mission statement by Fandoms Hate PoC clearly delineates the blog as a space for people of colour to vent and where white people's opinions and emotions are not welcome (or are restricted). This is an ideal example of the type of safe space discussed by Naamen Tilahun (TWC Editor, 2009) where anger becomes a source of community and resistance. *Fandoms Hate PoC* is made up of a combination of submissions from fans of colour that express anger at racism in the media and in fandom, and those that celebrate people of colour. For example, in May 2014 one of the blog moderators responded to an anonymous submission that defensively argued, "Sterek being the most popular ship does NOT make the Teen Wolf fandom racist. No way in hell. Scott, Boyde [sic], Kira, Danny, they are all loved in the fandom, race has nothing to do with it. Don't be ignorant" (Fandoms Hate PoC, 2014b, para. 1). The moderator responded by taking statistics from the Archive of Our Own demonstrating the discrepancy in fanfiction written about Scott as opposed to Stiles and Derek (at the time of the post, Scott had 13,000 and 9,000 fewer stories written about him than Stiles and Derek respectively) and stated:

> It's not like the stars of the show have actually "jokingly" threatened to kill off a gay man of color like Danny at all. I wonder where I'm getting this idea that the show itself is problematic (para. 4).[40]

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[39] Ppl is online shorthand for people.

So because fandom adores Tyler Posey they didn't mean those death threats?[41]

Must be some other fans then. Yeah I think you're right, the racist white dick

fencing fandom that ships sterek [sic] are the real problem here. My bad yes so

sorry.

Expressions of anger like this one, in response to repeated and sustained racism in

fandom—racism that is continually denied and ignored—can energize and "shudder us

into new ways of being" (Ahmed, 2004, p.175). As Audre Lorde explains,

> Every woman has a well-stocked arsenal of anger potentially useful against those
>
> oppressions, personal and institutional, which brought that anger into being.
>
> Focused with precision it can become a powerful source of energy serving
>
> progress and change (1984, p. 127).

Naming the sources of anger, as the above exchange on *Fandoms Hate PoC* does, opens

up what Audre Lorde theorizes as an anger that makes possible an imagining of "a

different kind of world in its very 'energy'" (Lorde, 1984, p. 127). Anger is not simply

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[40] In October 2013, a video was released of *Teen Wolf* actor Dylan O'Brien making a plea for fans to vote for *Teen Wolf* in a *TV Guide* poll. O'Brien joked, ostensibly with the permission of *Teen Wolf* producers, that if fans did not vote in the poll, the show would kill off its sole remaining openly gay character, Danny (Whitelaw, 2013).

[41] In February 2014, *Teen Wolf* actor Tyler Posey made a controversial comment about the Sterek pairing, calling it "a bizarre, weird, twisted thing" (Adri M, 2014, para. 1). Although the context of his comments indicated he was speaking about fans who watch the show only for one particular pairing and who do not engage with any other aspect, there was considerable backlash from Sterek fandom. Posey received numerous death threats, enough so that his mother took to Twitter to express her distress (Adri M, 2014).

being against something, but being for something, even if that something is "yet to be articulated or not yet" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 175). Anger can thus be "visionary" (Lorde, 1984, p. 127) and an opening to envision a different sort of future. In the above exchange, the anger expressed means that the racism in fandom that erases and diminishes characters of colour to prop up white men can be named, which then opens the door for the potential to imagine another way of being a fan. As anger from women of colour, particularly black women (Harris-Perry, 2011), has been perceived and undermined by the trope of the "angry black women," and anger is also perceived as the equivalent to irrationality, to imagine anger as productive and a site of resistance thus notices it as a revolutionary force that can sweep away the intentional erasure of racism and envision a different type of fandom.

It is important to recognize, however, the ways in which the emotional burden for doing resistance work is put on the backs of fans of colour, primarily women of colour. Biyuti, a *Teen Wolf* fan that I have previously quoted, states in a Tumblr post entitled, "Teen Wolf: A Fandom So Relentlessly Racist":

> … that white people establish themselves and centre themselves on the back of
> PoC. That in order to become agents and heros [sic] they must necessarily work
> to tear everyone else down.
> And it has just worn me down.

