Queer Fan Practices Online:
Digital Fan Production as a Negotiation of
LGBT Representation in *Pretty Little Liars*

William Patrick Bingham

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
University of East Anglia
School of Art, Media and American Studies

September 2016

ABSTRACT:

Fan Studies aims to de-pathologise fans, their communities and their fannish practices (Jenkins 1992). In doing so, Fan Studies privileges fan voices by interrogating their quotidian on- and offline fan practices (Brooker 2002; Hills 2002), demonstrating the emotional connection these fans have to texts. Much of this fannish engagement revolves around the creation and consumption of slash fiction (Bacon-Smith 1992; Hellekson & Busse 2006), a fan practice occurring in fan fiction communities that has been identified as a 'queer female space' (Lothian et al 2007, 103). This work predominantly explores *why* women create these fan texts with little consideration given to the fan's source text. In spite of this, little attention has been given to LGBT+ fandom and how self-identifying LGBT+ fans negotiate mediated representations of LGBT+ identity, especially when considering the increasing level of LGBT+ media representations on television and particularly on Teen TV programmes.

Therefore, this thesis addresses the ways in which fans negotiate non-normative identities represented in the teen mystery TV series *Pretty Little Liars* (2010-) by investigating 'queer' modes of fan production, namely 'fan talk', (fem)slash fiction, digital (fem)slash and fan theory-making created by *PLL* fans. *PLL* hosts a range of diverse LGBT+ representations and includes a large number of LGB producers and creative talent. This investigation occurs by employing a reader-guided textual analysis (Ytre-Arne 2011), a method that centralises fan meaning-making by analysing the fan's source text through these fan interpretations. I argue that reader-guided textual analysis (Ytre-Arne 2011) allows us to better understand how fans negotiate LGBT+ representation, how fans accept or reject these LGBT+ representations and the characters' relationships. The implications lie not just in Fan Studies methodologies and fan production, but also for Queer Theory's 'evaluative paradigm' (Davis and Needham 2009) or how Queer Theorist assess representations as either positive or negative.

Table of Contents

List of Illustrations

Acknowledgements

miles away from me during this process, you were (mostly) there for a call, a FaceTime or a visit just when I needed it. Thanks for being there with me throughout my entire journey from High School to now.

My family have been an unending supply of support my entire life. The Bingham clan is huge, loud and rambunctious but loyal to the end; the Cumby side is small, fractious and vehement, but imbued with passion. The combination of these two vastly different support networks have instilled a critical eye in me, but have also helped me manage myself during this academic pursuit. To my new family The Scales: Thank you for everything you have done for me. Chris, Maureen and Ryan, you have welcomed me with open arms and made a home for me in a country that is not my own. I am so pleased that you are now my family. But above all else, I'd like to say an especially gracious thank you to my mother Pattie Bingham and my father Billy Bingham. You have always been there for me, no matter what, have supported me through my varying fan obsessions (Britney Spears, Beanie Babies, Tamagotchis, Ben Folds), but I owe a lot of this devotion to both of you who taught me early to appreciate what I love. Thank you for your constant love and support.

To my dear partner Dr Adam Bingham-Scales. This has been an incredible journey. We formed our relationship through our mutual adoration for horror and education. If it were not for you, I simply would not be the person I am today. You challenge me every day, whether I like it or not, and humour me when it drives you mental; but you have always supplied me with unwavering support, love and academic criticism. I love you and am so happy to have shared our academic journeys together.

Lastly, I write these acknowledgements mere days before *Pretty Little Liars* airs its final ever episode. I came to this programme as a recommendation from Dr Dare-Edwards in 2012 and have loved every moment of this wonderful journey. A tremendous debt of gratitude goes out to the PLLArmy. We are vast, we are different, but our loyalty is true. Thank you for the late nights, the awesome theories and the love.

Patrick – June 2017

Got a secret.
Can you keep it?
Swear this one you'll save.
Better lock it in your pocket,
Taking this one to the grave.
If I show you,
Then I know you won't tell what I said.
'Cause two can keep a secret if one of them is dead.

The Pierces – *Secret* **(2007)**

Chapter 1: Introduction

Everything we see is just perspective, not the truth.
(I. Marlene King. *Twitter*. 2 October 2012, 2:24pm.)

11 August 2015 ruptured my views of my unwavering support to and membership in the *PLL* army. The *PLL* army is a faction of viewers devoted to the television programme *Pretty Little Liars* (2010-); in other words, *PLL* army is the moniker adopted by diehard *PLL* fans. We as a fan collective spent countless days deliberating on the hard and soft textual evidence to determine 'A's' identity in the years, months, weeks, days and hours leading up to the 'Big A' reveal; 'A' is the unidentified stalker/antagonist in the series *Pretty Little Liars*. Much of this activity occurred online, although I also had a small contingent of friends that I could discuss the happenings occurring onscreen IRL ('in real life').[1] My devotion wavered not because I was dissatisfied with the reveal, but rather because I was disheartened with the way certain factions of the *PLL* army responded to 'A' being a transgender character.[2] Further to this point, I was wary about the potential impacts this reveal could have on the transgender community. Although executive producer I Marlene King claims in the above quote that the events we are seeing as they unfold on screen are just mediated perspectives, representing non-normative sexual orientations and non-binary gender identities in *Pretty Little Liars* has the potential to have real world consequences. This speaks specifically to the reception of those representations, regardless of whether those consequences be positive or negative. These positive or negative consequences in regards to LGBT+ representation are one of the central concerns of this thesis. On the one hand, personal factors influenced my desire to consume media that overtly represented LGBT+ identity, knowing that had I grown up in the 1990s and early 2000s with significantly more positive LGBT+ representations, I may have come out to myself and others sooner. These personal motivations influenced and continue to shape my own academic research interests, noting how important these representations were, not just for me, but for the world. Moreover, I recognised that I was becoming a fan of popular culture texts that

---

[1] See 'In Conversation with Two *Pretty Little Liars* Scholars/Fans' (*CSTonline.tv* 19 July 2013) authored by Helena Louise Dare-Edwards and myself.
[2] See 'Unveiling 'A': Critical Fan Responses to a Transgender Villainess' (*CSTonline.tv* 19 November 2015).

depicted LGBT+ identity, with little regard to the 'quality' of the texts themselves. Instead, I was becoming a fan of LGBT+ media and media that represented LGBT+ identity.

With this in mind, this introduction outlines the key components of the thesis. The first section highlights the context out of which the thesis was constructed, pointing to the heightened presence of LGBT+ representations in Teen TV texts, particularly as these representations play an integral role in *Pretty Little Liars*. Furthermore, the ways in which queer theory has yet to address fully audience perceptions of these representations and how fan studies has moved its focus off of fan source texts and primarily onto the fans themselves are laid out. Here, I marry the two disciplines through what Brita Ytre-Arne (2011) termed a reader-guided textual analysis. Once the context has been established, I present the central argument for the thesis in the second section, namely that such a methodology as reader-guided is an optimal tool to address the ways in which fans negotiate LGBT+ representations and the relationships constructed for them. Because this argument developed out of the findings, the central research questions guiding this thesis that led to these conclusions are presented here as well. In the third section, I address the relevant terms employed throughout this thesis, demonstrating their significance to the framing of this research project. Finally, in the fourth section I provide a detailed chapter breakdown that summarises each of the chapters, but it also presents their central arguments as a way to highlight how they collectively build the thesis' primary argument stated above.

Background

Queer Theory aims to destabilise power systems that are structured against non-normative identities (Sedgwick 1990; Sullivan 2003). At the same time, Queer Theory functions as a mode of investigation into texts either to unearth queer subtexts (Benshoff 1997; Doty 2000), or to critique LGBT+ representations in a text (Davis 2004; Davis & Needham 2009; Demory & Pullen 2013; Elliott-Smith 2014). Yet, much of this "critiquing" privileges an academic assessment of positive or negative portrayals (Elliott-Smith 2012) and oftentimes yields no consideration for audience perceptions of these representations (Dhaenens et al

2008). On the other end of the spectrum, fan studies, and especially fan fiction studies,[3] privileges these audience voices at the expense of the text itself. In this regard, fan studies has focused predominantly on the sociological impact of texts on a fan's everyday life, how they form communities around these texts and how they negotiate the texts (Jenkins 1992; Bacon-Smith 1992; Hills 2002, 2005a and 2005b; Brooker 2002; Stein 2005 and 2015; Hellekson & Busse 2006 and 2014), rather than a simultaneous interrogation of the text and its fan audience. Therefore, this thesis' primary concern pertains to fan negotiations of LGBT+ identity as represented in *Pretty Little Liars* and through their varying modes of fan production. It employs a reader-guided textual analysis (Ytre-Arne 2011) to address the tensions between the way scholarship has separated audience, fan identity, LGBT+ representations and the text (see Chapter 3) in order to arrive at better understandings of the reception of these LGBT+ representations. By investigating these representations through the ways fans negotiate them, the fan negotiations move the 'evaluative paradigm' (Davis and Needham 2009) towards a more comprehensive assessment model that can begin to adequately weigh these representations as being either positive or negative.

Presently, there is a heightened LGBT+ visibility being portrayed in popular film and television (Stein 2015), particularly in what Matt Hills (2004) labels 'mainstream cult' texts (55). Hills (2004 and 2005a) links the notion of 'cult' to fandom, arguing that if a televisual or filmic text has an active fanbase then it should be deemed a 'cult' text (2004, 63). While the notion of 'cult' is not explicitly considered in this thesis,[4] 'cult' as a category surfaces in fan studies research, particularly surrounding science fiction, horror and fantasy texts (Jones 2002; Hills 2002, 2004, 2005a and 2005b; Pearson and Messenger-Davies 2002, 2003; Pearson 2003; Jancovich et al 2003; Duffett 2013). In spite of the fact that an interrogation of 'cult' as a category is not made in this thesis, Jones (2002) notes that 'studies of television fan cultures have often proposed slash fiction as a radical instance of resistant reading, one that counters the marginalization of female characters in much early cult television' (80). Integral to this is the links between 'cult' and the renegotiation of sexuality as it occurs in slash fiction. Jones (2002) essentially binds slash with 'cult' as it historically arose out of these types of texts (Coppa 2006). Although historically this is true (see Coppa 2006), LGBT+

---

[3] Of particular consideration in fan fiction studies is slash fiction, a practice whereby the fan producer authors a narrative that positions two ostensibly heterosexual men in a homosexual, romantic and sexual relationship (Jones 2002; Salmon & Symons 2004; Lothian et al 2007).
[4] For an overview of 'cult', see Stacey Abbott's (2010) *The Cult TV Book*.

identities are portrayed across multiple televisual and filmic genres fans consume avidly and these identities are explicitly represented, not just located within the subtext, visible only through certain codes, symbols and signs (Doty 1993 and 2000). What is more, with the rise of these representations, fans no longer need to 'subvert' these texts (or read these queer elements as 'latent textual elements' [Jones 2002, 82]) as they have openly gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender characters to play with in their fan practices. In other words, fans can now experiment with same-sex desire and gender non-conformity through writing and reading fanfiction.

