

**THE POWER ISSUE**

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her values from that of her pieces, the relationship between fans and authors becomes incontrovertible. Indeed, authors retain power over their words, but their acceptance or rejection remains at the mercy of fans. Hereon, one worrisome phenomenon popularized in the wake of the digital nativity is fans typifying trolls or cyberbullies. Naturally, such fan power foments negative experiences for authors in question and underrepresented or marginalized communities within the fandom.

Contrastingly adopting a more reader-based approach, one laments the prominence of power dynamics within fandom communities. While fandom communities have been part and parcel of fan culture, participatory levels have arguably risen with the onset of the Internet and social media. Complementing - or more so, shaming this trend, one contextualizes how fan culture, despite its supposed purpose of promoting minorities' opinions, delivers a paradox. It ends up exacerbating their experiences of prejudice, racism, copyright violations, misrepresentations of LGBTQ+, and misogyny - among others.

True to the aforesaid predicaments, this paper elucidates fan-to-author interactions while probing into the various power dynamics fandoms hold within their circles and over the author. It does so by borrowing from scholarly literary works like Henry Jenkins' article on *Transmedia Storytelling 101*, Poe Johnson's article on *Transformative Racism*, and Lindsay Ellis's take on Roland Barth's *Death of the Author*.

### **Text Poaching is a menace to authors: Stop stealing, start reading!**

The author-fan relationship has always been a topic of interest in literature and entertainment, but it has become more prominent with the rise of social media. Fannish feedback, reviews, or

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critique holds the power to contribute to or help shape authors' pieces. In the manifestation of so, fan literature and artworks surface.

Furthering the above, fans and authors exchange valuable intelligence about story worlds, blurring fans' understanding of "participating" and "poaching." Unfortunately, this legitimizes poaching: when someone takes someone else's ideas and claims them as their own - without crediting the creator. Attesting to this, media expert Henry Jenkins details how fans scavenge from popular media and conceal ideas from texts - violating copyright laws. The Internet arguably encourages this through websites like rogue archives, devoid of copyright protection, which allow fans to copy content without permission.

### **Empowering female fans' voices through the author: Tell me what you like, I'll tell you what she likes.**

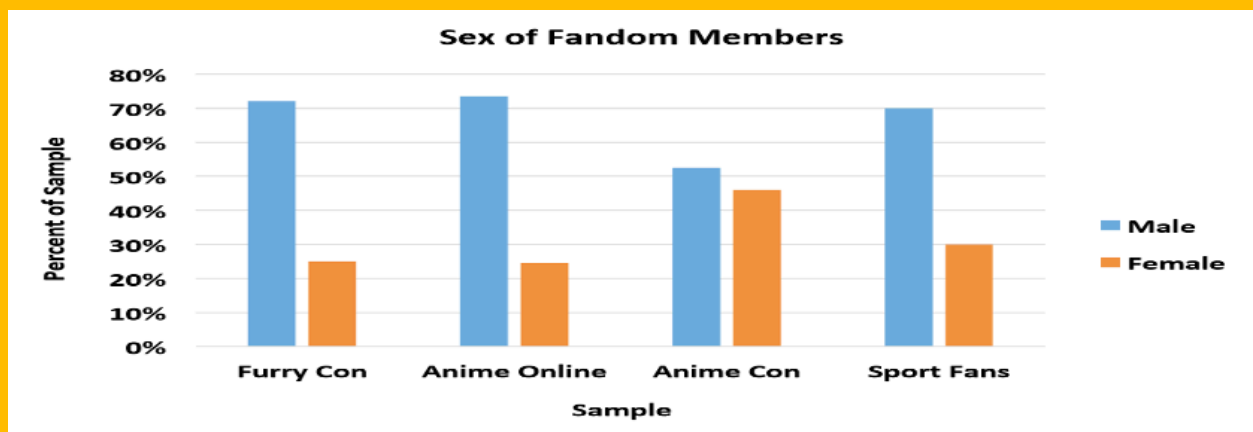
According to participatory culture, fans are seen as "manipulators of meaning" (Jenkins, 101) instead of passive media consumers. As active participants, fans create meaning from texts and media through participation. This occurs via online platforms wherein they can now openly raise questions about femininity, morality, and other issues in the media.