It is weird that i [sic] prefer just outright erasure (even as this tends to grate in my

atypical OTP, Kurt/Blaine).[42] Ultimately, it was the misogyny and vague stench

of the mra that drove me out of the buffy fandom.[43] Likely the the [sic] joyous

combination of racism and ableism is probably what will drive me out of the teen

wolf fandom (biyuti, 2013, para. 12).

While the "outsider within" perspective allows fans of colour to recognize and name

racism in fandom and express anger that can pave the way for change, the emotional

burden of doing this type of resistance work makes it easy for fans of colour to become so

exhausted and disillusioned with fandom that they leave (or are "driven out"). White

allies, myself included, have privilege to choose whether or not to engage with issues of

racism and white supremacy in fandom and thus do not face the same constant emotional

toll as fans of colour. Fan Deepa D illustrates this in her recollection of fans of colour

involved in Racefail '09:

They haven't filed a grant, they haven't go support to do activism; they're just

people who want to be fans and who've laid the groundwork by fighting again

and again in spaces where they shouldn't have had to fight in the first place.

They've made it safer for us to speak up and find each other. In the fandom

versus professional SFF discussion, we can feel pride in the way fandom in

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[42] Characters from the television show *Glee* (2009-2015), an American musical comedy-drama that explores issues of sexuality, relationships and bullying in an American high school context.
[43] MRA is an acronym for Men's Rights Activists.

general has policed itself. But that was at the cost of fans of color, who were burned out, hurt, not paid, and not rewarded. They paid the price having to retreat from something they love (TWC Editor, 2009, para. 6.17).

It is thus important to temper any discussion of the resistant power of moments like RaceFail and communities like *Fandoms Hate PoC* with a recognition that the vast majority of the work being done and the emotional burden that comes with it is placed on fans (mostly women) of colour. Anger can be transformative, it can be visionary and the work done by fans of colour should be celebrated, but all too often white fans sit back and allow this work to be done without acknowledging their complicity in placing the responsibility for resistance on the shoulders of people of colour. With this in mind, I turn my attention to another form of resistance that the creative heart of fandom and fan work makes possible.

Creative Resistance

> Fanworks can be an amazing space within which to negotiate … boundaries because the limits become permeable. Gender-bending, race-bending, age-bending, alternate universes – all of these provide the opportunity to engage with, challenge, reposition, or remove these ideologies as depicted in the original media
>
> - Rukmini Pande and Samira Nadkarni, 2013, p. 350

Academic work on fandom and fanfiction has long noted the potential for resistance to mass media that emerges in fan creative works. As the above quotation

references, fans regularly produce work that challenges dominant ideologies in popular culture, particularly those of gender and sexuality (Hodges, 2011; Reid, 2009). What has yet to be thoroughly explored, however, is fanwork produced specifically to resist hegemonic ideas *within* fandom, especially in terms of race and racism. It is this aspect of creative resistance that is the focus of this section.

Fanworks, and specifically fanfiction, as a means to subvert the meaning of texts and resist hegemonic ideas of gender and sexuality has been explored in much academic work. Henry Jenkins (1992), in *Textual Poachers,* introduced the idea of fanfiction as "poaching," building on the work of Michel de Certeau (1984) and Stuart Hall (1980). De Certeau theorizes audiences not as passive consumers but active interpreters of culture, following Stuart Hall's model of encoding/decoding, which posits that each individual creates different meaning from the same text, depending on their specific experience and background. Jenkins applies these theories to fanfiction, explaining that fan authors "poach" from their favourite texts to create new stories. Some of these interpret the text through the dominant cultural reading, but others interpret it through an oppositional reading, thus allowing for resistance to prevailing cultural narratives. Taking this further, Abigail Derecho (2006), imagines fanfiction as a type of archontic literature and as literature that is used by subordinate groups to talk back to power and express social and political critique. Derecho argues that instead of defining fanfiction as "derivative" or "appropriative" literature, it is useful to look at it as archontic literature, or as part of an archive that is never closed and that is specifically used by women and other minority groups as a way of making pointed social or cultural criticism.