In consideration of the information presented above, one key text that has progressively broken down representational barriers and privileged representations beyond solely white, gay male identities is *Pretty Little Liars*.[5] *PLL* is a television series about the aftermath of Alison Dilaurentis' (Sasha Pieterse) mysterious disappearance. The show has four central protagonists: Spencer Hastings (Troian Bellisario), Emily Fields (Shay Mitchell), Aria Montgomery (Lucy Hale) and Hanna Marin (Ashley Benzo). These four girls become known as the Liars by both the fans and by the residents of their fictional Pennsylvannia town Rosewood. Throughout the six seasons thus far aired, the Liars are tormented by the now infamous 'A', an undisclosed character who stalks and cyberbullies the girls. 'A' knows all of their darkest secrets and uses the secrets to put the Liars in uncompromising situations. Emily's darkest secret is that she is a lesbian and has had romantic feelings for their queen bee Ali, which becomes a central plot device in season 1a, the first arc of a two part season. Using the knowledge against Emily, 'A' threatens to out her to her family, her friends and her ostensibly conservative, affluent community. Throughout the first two seasons, Emily comes to terms with her sexuality, comes out to her friends and family and begins a relationship with the African-American bisexual character Maya St. Germain (Bianca Lawson). Along the way, the girls discover (SPOILER) that Alison is not dead, that the original 'A' is Mona Vanderwaal (Janel Parrish) and that a new 'Big A' or simply 'A' has continued Mona's bullying tactics. Subsequently, the Liars, along with Mona, are kidnapped in the season 5b finale 'Welcome to the Dollhouse' and are forced to "play along" with 'A's' sick games.

---

[5] Although it is important to represent all LGBT identities, there is a considerable lack of available lesbian, bisexual and transgender representation in mainstream television, especially representations of LGBT+ people of colour ((Munoz 1999, 8-11).

Although the text primarily focuses on representations of lesbian identity, it is revealed in the Season 6a, mid-summer finale 'Game Over, Charles' that 'A' is a transgender character. This reveal considerably restructures the ways in which fans and LGBT+ viewers interpret the text (see Chapter 7 for more on the transphobic backlash that occurred after 'A' was revealed to be a male-to-female transgendered person). Furthermore, it is one of the first mainstream television series to represent a fictional transgender character; it is also one of the first programmes to represent such an identity to an intended 12-24 year old demographic (see Bingham 2014 for more on *PLL*'s marketing and the ABC Family network). Furthermore, *PLL*'s fanbase is seen to be one of the most social media active fandoms (Stein 2015; Dare-Edwards 2016). More importantly, however, a large segment of this social media active fandom is built around the female-female femslash ship Emison.[6] Emison is the portmanteau ship name for Emily Fields and Alison Dilaurentis.

Argument and Research Questions

This section of Chapter 1 outlines the thesis' interventions in the fields of fan studies and queer theory, its central argument and the research questions that shaped this project. While I have stated that the central concerns of this thesis regard LGBT+ representation and fan negotiations of those representations, in order to address this topic's concerns, I must also consider methodological issues arising specifically in fan studies.[7] As has been argued above, fan studies and audience studies more generally tend to ignore the text in favour of fan or audience responses to the text. The methodologies available to researchers, while useful, have tended to favour ethnographic modes of inquiry that explore a media community without exploring the text that unites them. Furthermore, Adrienne Evans and Mafalda Stasi (2013) echo similar reservations regarding the limited methodological approaches undertaken in the field of fan studies, particularly emphasising fan studies research conducted in online fan communities (see Chapter 3). Therefore, the thesis' main intervention lies in fan studies methodologies by proposing a new methodology for fan

---

[6] Ship is the diminutive form of relationship and is used heavily by most media fans. Ships are explored further in the Literature Review and Chapters 5 and 6.

[7] Because Queer Theorists in the field of media and literature generally privilege textual methods over audience focused ones, it is implied that these methods are being challenged through reader-guided textual analysis as well. What this means then is that, although there is a considerable focus on the methods and methodologies relevant to fan studies and fan fiction studies, reader-guided seeks to bridge these traditions to gain a better, more holistic understanding of the ways in which meaning making and reading strategies occur.

studies research that operates to bridge audience research and textual analysis (see Chapter 3), thereby privileging fan/viewer interpretations of a text over academic ones; this methodology is a reader-guided textual analysis (Ytre-Arne 2011). But it also intervenes in fan fiction studies, specifically how fanfiction has been defined (see Chapters 2 and 6), how that definition excludes new modes of fan fiction production (see Chapter 6) and the changing nature of (fem)slash fiction in that these types of narratives now incorporate LGBT+ represented characters (see Chapter 5). These interventions address a gap in fan (fiction) studies scholarship that privileges sociological interrogations over fans' meaning making strategies. Returning to the notion of LGBT+ representation and fan negotiations of those non-normative identities, the thesis also highlights the lack of scholarship surrounding (fem)slash that specifically engages with LGBT+ characters explicitly represented as such in the fan's source text. As aforementioned, (fem)slash 'queers' or transgresses heteronormative narratives by positioning two heterosexual male characters together as a homosexual couple. Although this continues, there is a rising trend occurring in fan production that not only privileges lesbian ships, but lesbian ships that revolve around lesbian relationships overtly represented in the fan's source text or lesbian relationships where at least one of the characters identifies as such and their relationship is not simply read as canon,[8] but is canon.[9]

Therefore, this thesis argues that employing a reader-guided textual analysis (Ytre-Arne 2011) allows us to better understand how fans negotiate LGBT+ representation, how fans accept or reject these LGBT+ representations and how fans make sense of these LGBT+ characters' relationships. Each element of the argument addresses issues around the 'evaluative paradigm' (Davis & Needham 2009) adopted by queer theorists, particularly as academic assessments are privileged over audience valuation. Further, each aspect of the argument addresses the methodological implications raised above as scholars have ignored

---

[8] Canon is what is true to the narrative world of the source text. This means that when a fan creates a fantext based on the source text, this fan can choose to rely on the events as they occur in the text or can alter those narrative events to fix canon or expand canon. While this does not radically change the programme itself, canon-alteration or canon-adherence can be positions one takes as a fan. For example, Paige and Emily form a romantic relationship, which is a narrative truth; Emily and Spencer have never been in a relationship and to position them in such a relationship would radically alter canon.

[9] Of particular importance to this thesis are the *PLL* ships Pailey (Paige McCullers and Emily Fields) and Emison (Emily Fields and Alison DiLaurentis). However, Clexa (Clarke Griffin and Lexa) from *The 100* (2014-), Vauseman (Alex Vause and Piper Chapman) from *Orange is the New Black* (2013-) and Karmy (Karma Ashcroft and Amy Raudenfeld) in *Faking It* (2014-2016) are further examples.

the ways fans interpret these non-normative identities. Finally, it addresses the lack of sociological inquiry into how viewers/audiences/fans make sense of mediated representations of LGBT+ identity, which influences the ways they negotiate them. In other words, while limited scholarship has addressed LGBT+ fan identities (Lothian et al 2007; Scales 2015), scholarship has yet to account for how fans negotiate mediated representations of LGBT+ identities.

This argument was built around four research questions that shaped this thesis, whose findings allowed such an argument to be constructed. These research questions are:

1) How do fans of *Pretty Little Liars* negotiate LGBT+ representations?
2) What types of *Pretty Little Liars* fannish artefacts privilege these LGBT+ representations?
3) How do fans incorporate these LGBT+ representations into their fannish practices and for what reason?
4) How do these fannish artefacts address these LGBT+ representations as positive or negative and in what ways?

The first research question arises out of the increasing frequency with which non-normative sexuality and non-binary gender identities are represented on television, but specifically that *Pretty Little Liars*, a popular teen mystery TV series has structured 'queer' as central to its narratives, and not as peripheral. In other words, 'queer' here points to how LGBT+ characters and non-normative narratives are integral to the plots and the overarching narrative and are not relegated to the periphery.[10] While fictional LGBT+ representations are occurring with more regularity in all modes of television, Teen TV texts seem to dominate media attention in this regard, particularly with programmes like *Glee* (2009-2015), *Pretty Little Liars* (2010-), *Teen Wolf* (2011-), *Faking It* (2014-2016), *The 100* (2014-), and *Scream* (2015-).[11] This makes Teen TV of particular importance to interrogate through a queer theoretical approach. Moreover, these are also programmes that have a large contingency of online fans; thus, their online fandoms and their LGBT+ identity representations further substantiate an interrogation such as the one occurring in this thesis. The first research

---

[10] Science fiction, fantasy, horror and mystery Teen TV texts continue to be the dominant TV series representing fictional LGBT identities in mainstream American television, receiving praise from social activist organisations such as *GLAAD* who monitor LGBT representation in popular media (see *GLAAD Network Responsibility Indexes* 2010-2015).

[11] These are more "contemporary" examples, but in the history of Teen Television, programmes such as *Beverly Hills, 90210* (1990-2000), *My So-Called Life* (1994-1995), *Dawson's Creek* (1998-2003) and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) have also represented lesbian and gay identities either as peripheral or primary characters.

question simultaneously highlights a visible trend in the amount of representations existing within the source text, while considering how fans negotiate these representations that are privileged therein. This first question is shaped by the notion that historically, cisgender, white, middle-class gay men have been represented more often than other identities on the LGBT+ spectrum, but the trend in the past 10 years has seen an increasing number of Teen TV texts that have moved beyond solely representing one LGBT+ identity over another. Yet, while there is a movement occurring within the industry to represent other LGBT+ identities, these identities rarely move beyond cisgender representations. In other words, they often underrepresent gender minorities. Furthermore, LGBT+ representations of people of colour are also less common than white representations. *Pretty Little Liars* has diversified representations of Lesbian identity, by introducing characters that are mixed race; *PLL* also represents a transgender character.[12]

The final three research questions comprise the four case study chapters and the types of fan production/fan spaces consulted. What this means is that, the final research questions are answered through the specific fan practices appearing in Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7. Each chapter engages with specific fan spaces, which are outlined in detail in Chapter 3 (*Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Tumblr*, *FF.net* and *ArchiveofOurOwn.org*). They also engage with the types of fan production arising out of those spaces, with (fem)slash fiction, MEMEs/Gifs/GIF sets and fan theories as the key types of fan production interrogated. Furthermore, they are addressed in Chapter 3, which outlines the thesis' central methodology, and are addressed again through this methodological approach as it occurs in each of the chapters. Moreover, while these research questions are concerned *prima facie* with LGBT+ identity as represented in Teen TV, they also address concerns in fan studies scholarship that do not address LGBT+ representation in the fan's source text and how this research ignores the centrality of these online fan spaces to shape the types of fan productions employed thereon.

---

[12] Although this appears to be a checklist of "token" minority characters, a derisive practice in and of itself, diversity is represented in the production staff as well, which further shapes the ways these characters are developed and the sensitivity with which these characters' story lines are introduced.