However, the onset of a new platform for participatory culture has become a gateway for feminist resistance. Where writing fanfiction has been a female-dominated field, it was not until recently that women assumed a more active role in conveying their grievances within fan circles. It is, therefore, no wonder that more women are participating in transformational works while addressing gender-selective predicaments like the male gaze and or mainstream-ness in original

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fictional works. Far from a causal correlation, this is corroborated by how women now constitute an overwhelming bulk of fanfiction authors (Johnson, 1.6).

While the aforesaid offers ground for optimism, women remain discriminated against in the gaming industry. This is evidenced in the documentary titled "*GTFO: Get The F&#% Out,*" which specifies how 90% of girls and 48% of women play video games - a huge strata that have been wholly neglected in its capacities as consumers. This culminates in a vicious cycle of misogyny - rampant from the creators of the games to the very game and the male audience they are aimed at. So naturally, there is a scarcity of female characters in corporate positions. Below is an infographic that shows the distribution of female fans across various fandoms. It is imminent that this gap will only close further, with more females in fandom now than ever before.



*Credits: <https://furscience.com/research-findings/demographics/1-3-sex-and-gender/>*

Reverting to the representation of women within fandom, there appear to be challenges on both fronts: for both the women and fan culture at large. Even though women have fought for their rightful place in the fandom world for decades, the trolls remain in power. Jenkins, therefore, refers to fandom as a "space within which fans may articulate their specific concerns about sexuality, gender, racism, colonialism, militarism, and forced conformity" (Jenkins, 101).

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Additionally, women's safety remains an issue on these platforms, for they fall prey to stalking, harassment, and violence.

Nonetheless, what remains praiseworthy is how women have inadvertently become more vocal about what they desire in authorial works. As a result, they can influence authors to metamorphose authorial content - a phenomenon that the co-existent connection between fans and authors makes inevitable.

### **Fanatics or Enthusiasts - Who Wields Fandom's True power?**

While the terms "fanatics" and "enthusiasts" appear interchangeable or synonymous, there is an "us versus them" distinction. Where fanatics are overly enthusiastic about something and cross any boundary to defend their beliefs, enthusiasts are passionate and do not enter extremes.

However, by obsessing over fictional works, fanatics intentionally - or unintentionally - create power imbalances in native fan circles that legitimizes trolls, cyberbullies, etc. A prime example of this includes hate speech targeting Kellie Marrie Tran, the actress who played Rose Tico in Star Wars: The Last Jedi. She had been the subject of online harassment by a small group of Star Wars fanatics who spammed her with racist and sexist messages.

What is yet to be determined is how one might tackle this online garbage. While rational fans are pragmatic enough to distinguish between fanaticism and enthusiasm, they can identify the fine line between affection and obsession. Therefore, enthusiasts should engage rather than observe these fan circles to weaken fanatics.

### **Absolute Power - In The Hands Of The Author?**

Blatantly refuting the aforesaid, Roland Barthes dismisses the author as a bearer of knowledge and upholds the reader instead. This concept surfaced during the 1970s because people - owing to the absence of the Internet- lacked both connection and symmetric information like the author.

This theory, however, is chronologically redundant in today's tech-dependent age. Authors now have some power and can control how their work is interpreted. A good example is JK Rowling's casual announcement of Dumbledore as gay - even though her books did not account for this. So, one is tempted to side with Ellis's take on Death of the Author instead. She emphasizes that ". the author still reigns..." and "culture is tyrannically centered on the author..." (Ellis, 12:00) and implies that the traditional interpretation method limits interpretations to the power of a single perspective: the creators, which is, in fact, accurate to an extent.

Thereon, we see that authors are not dead (figuratively speaking). They are, in fact, timeless - in their impact. Authors have considerable control over new ways of reaching out to their audience. Fans will often tweet them for answers, and they will engage with fandom to give further information about their fictional work.

Despite their everlasting impact, it ought to be known that the impact itself features little to limited control or influence of the authors. This is particularly native to the rise of rogue archives where fans can create their own interpretive fanworks based on the author's story world. As such, even though the term DOTA is not as relevant as it was in the past, authors are still cautious with what they say to the community with social media and all its outlets. Many authors don't even dare to exercise their interpretive power; they're afraid of publicly voicing their opinions on

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sensitive issues and even refraining from writing about them; otherwise, they would be subject to retaliation.

Adding to the aforesaid, authors and creators are often even deprived of ownership of their work. The producers and publishers are the ones who have complete control. This means that if something does not go well with fan ratings, there is no point in continuing it because they won't make money from it. Comparatively, authors' ownership, control, and rights over their content are often overlooked, left in the dark, and abused.