While positing fanfiction as the act poaching canon texts, or as archontic

literature, is useful, how we read and conceptualize these texts must be read alongside the

understanding that while this work does, in fact, speak back in many ways to pop culture,

it also reproduces dominant cultural ideologies, including those that are sexist, racist and

homophobic. Nevertheless, a significant amount of fanfiction does work to speak back to

many hegemonic narratives of race, gender and sexuality, and there exists a subset of

fanfiction that can be seen as archontic literature of fandom (rather than simply archontic

of canon texts), in that it is written by minority fan groups to speak back to dominant

ones. On the Archive of Our Own there are a number of collections that specifically

archive fanfiction about female characters and underrepresented queer characters,

including Focus on Female Characters (Ao3, 2014a), Femslash February (Ao3, 2014b),

Bisexual Visibility (Ao3, 2014c), and Asexual Awareness Week (Ao3, 2014d).[44]

Most pertinent to this chapter are the communities and challenges that celebrate

and focus on characters of colour. In the wake of RaceFail '09, the community *Dark

Agenda – The Racebending Revenge Ficathon* was created on Livejournal (Pande and

Nadkarni, 2013, p. 351).[45] *Dark Agenda* was created as "a community promoting

chromatic sources, characters and people in fandom" (*Dark Agenda*, 2014, About

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[44] Collections are public archives that house stories with a specific theme, written for a
common challenge, about a specific pairing, or that have some other common
characteristic. While white gay men tend to predominate in slash fanfiction,
representations of other queer identities are lacking. One response to this is the Femslash
February collection which developed from a panfandom yearly event that encourages
fans to celebrate and create fanwork that focuses on slash fanfiction involving women
and non-binary characters. Activities take place mostly under the Tumblr tag
#femslashfebruary and this community was created to archive fanfiction written for the
event.
[45] *Dark Agenda* now also has a presence on Dreamwidth, a Livejournal-like, open-source
platform, and Tumblr.

section) and ran Kaleidoscope in the years 2011 and 2012. Kaleidoscope was a fanfiction writing challenge created specifically to foreground characters of colour, particularly in fandoms where they were often ignored. *Dark Agenda* is one of many online initiatives that specifically focuses on and celebrates characters of colour. A more recent example is *Represent!: Celebrating Diversity in the Media* (2014), a Tumblr community that describes itself as:

> A panfandom festival celebrating characters of color in our favorite media. Whatever role your favorites play in their canon, take the month of May to give them the focus and attention they deserve (para. 1)!

The celebration of characters of color in *Represent!* took the form of pictures, gifs, fanfiction, fanfiction recommendations (fic recs) and fan videos and involved a wide variety of fandoms, including *Teen Wolf*.

Dina Georgis suggests that "art and narrative are resources for political imagination and for political recovery: they link us to unthought spaces, to spaces that thought refuses" (2006, p. 166). In an analysis of the novel *The Life of Pi,* Georgis explains that even "left-leaning" people often tend to overlook the voices of alterity—a process similar to how many white fans, despite their politics, often ignore and actively erase the voices of fans of colour. Communities in fandom like *Dark Agenda* and *Represent!,* consequently, work as narratives of political imagination. By explicitly and actively seeking to represent characters marginalized not only by mainstream media, but also by fandom itself, these communities feature character voices that are ignored, erased

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or belittled elsewhere in fandom and hence act a creative resistance to white hegemony in

fan communities. If, as Georgis argues, "surviving difficulty and trauma is a creative

act," these communities can be read as a means of "seek[ing] 'the better story,' so that we

may live more ethically with others" (Georgis, 2006, p.169). As I established in the

previous chapter, the white supremacist and racist ideology that permeates fandom spaces

is an oppressive and traumatic experience for many fans of colour; those who feel that

fandom can be a joyful celebration and a place to explore queer identity also find fandom

a space where non-white identities are elided and erased. By creating communities where

characters of colour are moved to the forefront, "the better story," or a story that does not

reproduce white supremacy, can be told. This does not mean that racism or white

supremacy is absent from these stories, as these are often an important aspect of

fanfiction or meta written about characters of colour. Rather, these communities allow

for stories to be told that more accurately represent and include the fans of colour that are

so often sidelined in fandom. The following quotation from Tumblr blogger

amazonpoodle (2013c) illustrates the creative, resistant nature inherent in focusing on

characters of colour:

> if you love a character of color just because they are of color: GOOD. if you loved
>
> them immediately, without even finding out if they were likeable, just because
>
> they are of color: GOOD … if seeing their face on the screen or their name on the
>
> page lights you up inside because they are of color and you are of color, GOOD.
>
> if their stories are the only stories you're interested in because they are of color,
>
> GOOD. if you want their storylines to address their race or ethnicity, even in just

a tiny way, GOOD. if you project your own experiences with enduring racism and feeling othered onto them because they are of color, GOOD.