Terms and Definitions

Employed in this thesis are a number of terms arising out of fan studies, fan fiction studies and queer theory. In this section of the introduction, I interrogate 'queer' and 'heteronormativity' as they have been defined through queer theory; and 'fan-scholar'/'scholar-fan' and 'big name fan' (BNF) as they have been defined by fan studies scholars. It is important to address these terms in the introduction, rather than the literature review as these are the terms that have framed the research undertaken.[13] Furthermore, 'queer' and 'fan-scholar' specifically are identity categories that I adopt for myself as a scholar and as a member of the LGBT+ community, self-identifying as a gay male. Both of these identity markers shape the way I approach popular media and academic research, as stated at the beginning of this chapter. Finally, these terms continue to be debated in their respective fields and are defined, as I argue in Chapter 3, through historical associations with the terms themselves, but also through methodology.

'Queer'

For this thesis, I do not use the term 'queer' as an umbrella term for LGBT+, gay, lesbian, transgender and/or intersex; rather, I use it when fans refer to queer in such a manner or when it is an adoptive identity category employed in one of the fan texts, by one of the represented characters or a fan's self-identification. Instead, I adopt 'queer's' multiplicitous, radical and transgressive properties, which has been employed as such by scholars like Eve Sedgwick (1990), Alexander Doty (1993 and 2000), Judith Halberstam (1995 and 2005), Harry Benshoff (1997), Glyn Davis (2004), Alexis Lothian et al (2007), Glyn Davis and Gary Needham (2009), Darren Elliott-Smith (2012 and 2014), Pamela Demory and Christopher Pullen (2013), Joseph Brennan (2013a, 2013b), and Frederik Dhaenens (2014). While employing 'queer' as an umbrella term functions to reappropriate and recharge the derogatory slur 'queer', which was used to denigrate or degrade people self-identifying out of norm (non-normative); the term's reappropriation and radicality also functions as a

---

[13] While I address these specific terms in the introduction, 'fan' will be given more considerable attention in the literature review as it proves to be a contentious term that, although a quotidian term, fan studies scholars continue to question what constitutes a fan (Sandvoss 2005) and how fan practices or modes of fannish engagement make some fans more fannish than others (Brooker 2002; Hills 2002, 2004, 2005a, 2005b, 2006; Hellekson & Busse 2006).

transgressive property that subverts a text by uncovering a homoerotic subtext or by being positioned as a transgressive reading strategy, which is built around a model of social progressiveness, thereby seeking to destabilise normative society to include, rather than exclude, non-normative and non-binary identities. It is used both adjectivally and verbally to destabilise heteronormative structures and to unearth those identities that are deemed 'contra-, non-, or anti-straight' (Doty 1993, xv). Thus, the term functions to combat 'minoritizing' (Sedgwick 1990, 9) constructions of sexuality through its transgressive modes, thereby aiming to fracture binaries and systems of oppression. Employing 'queer' in this manner allows for not solely a 'universalizing' (ibid) understanding of sexuality, rather it permits identity categories to be in flux and ever-changing; in other words, it promotes fluidity over rigid binaries. Likewise, it challenges the historical constructions of the identity categories 'heterosexual' and 'homosexual', indicating that 'queer' moves beyond the simple binary that only two types of sexuality exist. Essentially, 'queer' promotes a multiplicity of identity formations through these transgressive reading positions, illuminating the ways in which identity is not fixed and that we adopt numerous gender, sexual, race and class markers. Rather, it is the combination of sexuality, gender, race and class that form human identity; not simply one of these categories.

Heteronormativity

If 'queer' can be used to represent a transgressive identity category or set of aesthetics (see Chapter 4), then heteronormativity is the power structure in which 'queer' and non-queer exist. 'Heteronormativity' then is the dominance of heterosexuality over the construction of society, gender roles and normative identity. Furthermore, it is built around heterocentrism, which functions akin to white privilege, whereby heterosexual narratives and identities, like white narratives and white individuals, are privileged in mainstream Western society; heteronormativity also affects the construction of popular culture and popular media. Building off this, Nikki Sullivan (2003) claims that 'heteronormativity does not exist as a discrete and easily identifiable body of thought, of rules and regulations but rather, informs - albeit ambiguously, in complex ways, and to varying degrees - all kinds of practices, institutions, conceptual systems, and social structures' (132). Sullivan's definition of 'heteronormativity' operates to illuminate the omnipresence of this oppressive power

regime. Similarly, Ron Becker (2006) underscores how 'heteronormativity' is 'the complex system of gendered relations and social institutions that privilege certain ways of living' (44). Whereas Sullivan (2003) suggests 'heteronormativity' is systemic in a way that affects more than just the everyday individual, Becker (2006) frames it, albeit similarly, as a system that predicates accepted 'ways of living'. W. C. Harris (2005) frames it as a 'hegemony' (25) or something that can be resisted, but 'hegemony' also suggests that it is a force that is exerted and instilled in socio-cultural and educational institutions, which also suggests that it is a learned practice; if it is learned, then it can be unlearned. Finally, Pamela Demory and Christopher Pullen (2013) indicate that there are 'heteronormative constructions' (4), signalling that these 'heteronormative constructions' are framed onto generic (both televisual and filmic) structures that would thereby privilege non-queer narratives over queer ones. This is crucial to have in mind when exploring the transgressive (or not) nature of (fem)slash, for instance. Alexi Lothian et al (2007) point to the fact that these practices exist in a 'queer female space' (103), thereby indicating that, even though (fem)slash may be created and consumed by self-identifying heterosexual females, the practice itself is an affront to 'heteronormativity' and by extension, patriarchy.

'Fan-Scholar'/'Scholar-Fan'

Although 'fan-scholar' and 'scholar-fan' appear to be interchangeable terms, Matt Hills (2005a) defines 'Scholar-Fan' as an individual that collates personal and academic interests (xxvi). Lucy Bennet (2014) defines 'scholar-fan' or 'aca-fan' (these two are interchangeable) as one whereby 'the researcher is simultaneously an academic and fan' and that this position is 'understood as a dual role that, although liminal, can offer complicated advantages from both perspectives' (11). Further, Alexander Doty (2000) lauds the 'scholar-fan' position, pointing to the notion that we instil our writing with our own personal histories and cultural associations (11-12). Doty (2000) does caution that, to be overly celebratory, may risk 'losing the respect of the reader/student by coming off as embarrassingly egotistical or gee-whiz celebratory' (12). Central to this discussion, however, is the position of the academic within their respective fandoms, by the assumed authority held by the researcher either to laud or misrepresent their fan communities. In other words, there is an inherent power-struggle that exists between the academy and fan communities

(Hills 2005a, xviii-xxiii) and that toeing the line between both communities puts that particular researcher at risk of abusing their access within the fan community explored. Conversely, 'Fan-Scholar' is a term that can either situate both academic and fan identities as opposing sides of a coin that operate in tandem rather than one influencing the other (Hills 2005a; Cochran 2009; Booth 2015) or it can refer to those fans who rely on academic knowledge, such as media theory, to increase their pleasure or enjoyment of the source text (Hills 2005a, 16-21). 'Hybridise' (19) is the word Hills uses to describe the conflation of these two opposing identities.[14]

'Big Name Fan'

While the attention thus far has been given to 'fan-scholar'/'scholar-fan', I turn to the discourses of celebrity within a given fandom: 'Big Name Fan' or BNF, as it will be used throughout this thesis. Matt Hills (2006) recognises the ability of fans to become celebrities within a fandom, defining BNF as 'fans who have attained a wide degree of recognition in the community, and so who are known to others via subcultural mediation without personally knowing all those other subcultural participants' (104). Hills frames this as a 'fan-cultural' (ibid) mode of recognition, whereby fans become celebrities themselves, highlighting the hierarchical nature of fan communities. Katherine Larsen and Lynn Zubernis (2012) add to this definition, noting that 'BNFs seek to set themselves apart in fan communities, earning privilege and status through amassing and controlling the flow of information or being able to claim entry into the other, protected realm of the performer' (30). What is distinctive about this addition is that it attributes knowledge as one of the key factors in becoming a BNF.[15] Larsen and Zubernis (2012) also indicate that these fans may often become points of contention within their fandoms, noting that they may be perceived to be 'arrogant and self-important' (ibid), a descriptor embraced by the principal BNF interrogated in Chapter 7. Their status comes not solely from providing pertinent and

---

[14] For the purposes of this thesis, I employ 'Scholar-Fan' as my self-identifying fan category, as I came to the fandom from an academic perspective: I was interested in the way Emily Fields and her partners were portrayed as lesbians and bisexual women and also owing to the fact that a significant portion of the production team self-identify as LGBT and that the broadcasting network ABC Family (now Freeform) promote an LGBT inclusive environment. Furthermore, my investments in the text stem from the intense analysis done by fans, which I also see as an academic interest (see Chapter 7).

[15] This is a concept addressed in Chapter 7 in relationship to fan theory-making, a highly under researched area of fan studies that this thesis addresses.

relevant information surrounding production and narratives (or 'spoilers'); they can also achieve this status through their fannish productivity (creating fan theories, fanfiction or GIFs/GIF sets).

Terms in Action

Each of these terms are at first glance ostensibly disparate categories; however, 'queer', 'scholar-fan'/'fan-scholar' and 'big name fan' function as identity categories that are shaped by the system within which they exist. Thus, 'heteronormativity', the 'hegemonic' system that controls and dictates what lifestyles are appropriate, regulates that system within which each of the aforementioned identity categories operate. Because 'heteronormativity' (and its semi-oppositional, yet reinforcing system of 'homonormativity' – see Chapter 2) is wide reaching and wields control over all aspects of everyday life, the terms therefore function within this system of control and are thus inexorably linked to one another. As is made evident in Chapter 5, (fem)slash is consumed and created in response to these systems of control and provides fans a safe space to play out these non-normative sexual and non-binary gender identifications. Moreover, the online fan spaces utilised become sites of transgression (see Chapter 4), which permit the confrontation of these systems within a space that appears to be a queer fan utopia (Bell 2013).

Chapter Breakdown

This thesis has been structured to investigate the ways in which fans negotiate LGBT+ representations and does so through a reader-guided textual analysis (Ytre-Arne 2011). While traditionally the Literature Review and Methodology are not disparate chapters and are usually contained within the introductory chapter, separating these chapters out further emphasises the importance of adopting alternative methodologies to investigate socio-cultural and political issues presented by a text and how audiences/viewers/fans interpret these subjects. Therefore, Chapter 2 explores and synthesises the literature regarding Queer Theory, Teen Television, Fan Studies and Fan Fiction Studies and Social Media as it pertains to Fan Studies. Although these fields of study are ostensibly disparate and unconnected, there are many crossovers (such as Stein 2005; Lothian et al 2007), particularly in relation to

the role social media plays in fostering slash fiction community formation online, a rich area that provides valuable fan analysis (analysis of the text completed by the fans). Yet, what also arises out of the investigation into these disparate fields is that they privilege audience over the text or vice versa and do not make attempts to bridge that gap between texts and audiences (or for the purposes of this thesis, fans).