### **Redistributing Power: From The “Default Fanboys” To The Community:**

The "default fanboy has a presumed race, class, and sexuality: white, middle-class, male, heterosexual" (Johnson, 1.4). Many fall into the underrepresented categories, as emphasized in the “Empowering female voice” section, a problematic representation of the American population because it does not represent it.

Nonetheless, the American mass media’s mournful depiction of black bodies in fan works appears condemnable. Often succumbing to portrayals of criminals, an article I read at length confirms the American media's explicit racism and black minstrelsy. "They may not have names, as opposed to their white counterparts; they may lack visible family lives; and so forth. In the world, as portrayed by the media, life is lived primarily by white (or other non-black) people, with black males, more or less sympathetic, in the background."

Another superficial form of prejudice is Blackface. It was formerly popular entertainment for white folks, and the practice has been discontinued in recent times. Still, many assumptions made in fanworks about black characters are inherently harmful because they perpetuate racist



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stereotypes. For example, black women are often depicted as big-mouthed, while black men are frequently shown as hostile.

Recent discourse on fandom also revolves around queer people who have experienced relentless hate in the past few years. As a result, many have left fandom and stopped writing altogether.

The American population is becoming more diverse with each passing day, so a more diverse representation in the media is needed. It's time to rethink what it means to be a fan and how we can change this flawed representation to something more inclusive because no one should feel questioned because of their identity.



*Credits: <https://www.excal.on.ca/uncategorized/2013/11/11/fandom/>*

There is still a base for queer-identifying individuals to be optimistic. Hereon, Fanzines like POOR LASS ZINE & FEAR BROWN QUEERS have fearlessly been fracturing stereotypes, and fan art exhibitions like the New York ComicCon provide an outlet for all fan groups to express their love for a show or a character. Queer fandom is becoming so powerful that it has enormously impacted how TV shows are created. Shows like The 100, Supergirl, and

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Shadowhunters have all been influenced by queer fandom in some way or another. In addition, platforms like A03 are a place for marginalized voices to find their voice in a fandom world often dominated by white, heteronormative culture. Through this platform, A03 has encouraged non-mainstream expressions of cultural identity.

### **It's Dangerous to Give Too Much Power to Fans!**

Citing the aforesaid relationship between fans and the author, we deduce the enticement and exasperation tied to it. Fans are enticed by the authors and want to know everything about their work, while the authors are irritated by the constant attention. In the age of social media, authors are forced to strike an uneasy compromise between their public and private life. Authors nowadays use platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to interact with their fan following to get valuable feedback and hold Q&A sessions, live chats, or even video interviews.

Authors, however, also face obstacles - online. One of the most common problems is the breach of their privacy, which can happen through hacking and cyberbullying. Another problem that authors may face is offensive material posted about them on social media or other websites. This could be because the author has produced a controversial piece, or someone has a vendetta against the author. For instance, Chelsea Cain, an author of the Mockingbird series, recently quit Twitter after being harassed by trolls. Unfortunately, the Internet has become a place where anyone can say anything and be anonymous, meaning that there is no accountability, and trolls can say nasty things without consequence.

Another dilemma authors face copyright infringement from rogue archives since the author has little control over the Archive's content and posts. The ostensible direct line and copyright laws

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to scriptwriters give the creators some control over the fan work, and the industry's structure makes fans seem obliged to share their thoughts (Ellis, 04:00). Alongside the emergence of digitally networked content, many self-proclaimed archivists and fans have turned to the Web to practice artistic protection. These amateur archivists ought to use original works to produce offensive content that doesn't represent the original author's views. They create publicly available internet archives of whichever content they deem worthy of technological conservation. The symbols of AO3 are combined with arms extended in jubilation, indicating their necessary and desired objective to embody the pleasure of fannish creativity in the Archive. Thus, websites like these foster overly enthusiastic fanatics willing to do anything to get what they want, including paying for it or even stealing it.

### **Summing it all up!**

Fandoms indubitably wield more power than ever before, sufficient to pressurize authors. Indeed, authors do not always comply with their fans, but they succumb when it is a majority petitioning. Meanwhile, fans ought to ensure they do not take authors' rights for granted. Instead, a sustainable power dynamic established through online safety algorithms and minority and femme representation may be most conducive to today's internet-savvy world of fandom.

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