… love them as hard as you can. characters of color deserved to be loved, whether or not it's "just because" they're of color, and you deserve to have characters of color to love especially when you are of color, and anyone who tries to tell you that you are "reducing" them to "nothing but their color" has no idea what they are talking about. no fucking clue (para. 1).

It is the conscious, active choice to love characters of colour and create transformative works specifically about characters of colour that constitutes creative resistance in the telling of "a better story" that provides resources for hearing "the expelled voices of women, queers, transsexuals, raced subjects and the subaltern" (Georgis, 2006, p. 170) in a manner that stands opposed to dominant narratives in fandom. As amazonpoodle articulates, transformative works created about characters of colour can be a way for fans to project experiences of "enduring racism and feeling othered" and a way of experiencing and surviving trauma through narrative and creative acts. For the reader, this potentially allows for an opportunity to work through loss and pain by opening up a space to experience such emotions through creative works – an experience that allows the emotions to possibly be less visceral and immediate, but still deeply felt. Fanfiction written by and for fans of colour and about characters of colour is thus creative resistance that destabilizes white hegemonic ideologies present in fandom.

Another facet of creative resistance in fandom involves creatively reinterpreting or reimagining white narratives to consciously center people of colour. Tumblr, with its

more visual orientation than previous fandom platforms has fostered the spread of picture

sets (or picsets) of "racebent" casting. Racebending, according to Racebending.com

(2014), usually implies the whitewashing of a character of colour in mass media or the

casting of a white actor to play a person of colour. Examples of both practices abound in

mainstream media and include instances such as the casting of Johnny Depp in *The Lone*

Ranger, Mickey Rooney in *Breakfast at Tiffany's,* nearly the entire cast of the film

version of *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, and recently much of the cast of *Exodus: Gods*

and Kings, a retelling of the story of Moses wherein nearly all the cast, save the servants

and villains, are white actors.[46] However, the term racebending can also refer to the

casting of a person of colour in a role previously assumed to be white, as with Idris Elba

in *Thor,* Lucy Liu in *Elementary* or Samuel L. Jackson in *The Avengers*. In fandom

terms, racebending follows the latter practice and involves fans creating fantasy, racebent

casts for already-existing source material. For example Tumblr blogger feministfangirl

(2013) created a picset of a racebent *Avengers* cast that includes Michael Ealy as Captain

America, John Cho as Iron Man and Lucy Liu as Pepper Potts.

Fandom racebending practices also led to the creation of the Tumblr *221B Baker*

Towers (2014), an archive of fan creative work centered on a racebent Sherlock Holmes.

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[46] It was this instance of whitewashed casting that prompted the creation of
Racebending.com and widespread protests including online petitions, letters of protest
and demonstrations in front of theatres (Pande and Nadkarni, 2013, p. 351). It is also
worth noting that the whitewashing of Tonto in Johnny Depp's casting is complicated by
his vague claims to indigenous ancestry – what he characterizes as having "some Native
American (in me) somewhere down the line" (Depp quoted in ACESHOWBIZ, 2011,
para. 3). This does not negate his experiences of white privilege but is notable in the
questions it raises about the demands put on passing bodies to verify ancestry through
colonial measurements like the blood quantum test.