Chapter 3 highlights this gap between texts and audiences by investigating ethnographic and netnographic methodologies as have been employed by fan studies and fan fiction studies scholars. While this chapter challenges these perpetually employed modes of inquiry and analysis, it also functions to detail the ethics involved with online research. What this means is that it raises and challenges held ethical concerns, particularly as they relate to social media research. Further, the chapter details how and why netnography and reader-guided textual analysis (Ytre-Arne 2011) are utilised in this thesis.

Chapters 4 through 7 are the case study chapters. Each chapter engages with fannish practices as they occur online, but they also operate to demonstrate how reader-guided textual analysis (Ytre-Arne 2011) is employed in practical application. Chapter 4 has an additional function, as it works not only to demonstrate methodological application, it also illustrates the way 'fan-scholar' can be viewed to be a textual positioning, and not solely an adopted identity. Its primary function is to contextualise the fannish practices of fanfiction creation and fan theory-making through the ways in which the text encourages this. In other words, Chapter 4 argues that certain genres, such as teen and mystery, encourage fans to become 'fan-scholars' by using generic conventions to invite critical engagements with the text.

Where Chapter 4 contextualises these fannish practices, Chapter 5 investigates the shifting nature of (fem)slash fiction creation and consumption. This chapter interrogates (fem)slash fiction that incorporates explicitly represented LGBT+ identities, which differs from how (fem)slash has been historically defined. While slash, and by extension femslash, have transgressed the text by coupling (or shipping) two heterosexual characters into a homosexual relationship, this chapter highlights how fans are beginning to move beyond this model by privileging LGBT+ characters over heterosexual ones.[16] By exploring this type

---

[16] While slash and femslash continues to queer narratives and characters by coupling heterosexual characters into a homosexual relationship, there is a rising trend, as aforementioned, whereby fans have begun to focus with more frequency on the LGBT identities represented and their relationships.

of (fem)slash, it provides insight in to how fans are negotiating these LGBT+ representations, which de-centralises the researcher's assessments of these representations (see 'evaluative paradigm' in the Literature Review – Davis & Needham 2009) to permit a more holistic approach to the positive and negative representational model. In other words, fan valuations of these LGBT+ representations become as important as the scholar's assessment.

As the content of (fem)slash is shifting to incorporate these LGBT+ characters into their narratives, (fem)slash and fanfiction is changing as well. Chapter 6 explores these technological changes by highlighting the role MEMEs, GIFs and GIF sets play in fan production, but also that these types of fan production tell narratives themselves. Therefore, Chapter 6 argues that fanfiction must be redefined to account for the way these digital fan products function as fanfiction. This chapter interrogates Emison (the portmanteau ship name for Emily Fields and Alison DiLaurentis on *Pretty Little Liars*) MEMEs, GIFs and GIF sets as they work not only to prove Emison as a canonical relationship, but also because they often retell or 'episode fix' instances that point to the reality of Emison.

The final case study chapter explores the role of fan theory making. This chapter investigates three popular fan theories that seek to prove who 'A' is and why. Fan theory making may incorporate elements from fanfiction (Chapter 5) or digital fanfiction (Chapter 6), but fan theory making also highlights how fans interpret or read texts. In this chapter, I interrogate three popular fan theories that critically engage with *Pretty Little Liars*, each of which either responds to 'A' being transgender, argues that 'A' is intersex or that 'A' is transgender. Finally, the conclusion summarises the findings of the thesis, reiterating the notion that reader-guided textual analysis (Ytre-Arne 2011) is an ideal methodology to explore fan discourses as they pertain to LGBT+ representations and LGBT+ identity. Additionally, it points to potential areas of research that may be undertaken in fan studies methodologies, fan fiction studies and issues surrounding the 'evaluative paradigm' (Davis & Needham 2009) and the lack of consideration to audience interpretations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Fan studies scholars have worked to de-pathologise fans by highlighting the positive intricacies and social nuances of their communities, fan products and emotions and investments in creation and consumption of fannish texts. Many of these scholars have immersed themselves within fan communities for lengthy periods of time, whether for research purposes or personal motivations; they thus attribute to their fan communities a place of belonging.[17] However, this does not mean that these scholars are uncritical of their fan communities and the source texts. Their research may appear tempered with an unfettered positivity towards their fannish friends and the members within their fan communities (Hills 2002, 8-11); in large part, this can be ascribed to the socio-historical stereotyping of fans as social pariahs (Jenkins 1992). In other words, fans are and have been portrayed as social outcasts, heading towards a life of confinement and social exclusion; they are the nerdy boys who can't get the girls or the obsessed stalker types that have been portrayed on film and in television as such (Hills 2002, 9). However, in the pursuit of this fan 'normalisation' and the plea for society to reassess the way fans are viewed and characterised, in that process fan studies has done little in the way of exploring fannish identity categories beyond those fans that could be identified as white, heterosexual, and middle-class. Of particular importance to future fan studies projects are those that consider ethnicity, class and sexuality as identity constructs that factor into fannish identities.[18]

Despite the heightened emergence of LGBT+ characterisation on contemporary television (see the *GLAAD Network Responsibility Index*, an annual publication that monitors and assesses LGBT+ representation in mainstream American television), and particularly within Teen TV, little of this scholarship has focused on how fans negotiate LGBT+ representations and their narratives. In other words, how fans make meaning out of these non-normative identities, the relationships created for these LGBT+ characters and the challenges these characters may (or may not) face have been of little concern to scholars. This is extremely important within fan studies scholarship as a large body of work, particularly that on fan fiction and slash fiction (Hellekson & Busse 2006 and 2014), focuses

---

[17] See Camille Bacon-Smith (1992), Henry Jenkins (1992), Constance Penley (1997), Natasha Whiteman (2007), Tom Phillips (2014), for example.
[18] There has been a proliferation of literature on issues of gender in fan studies, which will be explored and investigated later in this chapter; however, there is very minimal scholarship on queer, lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender issues within fandom.

on non-normative relationship formation through the act of shipping, which some scholars argue is an act of queering the text (or reads a text and produces a product that highlights homoerotic undertones) (Lothian et al 2007; Dhaenens et al 2010). Yet, with shows like *Glee* (2009-2015, FOX), *Pretty Little Liars* (2010-, Freeform), *Teen Wolf* (2011-, MTV), *The Fosters* (2013-, Freeform), and *Faking It!* (2014-2016, MTV), LGBT+ identities are foregrounded *as* protagonists and series regulars, and there is a significant body of fan work that is devoted to these LGBT+ characters. In other words, this is not meant to address minority fan identities, the focus here is rather, fans engage with same-sex 'shipping' (or how fans renegotiate characters' sexualities and pair them romantically and sexually with characters of the same gender) across multiple fandoms, whether they be canonical or not (warranted by the text or not). What this means, then, is that fans are engaging with canonical and non-canonical same-sex sexual relationships in a variety of ways, but particularly through the ways in which fanfiction is produced (see Chapter 5 and Chapter 6). More importantly, these slash fiction stories are the most widely consumed out of any other fanfiction genre (*AO3 Census* CentrumLumina, 2013). Therefore, fans' negotiation of LGBT+ identity is undoubtedly an area of inquiry that must be considered not solely from an ethnographic, immersive perspective; it must also be investigated through their meaning making practices, particularly in how these interpretive strategies shape fannish artefacts (an increasing amount of LGBT+ characters are portrayed in fanfiction currently – see Chapter 5 and Chapter 6).

To investigate how scholarship has largely marginalised the ways fans negotiate LGBT+ identities in their fan meaning making practices, this literature review focuses primarily on fan production as integral to the ways fans negotiate these non-normative identities.[19] In order to demonstrate how these fans are negotiating non-normative identities and why this is important, the literature review synthesises fields of research that cross over with one another. These bodies of work arise out of the following areas: fan studies, media queer theory, teen television, fan fiction studies and social media research. The purpose of aligning these fields is to highlight the ways in which being a fan is not a

---

[19] The literature review explores how these meaning making strategies have been investigated through the scholarship, while the methodology chapter provides a method to engage with these fannish productions as a means to gain a better understanding as to how fans explore non-normative identity as it is represented on screen. In other words, the method provides the researcher with a new approach to investigate fans and their meaning making processes while simultaneously exploring the representation of LGBT identity in the source text. This is done through a reader-guided textual analysis (Ytre-Arne 2011).

singular identity and the construction of that identity does not solely fall into one camp. Furthermore, fan studies is largely an interdisciplinary area of research that considers differing approaches (ethnographic and netnographic are examples of this – see methodology chapter) and it fits within varying disciplines. However, fan studies is largely concerned with media fandom as opposed to sports fandom (Duffett 2013), where media studies is an interdisciplinary area itself. Moreover, because this thesis investigates digital fan production on social media platforms, it is essential to investigate fan studies oriented social media research. As LGBT+ representation is a central concern of this thesis, it is therefore pertinent to explore the development of queer theory alongside media scholarship. Synthesising these fields provides a more holistic understanding in regards to the fan meaning making strategies to negotiate non-normative and non-binary identities, which is investigated through fans' negotiations of both LGBT+ characters and how they queer texts in this thesis (see Chapter 1 for the ways in which queer is used throughout this thesis).

Before exploring these fields of research in detail, the literature review identifies how fans have been historically constructed, considered and defined by fan studies scholarship. As it deals specifically with identity, it is important to establish a framework through which to view 'fan' to assess the malleable nature of the term itself and the implications behind definitions. Key to this inquiry is the tension between active and passive fans; this is not to suggest that the varying models of 'fan' identified by fan studies scholars indicates an active and passive viewership akin to Stuart Hall's (1980) active/passive audience paradigm. Rather, the tension between active and passive fan suggests the level of engagement by fans with their fan communities (i.e. creating fan fiction, vidding, filking, engaging in 'fan talk', for example), which has been argued as integral to being defined as a 'fan'. In other words, to be a fan one must participate in at least one fannish activity, such as creating fanfiction or spending spurious amounts of time engaged in 'fan talk'. Further to this point, one cannot be a fan unless they participate in some manner (Sandvoss 2005), indicating that the figuration of fan is defined by its activities and not through consumption.

The chapter then moves on to investigate how media scholarship has addressed LGBT+ representation, the paradigms used to assess these representations and the tensions between queer as a radical category and queer as representative of LGBT+ identity. This largely draws on queer theory, with particular emphasis on television representation, and

the ways in which scholars have situated these representations historically and culturally. Alexander Doty argues that 'queer is everywhere' (Doty 2000, 14),[20] including the construction of identities and readings within fan communities; as these fans negotiate LGBT+ identities through meaning making practices and is the central concern of this thesis, it is a logical segue between the moniker fan and their queer fan practices. Moreover, there is a cogent link between the ways in which queer theory scholars queer a text and how fans queer texts; this is particularly evident in (fem)slash fanfiction.[21] Since queer theory is both a radical approach and a radical philosophy that considers more than just assessing overt LGBT+ media representations, it is useful to illuminate or uncover the queer nature of texts, which highlights the link between queer theory and (fem)slash as an important fan practice. Thus, fans queer a text through characterisations and relationships similar to the way queer theorists have uncovered queerness as innate to a text; thus, it further highlights the importance of evaluating this queer theory literature on representation.

The next section deals with notions of genre, particularly teen TV, as this has become one of the most important areas of LGBT+ representation (Davis 2004) and has a very active online network of fans (Hills 2004). The subsequent section explores this queer fan practice through an investigation of fan fiction studies scholarship with specific emphasis on (fem)slash research. How (fem)slash has been defined, the communities that consume it, the (fem)slashers that create it and its subgenres are considered in this section. This links back to issues of LGBT+ representation explored in the previous section on (media) queer theory and highlights how fan fiction studies scholarship focuses on queerness in (fem)slash through the construction of ships, but largely ignores the ships and the fan fiction surrounding those ships that deal explicitly with LGBT+ characters. In the final section, the literature review investigates how social media, particularly *Tumblr* and *Twitter*, has been utilised by fan communities to cross-promote their fan products and validate their ships. Further, the literature goes on to suggest that these social media platforms have become the new terrain for validated fan consumption/fan engagement/fan production. While social

---

[20] When Doty (2000, 14) argues that 'queer is everywhere', this indicates that 'queer' is not just used as an umbrella term for LGBT identity, but also that it can be a transgressive element to a text, such as an aesthetic, mood, or technique. Furthermore, 'queer' also functions as a verb, whereby a viewer/reader/scholar transgresses a text by "reading" a text queerly. In other words, a queer reading occurs when the queer elements are illuminated by the consumer of the text for a radical or transgressive purpose. For example, in Chapter 4, I discuss the use of chiaroscuro as a cinematographic tool to evoke mystery, but are also used to denote the queer space in which 'A' exists.

[21] These terms will be fully explicated in the section on fan production.

media research is the primary body of work investigated in this final section, a large proponent of those works centralise the movement of fans to these virtual spaces. What this means is that the social media research investigated signals an emigration of fans from physical spaces (conventions, namely) to virtual ones (*Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Tumblr*). Moreover, because the field of social media and Web 2.0 research is wide-reaching, an emphasis on social media fan usage is privileged over general social media research.

Defining Fan(dom)s

To use a commonality amongst fan studies scholars: 'fan' is a "slippery slope" term (Hills 2009). Henry Jenkins (1992) constructs his definition of 'fan' in terms of media fandom, or those 'enthusiasts' that devote themselves to a set of televisual or filmic texts (1). However, he identifies in *Textual Poachers* that fans are 'largely female, largely white, largely middle class, though it [the group of fans] welcomes into its ranks many who would not fit this description,' (ibid.); further, a 'fan' or groups of fans 'embrace not a single text or even a single genre but many texts,' (ibid). Camille Bacon-Smith positions the term 'fan' within media fandom, indicating that fans (referred to as 'she' in *Enterprising Women* [1992]) 'usually enjoy many genres through many delivery media,' but that 'the fan will have a favourite with which she will identify most strongly,' (Bacon-Smith 1992, 7). Although Bacon-Smith suggests that a fan will 'identify most strongly' with a 'favourite' text, she recognises that fans may or may not engage with multiple fandoms and with multiple genres. Moreover, this does not preclude a fan from identifying and favouring a range of texts, particularly as they leave one fandom for another ('cyclical fandom' as defined by Matt Hills 2005b, 803-804). Furthermore, both identify the locus of *being* a fan with activity; Jenkins refers to these processes as 'textual poaching' and Bacon-Smith signals that this process occurs upon meeting other fans. Seemingly, then, fan engagement and activity are coded as innate by Jenkins and Bacon-Smith. Cheryl Harris problematizes this notion, as these definitions are largely constructed around this activity, arguing that: 'describing what fans do provides some necessary insight, but in doing so we tend to lose sight of how fans fit into the larger picture,' (Harris & Alexander 1998, 4). In other words, while it is important to consider how fans 'do' fandom (or engage with their fan texts), that activity is not the sole

factor to define fans. 'The larger picture' (ibid) suggests that there is more to fandom than just creating or consuming fan fiction, for example.

Responding to these ostensibly rigid constructions of 'fan' or 'fandom', Cornel Sandvoss highlights the problematic nature by defining a 'fan' through activity, because 'sometimes audience groups that from the outside appear as casual viewers identify themselves as fans (Sandvoss quoting Sandvoss 2003 in 2005, 6). Furthermore, Sandvoss employs the term 'fan practice' over 'fan activity' as 'many of those who label themselves as fans, when asked what defines their fandom, point to their patterns of consumption,' (7). Therefore, by not delimiting oneself merely to the notion of 'activity' as *the* marker of fandom, 'practice' opens up the definition to include a wide range of 'self-identifying' fans that may or may not engage with the various modes of being an 'active fan'. In other words, not all fans create texts, but not all fans are merely devoted viewers; there is a broad range of fan identity markers that allow fans to be a diverse faction of media viewers/consumers (Abercrombie & Longhurst 1998, 'fan continuum'; Sandvoss 2005). Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse (2006) take this further, arguing that 'fans can remain *lurkers* who consume fannish artefacts without interacting with other fans' (13).

For the purposes of this thesis, I identify media fans as those who self-identify as fans, and read from that self-identification is that these individuals form 'a positive, personal, relatively deep, emotional connection with a mediated element of popular culture,' (Duffett 2013, 2). Mark Duffett's definition broadens 'fan' to encompass the diversity within fandoms, and is one that does not limit media fandom to being 'largely female' or 'largely white' (Jenkins 1992, 1). Moreover, insinuating that fans are predominately one gender, one race, one class, or one sexual orientation denies not only the variability of audiences, but also fixates fan studies research onto a particular set of texts and ostensibly dichotomises fandoms into gender-based consumption practices. For example, Matt Hills (2005) locates horror fandom as being primarily and fixedly masculine, thus denying the possibility of a larger group of female horror fans, to which both Brigid Cherry (1999a, 1999b, 2001) and Milly Williamson (2005) contest and bring evidence to the contrary. This tension essentialises fans unwittingly into a narrow, rigid binary that perpetuates masculine consumption and fandoms as seemingly 'good', and female consumptions as seemingly 'bad'. Helena Dare-Edwards (2015) locates this consumptive binary as a primary source for the derogatory nature of the word 'fangirl' (11-12). Adam

Scales (2015) comes to similar conclusions in his research on gay male horror fans, particularly as they are spread across multiple sites, and coded as masculine (avid horror consumers) or feminine (refusing to consume, unless with a romantic companion) based on their affinity and affiliations with the horror genre.[22] Therefore, Duffett's definition yields a broader set of fans and recognises the diversity of media fandom.

It is worth noting that fan studies scholars have argued that fans and their fan practices engage with texts on a level that resembles academic engagement.[23] Matt Hills (2002) refers to these fans as 'fan-scholars', which is a central focus in Chapter 4. What this means is that fan practices (such as fan theory making – see Chapter 7) can often function as analyses of the texts themselves, with socio-politico-cultural issues brought to the fore by these fan communities' 'fan talk' (Fiske 1992, 38). Furthermore, these fan analyses, I argue in Chapter 4, arise out of the generic conventions of the text, therefore positioning 'fan-scholar' not just as an adoptive identity, but also as a theoretical positioning constructed by the text and its respective generic categories. For example, Will Brooker (2005) argues that fans may often blur boundaries between the academy and their fandoms, a conclusion he came to by immersing himself within the Lewis Carroll Society and thus illustrated this relationship: 'Perhaps instead of the term *fan-academic*, suggesting an individual with a foot in two separate camps, we should sometimes use the more intimate term *fan/academic*, indicating by the slash that the two fields and practices may in certain cases […] be interchangeable' (Brooker 2005, 879). Brooker identifies this as 'curatorship' (875-879) - a process whereby fans legitimate their practices and fannish engagements through collection, detection and analysis of textual and extra-textual materials relevant to their fandoms. This practice serves many purposes, but it reinforces 'fan' as a status. And while this may seem to contradict the notion that fans do not have to 'do' fandom in any specific way (i.e. writing fanfiction), it is a process that can occur at the textual and extra-textual levels. In other words, the act of consumption may be viewed as a form of 'curatorship'

---

[22] I have cited Dare-Edwards and Scales as their research aligns with the types of fans I have engaged with throughout researching this thesis. Though I am less concerned with the gender or sexuality of the fans, the content they produce (same-sex shipping) and the content they consume (frequent LGBT characters are represented in *Pretty Little Liars*) is organised around similar, though different axes.

[23] Though fan community is integral to the organisation of fandoms and how fans 'learn' their 'fan practices', this thesis is largely concerned with the ways in which fans consume or produce LGBT narratives. Therefore, there is less emphasis on fan communities and its construction. For a good overview of fan communities, see Jenkins (1992; 2006), Hills (2002, 2004, 2005), Brooker (2002, 2005), Karpovich (2006), Lackner, Lucas, and Reid (2006), Kirby-Diaz (2009), Jenkins et al (2013).

where the fan takes in canonical knowledge and thus legitimates their status as a fan. Moreover, 'curatorship' is integral to the way *PLL* fans approach the mystery of 'A' and is a primary mode of their investigative efforts to disclose that person's identity (see Chapter 7). Furthermore, Matt Hills (2005) finds a similar link between horror fans and media scholars: 'Where both fans and academics are concerned with discursively revaluing the consumption of popular culture, both subcultures will tend to deploy similar "meta"-discourses of moral valorisation: academics ontologize the "active" audience, while fans perform textual agency,' (97). On a more personal level, Jenkins (1992 and 2006), Hills (2002 and 2005), Brooker (2002 and 2005) and Doty (2000) highlight how their personal and academic investments demonstrate their own engagements within fan communities and as fans of specific genres, texts or filmic/televisual periods.[24]

Significant to the construction of fan and 'fan-scholar' / 'scholar-fan' identity (Hills 2002) is the notion that fans have migrated onto virtual spaces. These personal investments within fandoms and conducting research into those subcultural arenas is what Hills refers to as either the 'scholar-fan' or 'fan-scholar', further elaborated upon in Chapters 3 and 4, which surveys the prominent fan studies methodologies. Rhiannon Bury et al (2013) document their personal and academic investments in an array of media texts, but specifically how the identity of fan has moved beyond the physical borders of the convention and onto virtual spaces.[25] These scholars all reflect upon their own fandoms to make these claims and to validate their scholarly pursuits. Investigating 'aca-fandom' (Jenkins 1992) has serious ramifications for the ways in which scholars approach their fan communities, identities and texts.