As sophistory, the creator, explains, *221B Baker Towers* was formed as a response to the white lens through which fandom views characters:

> So that whole 'The Indian Sherlock' thing got me brooding over the shitfit some parts of fandom tend throw at the prospect of a Holmes and/or Watson that aren't British – and how by 'British', they in fact mean 'a very narrow idea of ~Britishness~ that includes the following attributes: white, English, and coded as upper to upper-middle class.'
>
> And how, if you don't think that's true, you should try to imagine fandom's reaction if the next big Holmes adaptation to come along had Holmes and Watson as British, yeah – young black British men, living case to case on a council estate in a dodgy area of London. How fandom would react if Sherlock Holmes didn't employ street kids and homeless people like trained animals to do his bidding, but instead *was* part of that invisible underclass; if instead of having his eccentricities tolerated~ by Scotland Yard on account of being the Great White Genius, Sherlock Holmes, BME, school dropout, and sometime addict, was regarded by the police as practically a criminal already, one more thug, one more junkie, one more dealer in the making. If he had to choose between buying the week's groceries or palming a twenty to a bored constable for the chance to spend five minutes on a crime scene, in the hope that whoever's under enough pressure to deal with crime rates in the neighbourhood will pay him enough for a perp to feed himself and Watson for a month or two. If the greatest threat to his safety were police brutality, or the prospect of being done for a snitch; if his arch enemy

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weren't Moriarty, but the systemic poverty and inequality that has him helping out

his oppressors just to get by, and that makes the other side of the law look more

tempting to someone with his skills every day.

And then I realised that I want this adaptation LIKE BURNING, that I have

already headcast Holmes and Watson as John Boyega and Leeon Jones, and that

from now on whenever I watch *Sherlock* I will be imagining this instead and

crying softly deep within my soul (*221B Baker Towers*, 2014, para. 2-4).

221B Baker Towers, a Tumblr that now contains fanfiction, fan videos, fan art, music

playlists, fan created graphics, and other creative fan work, was formed out of an intense

dissatisfaction with the white hegemonic representation of Holmes and Watson in both

mainstream media and in fandom and serves as a fandom example of what José Muñoz

calls "disidentification" (Muñoz, 1999). Disidentifications, as Muñoz explains, develop

from "a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the

dominant culture" (1999, p. 31). This "unthinkability" was an essential element to the

development of *221B Baker Towers* as it was, in part, a response to the backlash from

white fans at the mere suggestion of Holmes and Watson being anything but white,

middle-to-upper class men. Disidentification is a strategy that involves neither aligning

oneself with dominant, mainstream culture or wholly opposing it, but rather working to

transform exclusionary cultural works for the purposes of those outside the racial and

sexual mainstream (Muñoz, 1999). It is a strategy that involves "working on and against"

(Muñoz, 1999, p.11-12) dominant culture by transforming it from within in a manner that

allows for the formation of community and the creation of shared resistant meaning.

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221B Baker Towers is a form of disidentification that works from within fandom and using the creative tools of fandom (fanfiction, fan videos, fan art, etc.), but actively seeks to creatively resist and identify against dominant fandom ideology.

In the above quotation, sophistory, the creator of *221B Baker Towers*, articulates the complex nature of disidentification. There is an expectation that a young black Sherlock Holmes, from a "dodgy area of London," will receive negative reactions by the wider fandom. By explicitly framing *221B Baker Towers* outside of wider fandom expectations and desires, sophistory and the community "disidentify" with wider fandom in order to expose racist and classist assumptions that underlie much of Sherlock Holmes' stories in the canon and in fanwork. As sophistory articulates, Holmes' relationship to the police in canon is an important aspect of his ability to work. As changing Holmes' racial and class identification necessarily transforms his relationship with the police, fanwork written for *221B Baker Towers* can expose both the structural inequalities that govern the relationship between the police and the "invisible underclass," as well as the white hegemonic thinking that obscures these inequalities in other fanwork about Sherlock Holmes. Fan acceptance of Holmes' use of the "invisible underclass" to aid him in solving crime in canon, while paying little to no attention to their narratives gets turned on its head in *221B Baker Towers*. Narratives about people of colour are foregrounded in a way that does not happen in wider Sherlock Holmes fandom. The strategy of disidentification therefore allows fans to use the creative tools of fandom to expose the racist and classist assumptions that underpin much creative fanwork. The creative tools of fandom are in many ways ideal for strategies of resistance, and projects like *Dark Agenda*, *Represent!,* and *221B Baker Towers,* use these tools to great effect to

make the type of pointed social and political critique that is essential to archontic

literature. It is therefore through this type of creative fan work that we can truly see the

potential for fandom and fanfiction to become a voice that talks back to power (Derecho,

2006).

Conclusion

> "…fandom can contribute significantly to exposing racially flawed texts and
>
> building a resistance to them; there just needs to be a continual will to make that a
>
> priority."

> - Rukmini Pande and Samira Nadkarni, 2013, p. 351

In one of the quotations that opens this chapter, Samira Nadkarni describes fans as

being in a "particularly enviable position" to engage with issues of race, gender and

sexuality and resist dominant oppressive ideologies. Fandom has a long history as a

community built from the bottom-up and based on a passion for stories and characters.

Creative reinterpretation is the basis for fanwork and it is in this spirit that the resistant

potential of fandom lies. Fandom, in its very nature, is a talking back to mass media that

is not governed by corporate interests, but the communal, reciprocal passion of fans.[47]

This passion does not always, or even usually, result in an active challenge to white

supremacy, but the potential is there and sometimes springs to the fore, as was the case

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[47] In recent years, producers and executives have begun to see the potential of fandom as
a marketing tool and have started to actively court fandom online. Many TV shows and
movies have social media accounts on Tumblr, Twitter and Facebook and *Teen Wolf* has
recently created a website to house creative fan work.

with RaceFail '09. RaceFail changed the way many fans engaged with issues of race and helped cement concepts such as white privilege, cultural appropriation and whitewashing into the language of fandom. Projects that propagated from RaceFail, and those that have been created since, emotionally and creatively engage with race and refuse to let characters of colour be ignored or erased. As Rukmini Pande (2013) reminds us, there needs to be a continual will in fandom to resist dominant cultural ideologies so that it may become the queer, emancipatory space that many fans imagine it to be.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

So how can we stop feeling powerless? What can we actually do?

Honestly, there are people much smarter than me who can do a better job of answering that question.

But trying to answer that question for myself is a large part of why I do what I do for a living. Because representation matters. Because being in control of our own stories empowers us to show a wide range of depictions of blackness and "otherness" (shockingly, not only do we not all LOOK ALIKE but we also don't all THINK ALIKE) that are far more interesting than what we've been spoon fed in the past. I'm the first to admit that we've still got A LONG WAY TO GO and that's where you all come in.

Although my engagement in fandom is embraced by some and side-eyed by others, these spaces of interaction may in fact play one of the most significant roles in the future of media and representation as we know it. At the very least it will create a future generation of professional storytellers (and social justice advocates) who were raised in the trenches of Live Journal, Tumblr, ao3 and other platforms currently in use or yet to be created.

I know this is your turf and even though there are times some of you wish I'd go away I genuinely appreciate the opportunity to interact with you here.

Together, we can make a difference.

Trollando out.

<div align="right">- Orlando Jones, 2014, para. 10-16</div>

Orlando Jones, who currently plays Captain Frank Irving on the television show *Sleepy Hollow*, has a relationship with fandom that few, if any, professional actors have had before. He not only has ongoing direct, positive interactions with fans, but he actively and enthusiastically participates in fan activities. Affectionately dubbed "Trollando" by fans, Jones has a Twitter and a Tumblr on which he solicits and posts fanart, fanfiction and fanvids, as well as making his own – usually humorous graphics of

himself.[48] He describes himself as a multishipper and proudly reblogged a post calling

him the Captain of the Ichabbie ship.[49] Although he is not the first actor to be aware of

fanwork or even to share it on social media, Jones is different than most in the way he

seems to genuinely admire and enjoy fandom. Rather than approaching fanwork as a

potential marketing tool, or a way to make a profit, Jones has actively worked to educate

himself about fandom and, as is evident in the above quotation, he recognizes the

transformative potential of fan activity.

What Jones also makes clear in the blog post from which I excerpted the above

quotation is that the transformative *potential* of fandom is not enough. He compares the

media, and social media, attention given to the death of Robin Williams to the lack

thereof given to unarmed black men gunned down by police. Specifically discussing the

killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, Jones makes clear how the white power

structure was so quickly able to change the narrative from one about the murder of an

unarmed black teenager to one of dangerous "black violence" and argues for the power of

media representation in changing this. While hardly the only issue, showing a "wide

range of depictions of blackness and "otherness"" (Jones, 2014, para. 12) is one strategy

that weakens the stereotypes of violent black men that police and the media find so easy

to call on. Due to his close association with fans, Jones recognizes the power in fandom

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[48] While calling someone online a "troll" usually implies that they are engaging in
malicious behaviour with the intent to derail a discussion, the term can have a more
benign, and even positive, meaning. In the case of Orlando Jones, the moniker Trollando
(which he has enthusiastically taken up) is a nod to the way he seemingly relishes
exciting fandom with his participation.