Surveying the fan studies literature to arrive at a clearer definition of 'fan' as a category and as an identity is crucial to understanding the ways fans negotiate texts. Furthermore, the parallels noted above (fan identity being pathologised and culturally constructed as other) indicate that there is a link between non-normative identity constructions and identifying as a fan. Although Jenkins (1992) and Bacon-Smith (1992) suggest that media fandom is comprised of primarily middle-class, white women, Duffett's (2013) definition provides a space for 'fan' to include all types of identities beyond the ones

---

[24] I highlight Alexander Doty (2000) as his academic and personal investments surrounding his research and his own self-identifying fan status stem largely from his sexual orientation.
[25] Bury et al (2013) demonstrate through academic dialogue that fandom now exists primarily online, though convention attendance continues to play a dominant role in fan practices.

identified in Jenkin's (1992) and Bacon-Smith's (1992) works. Furthermore, because 'fan' encompasses a larger, more diverse group, this invites a reading into the negotiation of non-normative identities represented in a fan's favoured text, which is explored in further detail in the fan fiction studies section and later in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. In the next section, I look at how scholars have employed queer theory to unearth a text's 'queer potential' (Doty 1993). This has particular relevance to the ways in which fans queer a text through fan production, namely in (fem)slash fanfiction. While many of these characters are positioned as straight within the narrative, these fans see the 'queer potential' of those characters and explore the 'true' relationships they should be in. What complicates this matter, and of particular importance throughout the thesis, is how this 'queer potential' functions when characters are represented as LGBT+ rather than heterosexual (see Chapter 5 and 6 of this thesis for a more in depth analysis). Consequently, the following section investigates how Queer Theory and queer theorists have conceptualised LGBT+ representation in television.

Queering the Queer

Queer theory offers a potential to destabilise heteronormativity through a radical, poststructuralist framework (Sullivan 2003). Heteronormativity 'does not exist as a discrete and easily identifiable body of thought, of rules and regulations but rather, informs - albeit ambiguously, in complex ways, and to varying degrees - all kinds of practices, institutions, conceptual systems, and social structures,' (Sullivan 2003, 132). These 'practices, institutions, conceptual systems, and social structures' (ibid) are typically coded through a heterosexual framework, meaning that heterosexuality, particularly patriarchal heterosexuality, is the dominant sexual framework within a given society. Consequently, heterosexuals and their practices are constructed as 'normal', whereas non-normative (aka Queer) identities and sexualities are positioned as contra-normal or in opposition to what is beneficial to or supported by society. Investigating heteronormativity in a televisual landscape highlights the socio-political identity constructions supported or denounced by its culture. This is especially relevant to the ways in which fans negotiate LGBT+ or non-normative identities in their fannish practices, particularly in the construction of (fem)slash (see Chapters 5 and 6) and their meaning making strategies through formulating fan theories (see Chapter 7). Moreover, fans may be viewed as a social barometer for accepting

the other, as many of the fan practices investigated in this thesis privilege queer politics; although, as Mark Duffett (2013) notes, fans comprise a mere 20% of a media's consumer base (21).[26]

Queer theory positions itself as a means to transgress heteronormative paradigms through exposing or uncovering codes or symbols of queer presence written into or depicted by a given text. This is also a common fan practice, whereby typically two non-romantically involved male characters are paired in a same-sex relationship through slash fanfiction or by the visual representation of their 'romance' via graphic memes (gifs with text that fashions a non-normative narrative). This is explored in Chapters 5 and 6, where Emison (the portmanteau relationship name for Emily Fields and Alison DiLaurentis) is a central focus for *Pretty Little Liars* (2010-) fandom. These fans utilise different modes of validating their ship (short for relationship), but particularly employ GIFs, graphic memes and slash fanfiction to narrate this semi-canonical relationship.

Simultaneously, Queer Theory functions as a non-normative philosophy, political position and a radical methodology, whereby a queer reading of a text unearths the text's non-normative properties. What this means is that 'Queer, in this sense, comes to be understood as a deconstructive practice that is not undertaken by an already constituted subject, and does not, in turn, furnish the subject with a nameable identity' (Sullivan 2003, 50). While a queer reading may seek to destabilise the heteronormative structures within a given text, it may do this through highlighting a homoerotic subtext by bringing that subtext to the fore, such as occurs in Emison femslash. Moreover, Sullivan uses the term queer to destabilise fixed identity categories (male/female, heterosexual/homosexual, cisgender/non-binary) and heteronormative concepts (the nuclear family, masculinity, femininity, gender, sexuality). Eve Sedgwick frames this unnameable identity through seven axiomatic expressions:

---

[26] This figure is contestable and is only taken as a rough estimate. Fans may represent more or less of a given text's viewership. Further, it is not to say that all fans accept representations of the other, although many of the fan producers do (*AO3 Census* CentrumLumina, 2013).

Axiom 1: People are different from each other.
Axiom 2: The study of sexuality is not coextensive with the study of gender; correspondingly, antihomophobic inquiry is not coextensive with feminist inquiry. But we can't know in advance how they will be different.
Axiom 3: There can't be an a priori decision about how far it will make sense to conceptualise lesbian and gay male identities together. Or separately.
Axiom 4: The immemorial, seemingly ritualised debates on nature versus nurture take place against a very unstable background of tacit assumptions and fantasies about both nurture and nature.
Axiom 5: The historical search for a Great Paradigm Shift may obscure the present conditions of sexual identity.
Axiom 6: The relation of gay studies to debates on the literary canon is, and had best be, tortuous.
Axiom 7: The paths of allo-identification are likely to be strange and recalcitrant. So are the paths of auto-identification. (Sedgwick 1990, 22-59)

These axioms provide a deconstruction of the ways in which heteronormativity pigeonholes individuals into rigid binaries. Drawing off the 'traditional' gender/sexuality matrix of (male, female; heterosexual, homosexual), these axioms break down 'traditional' power structures, where the first position in the binary equates to power holder or dominant one and the second position is structured as the submissive or dominated one. Principal to this philosophy is that everyone is different, which, although simple, serves a radical purpose in questioning the role of non-normative or contra-straight identities (Doty 1993, xv) in a heteronormative society. Chapters 5 and 6 investigate this practice in (fem)slash consumption and creation practices, as I argue, (fem)slash functions as interpretations and rejections of the primacy of heteronormativity, particularly visible in the fans' allegiance to Emison and rejection of Pailey (Paige McCullers and Emily Fields portmanteau ship name).

While Sedgwick's work originates from a literary perspective, Alexander Doty employs queer theory to investigate how *media* visualises queerness innate to or subtextually located within a text or a film period. In other words, he utilises this radical philosophy/methodology to unearth queer potentialities hidden amongst a set of visualised symbols. Whereas Sedgwick positions the 'queerness' in written language codified by the author (whether this is conscious or not), Doty posits that:

…the queerness of mass culture develops in three areas: (1) influences during the production of texts; (2) historically specific cultural readings and uses of texts by self-

identified gays, lesbians, bisexuals, queers; and (3) adopting reception positions that can be considered "queer" in some way, regardless of a person's declared sexual and gender allegiances (Doty 1993, xi)

Each point provides a different 'queer potentiality', whereby it could be produced knowingly by LGBT+ creative personnel or through reading positions (whether they be context or reader specific). Reading positions also point to the interpretive strategies employed by fans to (fem)slash their source text or to scrutinise their source text for clues that would indicate a non-normative or non-binary gender category is being alluded to, particularly in the case of CeCe being both transgender and 'A' (see Chapter 7). The second and third points highlight the importance of queer methodologies (Jackman 2010), or methodologies that adopt alternative strategies to decode cultural texts. This is the central aim of this thesis (developed further in Chapter 3, which investigates fan studies methodologies), which adopts a reader-guided textual analysis (Ytre-Arne 2011; see Chapter 3) to investigate how fans negotiate these queer identity categories. Furthermore, as Queer Theory takes as its central tenet the erosion of power structures, particularly those surrounding sexual identity, employing a method (here, reader-guided textual analysis [Ytre-Arne 2011]) that illuminates the ways fans erode these heteronormative relationships is crucial where LGBT+ representation is fraught with stereotyped and often problematic characterisations.

Overt Representation

Alexander Doty (1993 and 2000) utilises Queer Theory to 'uncover' or 'queer' Hollywood film classics. Taking a similar approach, Harry Benshoff (1997) investigates how the monster figure in the horror genre represents queerness, but with a particular emphasis on how this figure represents a characterisation of gay men. Jeffrey P. Dennis (2006) explores a similar queer expression, not solely through film, but also through television and teen culture. These studies, arguably, exist because of Vito Russo's landmark book (and later documentary film) *The Celluloid Closet* (1981). Russo explores the tropes of sexuality as coded into character archetypes, costumes and narrative positionings. However, with the increase of out and proud Lesbian and Gay characters in both film and television, a new set of investigations must occur.[27] Much of the scholarship that focuses on fictional LGBT+

---

[27] Though I would love to say bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer/non-binary characters have been and are being represented with the same frequency as lesbian and gay identities are, there is still a huge absence

representation falls into two ostensible categories, which Glyn Davis and Gary Needham label as the 'evaluative paradigm' (Davis & Needham 2009, 2): praising or lambasting (Berridge 2012, 314).[28] As with most identity politics, realism (meaning verity) and diversity are often the two most central criteria that figure into this work. Although this remains an important part of addressing the one dimensional characterisations of LGBT+ identity categories in popular media, it exposes the tensions contained within the representational model. What this means is that a focus solely on positive or negative representations originates from an academic understanding of these characterisations and largely ignores how viewers negotiate these identities (Dhaenens et al 2008, 336). This is not to say that fighting for more diverse representations of LGBT+ characters is unnecessary; in fact, it is paramount to portraying the diversity within the LGBT+ community and provides a voice to marginalised identities that exist within multiple identity categories (i.e. race, gender, class); the discussion on homonormativity in the next section will address this further. Yet, instead of privileging the academic critique of these representations, a privileging of the ways viewers or in the case of this thesis fan negotiations are important to consider when assessing whether these identities represented are positive or negative.[29] For example, Darren Elliot-Smith (2012) questions the symbolic nature of the vampire in *True Blood* (2008-2014) and its historic associations to represent homosexuality and non-normative identities. He argues that:

> Interestingly, it is a human character - the black, gay, feminine, gender-troubling cook, Lafayette - who is a more 'truthful' portrayal of homosexuality in the Deep South. Lafayette flagrantly displays his true nature, representing an idealized gay masculinity that blurs gender boundaries and challenges stereotypes of black male machismo, whilst remaining a strong, individualistic character unafraid to stand up to bigots and homophobic abuse. (Elliot-Smith 2012, 150-1)

Although this assessment is rife with positivity, there is a bias injected into that reading that privileges an academic reading in regards to the positive portrayals of homosexuality. And while the character Lafayette ticks a number of diversity boxes, Elliot-Smith risks

---

of these types of identities represented within contemporary media – though these characters, particularly transgendered ones, are gaining representation, however slightly.

[28] 'Queer' in this sense is commonly employed by scholars that investigate gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex and other non-binary, non-normative or contra-straight identities (Doty 1993; Halberstam 2005).