[49] A multishipper is, as the term implies, someone who ships many different pairings.
Ichabbie is the portmanteau for Ichabod/Abbie, the two main characters on the
supernatural/police drama television show *Sleepy Hollow* (2013-present).

to do exactly that – to be a space of interaction and representation that transforms the dominant cultural narrative. It is that recognition, that hope, that fandom "may in fact play one of the most significant roles in the future of media and representation as we know it" (Jones, 2014, para. 13) that was my driving force in writing this thesis.

Fandom, unfortunately, is not there yet. As Ann Jamison (2013) explains, "fanfic hasn't done the kinds of deconstruction and reimagining of race and ethnicity that it's done for gender and sexuality" (p. 342). Slash fanfiction offers representations of queerness to an extent rarely seen anywhere else. The diversity of plots in slash fic, plots that have queer characters doing something else other than just being queer, stands in stark contrast with much of the canon texts upon which it is based. As a queer online space that foregrounds women's pleasure, slash fandom does radically deconstruct, transform and reimagine gender and sexuality. Unfortunately, and disappointingly, it remains a *white* space where *white* gender and sexuality are foregrounded. White supremacist ideology that keeps whiteness the invisible norm, and the privilege that allows white fans to ignore this, is the nasty undercurrent of slash fandom. Characters of colour continue to be ignored, erased, maligned and vilified so that slash fandom's obsession with white men can persist unrelentingly. Fans, usually women of colour, who point out the racism inherent in slash fandom, are themselves vilified, ignored and maligned in the service of white fans retaining the supposed moral authority that comes with being a slash fan. Criticisms of racism and white supremacy in fandom are shut down so quickly and vehemently by white fans invested in white supremacy that many fans of colour end up leaving fan spaces entirely (alphaunni, 2013). The result is that, while fans are more and more likely to discuss the racism, erasure, and whitewashing in

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the media they consume, the same forces in fandom itself remain comparatively invisible and unspoken. White fans refuse to see the racism and white supremacist thinking that they themselves perpetuate and in which they are complicit.

However, women of colour are doing radical and transformative work in fandom. Resistance to white hegemony exists in many forms, including actively, angrily shining a light on instances of racism, and producing creative fan work that reimagines source texts. It is this fan work that most closely resembles the conceptualization of fandom as a space of infinite possibility and answers Orlando Jones' call. It is not, however, enough for women of colour to be doing this work alone. As white fans, we so often point to a story that contains a character of colour in our fandom or identify one woman of colour about whom we read or write fanfiction and call it a day, patting ourselves on the backs for being good allies while leaving the hard work of confronting white supremacy to women of colour. I do not mean to imply that the presence of white people is important, or even necessary, to any resistance movement, but merely that the white fans who talk about fandom as a radical, transformative space must commit themselves to doing the work to make it so. Doing such works means moving beyond simply agreeing with people of colour by passively reblogging/retweeting/sharing their posts to actively identifying and critiquing structures of white supremacy in fandom (like practices of whitewashing or the Two White Guys trope) and taking the initiative to call out other white people on their racism rather than leaving that responsibility to people of colour. Furthermore, white fans must work to dismantle structures of white supremacy by seeking out and sharing fanworks that focus on characters of colour, specifically those written by women of colour. White fans must also attend to the creation of fanworks –

which necessitates a careful consideration of why we immediately gravitate towards white characters and pairings and how this is intimately tied with white supremacy, and further listening carefully to, and not dismissing, critiques about how characters of colour are represented in fanworks. To be radical work, however, this cannot stop at consideration, but must extend to a conscious choice to consume and create fanworks that do not replicate patterns of white supremacy. Moreover, with the improved accessibility to creators of media that social media allows, radical work also entails not letting racism in canon texts slide, but instead continually critiquing and calling out writers, directors, producers and actors for racist actions or representations. It is to this end that I write this thesis and it is my fervent hope that my work, in both academia and fandom, can contribute to that being done by fans of colour to more closely realize fandom's potential.

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