[29] Although this is an important part of this thesis, the ways in which fans negotiate LGBT representations considers more than just fan assessments of these representations. It also considers how they are constructing these identity types in their fannish artefacts that speak to the way they view these non-normative and non-binary identity categories.

essentialising homosexual identity into one model that would not permit a multiplicity of queer (read transgressive) identities. His reading does the opposite of what he sets out to do, which is to critique the lack of diversity in representation; but, by him claiming this representation is more 'truthful', it qualifies what, in his eyes, is a positive media construction of gay male identity. This has wider implications for those LGBT+ individuals who do not fit this description. Furthermore, his reading ignores fan and viewer responses that would support or refute these claims, which is what this thesis seeks to address by adopting a reader-guided textual analysis (Ytre-Arne 2011) methodology (see Chapter 3) that permits a textual analysis of a given text through fan discourses and fan practices.

Conversely, owing to the underrepresentation in popular media of non-normative and non-binary identities, much of the fan production created 'corrects' this lack through (fem)slash consumption and creation (this is addressed in the next section on fanfiction, femslash and slash and investigated more thoroughly in Chapters 5 and 6). In other words, because gay and lesbian characters, and everyday gay and lesbians for that matter, have continuously been discouraged, unsupported and forced to remain in the closet, these fictional representations have allowed for a faction of fans to create and explore non-normative sexuality vicariously through similarly non-supported couplings by creating and consuming (fem)slash. While this is not to say that representations do not occur, because the scholarship outlined above does indeed address overt representations, the proportion of LGBT+ characters represented versus characters that fall into the majority demographic continues to be problematic (*GLAAD Network Responsibility Index* 2015). Just as LGBT+ people and characters have not historically been supported by society or the media (though this is steadfastly changing), alternative fan readings and fan production have been discredited and attacked by the industry and its producers (Jenkins 1992; Coppa 2006). Therefore, exploring how queer scholars have accounted for representation, representation's purposes and the positive/negative effects it has on media, society and culture must be interrogated. Investigating representation, not just from an academic perspective, is the primary concern of this thesis. By juxtaposing fan negotiations of these representations through their fan production, the thesis explores a more complex dynamic that balances a critique of the text and the ways in which fans negotiate those non-normative and non-binary identity representations. Thus, the case study chapters (5-7) and the contextual chapter (4) function to illustrate how fans negotiate these identities.

Lesbian and gay representations begin to appear in 1980s/early 1990s television, and are commonly featured in (melo)dramas (or soap operas). Ron Becker (2006) refers to the 1990s as the 'gay 90s', because this is a time where LGBT+ rights begin to be reframed as civil rights (78). Furthermore, Becker suggests that this occurs because the assimilationist faction within the LGBT+ community had begun to win over those who sought a radical change within society in order to decimate heteronormativity as a way 'of radically altering society by undoing the complex system of gendered relations and social institutions that privilege certain ways of living,' (44). Nikki Sullivan (2003) demarcates these groups into 'assimilationists' and 'liberationists', whereby 'the aim of assimilationist groups was (and still is) to be accepted into, and to become one with, mainstream culture,' (23). Further, 'the assumption was/is that tolerance can be achieved by making differences invisible, or at least secondary, in and through an essentialising, normalising emphasis on sameness,' (ibid). Conversely, 'for liberationists the imperative was to experience homosexuality as something positive in and through the creation of alternative values, beliefs, lifestyles, institutions, communities, and so on;' (29) and 'that in order to achieve sexual, and political freedom it was necessary to revolutionise society in and through the eradication of traditional notions of gender and sexuality and the kinds of institutions that informed them and were informed by them,' (31).[30] This reiterates the tension highlighted above, which positions positive representations as radical (liberationist) over what Elliot-Smith refers to as 'non-threating, bland and asexual' (2012, 147; read as assimilationist). Although it is important to consider the context out of which these LGBT+ representations arise, Becker, like Elliot-Smith, does not consider viewer or fan responses to these LGBT+ identities (Dhaenens et al 2008). Furthermore, to get a broader picture of the queer politics at play in popular media, it is important to address available public discourses surrounding these texts and the LGBT+ represented identities that are available through fan activity and fan production.

Pamela Demory and Christopher Pullen (2013) question what 'positive representations' actually mean for the viewer, as there is no consensus amongst queer scholars, viewers, and in this case fans, to determine what those ideal representations are (4). However, they do argue that 'an understanding of the Western romantic narrative tradition must be incomplete without an understanding of modern queer love' (8). Framing

---

[30] In the next subsection, I will explore how assimilationists have become viewed through the lens of 'homonormativity' (Duggan 2002).

representation around notions of love, as opposed to the physical attributes and characteristics (or arguably stereotypes), moves us beyond the gridlock of simple identity politics and towards a more impactful and meaningful discussion about LGBT+ depictions within media culture. This has particular resonance with the Emison shippers, as they argue that none of the relationships crafted for Emily truly suit her. This is important as shipping and the femslash they create demonstrate a rejection of concocted suitor-narratives, and is explored in more depth in the case study Chapters 5 and 6.

Many of the chapters in Demory and Pullen's edited collection *Queer Love in Film and Television* explore how this love is either presented through a heterosexual framework (Bradley 2013; Chan 2013) or is framed as a radical rejection of that framework (Brown & Westbrook 2013; Demory 2013). In fact, much of the scholarship centres on these two notions: the former read as an assimilationist strategy and the other positioned as the liberationist strategy. Frederik Dhaenens (2014) positions his work somewhere in between the two poles, suggesting that 'cultural resistances on television are not aimed at overthrowing the hegemonic order' (521). Rather, these representations of LGBT+ identity and their romance narratives have the potential to 'erode the order from within. They aim for social change, but they depend on the hegemonic order and its discursive practices to do so. Consequently, queer resistances on television destroy heteronormative discourse from within by corrupting or undermining it' (ibid). Evidently, according to Dhaenens, representation is simultaneously assimilationist and liberationist; they have the power to blend in and then wield their power to challenge heteronormativity from within, and thus the heterosexual matrix. Surfacing from this argument is the idea that representing LGBT+ identities on television challenges viewers' assumptions, but to represent them within a medium that narrowcasts towards a youthful, arguably mouldable demographic (teens, tweens and youthful-minded adults [Davis & Dickinson 2004; Ross & Stein 2008]) is a radical pursuit. Consequently, a programme that does not shy away from non-normative sexuality, that presents LGBT+ identity as 'normal' and that seeks out a female audience would have the power to shape and/or change rooted beliefs.[31] Louisa Stein's 'They Cavort, You Decide'

---

[31] Glyn Davis (2004) argues that 'there is a female sensitivity to issues of sexuality that men lack,' (132). Though more empirical research needs to be done in this area, there is seemingly an ostensible link between the two, especially as much of the Teen TV scholarship suggests these series have a predominately female audience (Davis and Dickinson 2003; Stein 2005 and 2015; Feasey 2006; Kearney 2007; Murray 2007; McCracken 2007; Ross & Stein 2008; Aslinger 2008) and have a proclivity for LGBT representation. Further to this point that will

(2005) focuses on how fans read queerness as an obvious recurrence throughout *The OC* (2004-2008) and *Smallville* (2001-2011). Stein claims that 'fans perceive themselves as part of a multi-dimensional process of cultural creation and communication, understanding the production and reception of fictional televisual texts […] as potentially imbricated in broader issues of culture and politics,' (20). This namely occurs through the fans' negotiations of and response to both the text and the industry out of which these texts arise. Stein points to the fact that fans claim the text has innate queerness to it and that the industry has begun to privilege LGBT+ representation. Though this departs from representation, it highlights the ways in which fans begin to negotiate gay and lesbian identity representations that have been fashioned through contemporary pop-cultural media discourses (13). These cultural discourses shape the way straight society and contra-straight society negotiate represented LGBT+ identities. In other words, LGBT+ identities carry certain expectations (i.e. stereotypes, archetypes, characterisations) when represented on television or upon meeting a queer individual 'in real life'.

The 'H' Word: Homonormativity

What has not been wholly considered by many queer theory scholars that deal in the politics of representation is the concept of homonormativity. This concept/term was coined by Lisa Duggan (2002) in 'The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism'. Duggan 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,' (178). Key to homonormativity is consumption, privatization of the self, and being 'anchored' in the dominant heteronormative community (179). In other words, LGBT+ individuals that assimilate do not necessarily challenge the status quo, they actually reinforce it by participating in neoliberal, heterosexual culture. Furthermore, those individuals that would assimilate are argued to be within the majority demographic and espouse heteronormative gender ideals: they are usually men and women that conform to gendered stereotypes and reinforce masculinity and femininity within the LGBT+ culture. While Duggan locates this as an economic driving

---

be expanded in the fan fiction studies section is that the primary (fem)slash authors and readers are generally female (Hellekson & Busse 2006; Coppa 2006; *AO3 Census* CentrumLumina, 2013).

force that forces LGBT+ individuals to assimilate or else they will be excluded from the mainstream, this pattern is emerging on the large and small screen alike (Elliott-Smith 2012 and 2014). Therefore, to assess the heightened presence of LGBT+ characters in mainstream and primetime television, a consideration of the homonormative ought to be considered as it has the potential to reinforce issues of race, ethnicity, class and gender.[32] Further, it reframes the 'evaluative paradigm' (Davis & Needham 2009, 2) explored in the previous subsection, particularly in that it foregrounds white, middle-class, gay, male identities over people of colour, those from different classes and non-binary gender identities (Elliott-Smith 2012 and 2014; Herman 2013; Ng 2013; Britt 2014).

Privileging these specific gay male identities over, say, an asexual, gender-queer woman-of-colour speaks to the contemporary cultural landscape that is middle-class America. Moreover, it not only underrepresents these alternative identities, but positions them within the lower-classes (as they would fall in the secondary binary position – a suggestion of inferiority inferred from the heterosexual matrix), and therefore outside of the primary purchasing-power demographic. In other words, those represented identities (specifically white, straight-acting, gender conforming gay men and lesbian women), it can be argued, fall into the demographic networks and studios are after (Ng 2013, 273). Eve Ng (2013) speaks to this concern in her article on 'gaystreaming' and the LOGO cable network: 'the discourses around gaystreaming also feed into constructions of homonormativity that are enabled by the concomitant marginalization of other queer bodies and practices,' (270). Ng investigates this through an industry analysis, utilising LOGO executive interviews and memoranda to highlight the type of content worthy of gaining a more general audience, but also content that appeals to a broader gay male and heterosexual female viewership (259). Though Ng figures 'gaystreaming' in relation to homonormativity, for the purposes of this thesis, I propose that 'gaystreaming' and homonormativity are coterminous and interchangeable.

If LOGO used 'gaystreaming' to downplay non-conforming queer identities in the programmes aired to invite more viewers (ibid), the current teen-oriented networks ABC Family, The CW and MTV (who is the parent company for LOGO) are employing LGBT+ representations to 'gaystream' mainstream content. This has a particular impact for this

---

[32] While not a primary consideration of this thesis, highlighting the damaging nature of homonormativity and how it affects minority identities within an already-marginalised community.

thesis as *Pretty Little Liars* has been voted one of the best shows for LGBT+ representation by GLAAD (*GLAAD Network Responsibility Index* 2010-2015), has a pool of LGB creative personnel (I. Marlene King, executive producer; Oliver Goldstick, executive producer; Norman Buckley, Director) and has a devoted Emison fanbase.[33] Therefore, questioning the ways in which lesbian characters are represented in terms of homonormativity does not ignore issues of positivity and negativity, rather it clusters them together to give a better understanding of the 'accepted' or 'preferred' portrayals. This would speak to how the fans reject certain, potential romantic partners constructed for Emily and the ways in which fans renegotiate the text to fashion or match Alison with Emily. This is the primary concern for Chapters 4 through 6, which explore (fem)slash fiction; hashtags and 'fan talk' (Fiske 1992); and memes, gifs, and graphic memes through the lens of same-sex shipping.

In spite of the fact that little work on homonormative, visually-mediated LGBT+ representation exists,[34] the scholarship that does cover this focuses on television, and particularly on those shows that are arguably classed as female-oriented (melodrama [Klinger 1994], soap-opera [Geraghty 1991; Thomas 2002], and gothic [Wheatley 2006; Jowett and Abbott 2013]). Darren Elliott-Smith (2012) tackles the apparent homonormativity embedded within the discourses surrounding vampires in *True Blood* (2008-2014, HBO), their coming-out-of-the-coffin narratives and their fight for acceptance in the fictional small Louisiana town Bon Temps (aka Good Time). Elliott-Smith looks at the disjuncture between Lafayette (at-times gender-queer, gay male person-of-colour) and the nominally white, middle-class vampires (coded 'gaystreamed') that dominate this televisual landscape. He argues that 'the assimilation of the homosexual (vampire) into mainstream culture demands abstinence from transgressive sexuality and the adoption of a homonormativity where gay masculinity (vampirism) is rendered non-threatening, bland and asexual,' (147). Further, this highlights the apparent 'hypocrisies within minority groups, where acceptance into the mainstream can either cause further divisions (subcultural rejection) or complete invisibility (assimilation or denial),' (150). This paradox supports the

---

[33] GLAAD is the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation. They are a non-profit organisation and have a particular interest in mediated representations of LGBT identities. Each year they release a Network Responsibility Index that 'grades' the major American broadcast networks ABC, NBC, CBS, FOX and The CW and certain key narrowcast networks, such as MTV and ABC Family. It marks them on types of identities, positive/negative, diversity, air-time, protagonist/supporting/guest role.

[34] I use visually-mediated, because there is a small body of work that explores homonormativity in children's and young adult literature.

earlier argument that homonormativity essentialises contra-straight identity categories into a binary of mainstreaming ('gaystreaming'): assimilate/liberate. Moreover, not only does it *not* disrupt, fracture and destroy heteronormativity, it has the potential *to fracture* contra-straight identities into a seemingly homonormative matrix {gay, lesbian and bisexual/asexual, pansexual, polyamorous; cisgender/trans- or gender-queer; sexual/asexual} that could potentially sustain and reinforce heteronormativity.[35] Elliott-Smith (2014) goes on to clarify that:

> Queer Gothic soaps appropriate both horror film and melodramatic conventions to foreground gay men's anxieties that encourage a homonormative aping of heterosexual culture - which, in turn, feeds further anxieties surrounding the cultural conflation of gay masculinity with a shameful femininity. These shows not only demonstrate a trend of masculine performance, but a Gothic layering of gender *and* genre as a method of masking feminine association. (97)

Reinforced in this claim are three salient points: encouraged, idealised masculinity; performance; and issues of gender and genre. What is seemingly left out of the literature on homonormativity is how lesbian women perform/enact homonormativity similarly to the ways gay men do; thus, I expand idealised masculinity to include idealised *figurations of masculinity and femininity*. Owing to the fact that gender is performative and, by extension, so are masculinity and femininity (Butler 2004), the genres through which LGBT+ identity has been expressed are performative genres. In other words, the genres that would normally privilege representing fictional LGBT+ characters, such as Teen TV, mystery/horror/fantasy TV, soap opera and the gothic melodrama all invite a wider female viewership (Botting 1996; Benshoff 1997 and 1998; Baym 1998; Thomas 2002; Davis 2004; Davis & Dickinson 2004; Hills 2004; Osgerby 2004a, 2004b; Wee 2004 and 2008; Ross 2004; Feasey 2006; Wheatley 2006; Kearney 2007; Murray 2007; McCracken 2007; Ross & Stein 2008; Jowett & Abbott 2013).

In the next section, I move on to an exploration of genre, particularly an exploration of teen TV. Because teen TV is a genre rife with popular media representations of LGBT+ identity within these texts, issues surrounding these representations as highlighted above will continue to be foregrounded in this discussion of teen TV as a generic category.

---

[35] A note on the homosexual matrix: I have positioned these binaries into three categories: sexual orientation, gender, and sexuality. The primary position is the 'accepted' identity, though it is arguable where bisexuality fits within this matrix; and the secondary position is the unacceptable/unaccepted/unassimilated identity formation.

Moreover, as this thesis takes as its central concern the ways in which fans negotiate these identity representations through fan production and practices of consumption, consideration will continue to be given to the disconnect between audience based research and, here, genre focused research. This links to the final two sections explicitly discussing modes of fan production, their relevance to fandom and where those fannish products exist (namely on social media and the internet). However, before I can move on to investigate these areas, I wish to investigate the prominent genres explored by this thesis and its fans.

Teen TV Is Totally a Thing!

Teen Television is hugely under researched, with only two prominent academic texts in circulation: *Teen TV* (2004) and *Teen Television* (2008). Both of these are edited collections, providing short chapters from a variety of scholars, and cover a range of topics including genre, fandom, gender, sexuality and history. Glyn Davis and Kay Dickinson (2004) provide a similar report in an attempt to 'survey' the available literature, also noting that the only work is in edited collections and usually on specific 'cult' programmes (4), namely *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003, The WB and UPN). Sharon Ross and Louisa Ellen Stein (2008) highlight that same lack Davis and Dickinson identified four years prior, arguing that the considerable work done on teen has emphasised film over television (9). Further, though there exists 'relevant literature on children's media and children's TV, Teen TV remains largely unstudied – the one clear exception being Glyn Davis and Kay Dickinson, eds., *Teen TV: Genre, Consumption and Identity*' (ibid). Both works attempt to define Teen TV in terms of its socio-cultural, historical, industrial and textual features, working through issues of audience, content, generic hybridity, and identity formation (i.e. 'coming of age' stories, insider/outsider social status, gender, sexuality, race). Though Davis and Dickinson (2004) emphasise that Teen TV should be considered in terms of its audience's youthful sensibility (10-12), Ross and Stein (2008) highlight that teen could be a collection of genres that recognise this youthful sensibility, but borders both low-brow and elite genres; they also indicate that it could be defined in a similar fashion as cult (10).

Matt Hills (2004) makes an identical argument in his chapter '*Dawson's Creek*: "Quality Teen TV" and "Mainstream Cult"' (in *Teen TV*), claiming that, because Teen TV generally has fans, it therefore should be read as a mainstream version of cult TV. This logic

works seemingly to *legitimate* Teen TV, calling up questions of gendered programming and, when defined through cult, Teen TV becomes an acceptable genre to watch, because it would then naturally fall within the 'cult of masculinity' (Read 2003) or 'the masculinity of cult' (Hollows 2003). Not only is this problematic in that it de-feminises texts, but it also binarises fandom into masculine=cult/feminine=soap, where the first position is acceptable and the second is socially unacceptable. By doing this, it devalues arguably female-oriented genres, which many LGBT+ and female viewers consume, according to LOGO (Ng 2013; Elliott-Smith 2014). Moreover, this has implications for *Pretty Little Liars* as it has been discursively attributed to Teen TV (Bingham 2014); and thus, has major implications for this thesis. Furthermore, when considering the heterosexual matrix proposed by queer theory, teen TV, and therefore *Pretty Little Liars*, are seemingly marginalised in the same way the LGBT+ community, women and people of colour have historically been othered; the same can also be said for fans (Jenkins 1992; Tulloch & Jenkins 1995; Harris 1998; Hills 2002 and 2005a; Brooker 2001, 2002 and 2005; Sandvoss 2005; Hellekson & Busse 2006; Zubernis & Larsen 2012).

Teen TV, Sexuality and Gender

Teen TV has a certain proclivity for representing non-normative identities, inclusive of LGBT+ identities, but more broadly speaking, also 'fringe' identities, such as nerds, geeks, the obese, the disabled, ethnic and racial minorities, and women. Davis and Dickinson (2004) locate this in the 'teen condition' itself (11),[36] while Davis (2004) emphasises that these representations of teen and LGBT+ can be viewed as analogous (130). Similarly, Ross and Stein (2008) posit that:

> Perhaps because Teen TV probes such a wide range of culturally weighted categorical divides, and also because of its recurring engagement with questions of identity and self-discovery, some of the programs explored here and the meta-texts surrounding them go beyond addressing specific teen issues to negotiate questions about class, race, gender, and sexuality. (9)

---

[36] The feelings of exclusion and the act of othering has been argued to be a component of the teen identity. This means that the 'teen condition' (Dickinson & Davis 2004, 11) can be seen to be a 'by-product of various social practices which designate "the teen" as a marginalized group in its own right" (ibid.).

One could attribute this argument that teen as a marginalised identity is a crucial factor behind the importance of teen TV for its youthful audiences and brings to the fore the most central and recurring narrative evident within teen TV: the 'coming of age' narrative. 'Coming of age' narratives have been largely ignored by teen TV scholars, teen film scholars and teen culture scholars. This is a glaring gap that is commonly referenced in the literature on young adult fiction, arguably teen TV's twin sibling (Hunt 1996; Jenkins 1998; Owen 2003; Stephens 2007). Furthermore, many of these references link directly to those stories that tell LGBT+ narratives, particularly as they pertain to the 'coming out' process. Susan Berridge (2012) toes the 'coming of age' line without explicitly stating Teen TV portrays these narratives through the lens of 'coming out' narratives. She argues that these 'coming out' narratives in Teen TV serve as 'narrative end points for queer characters,' (315), a similar position Dennis Allen (1995) makes, arguing that 'the revelation of homosexuality is the *only* story that can be told about it,' (610).

These 'coming out' stories, claims Berridge, 'are almost always preceded by storylines involving homophobic abuse,' (315). However, while this remains nominally true, I would argue that homophobic abuse storylines now function as a catalyst for the 'coming out' process that gives contemporary LGBT+ characters agency to function, not only as peripheral or supporting characters, but also as protagonists. *Pretty Little Liars* privileges Emily Fields, her lesbian identity, her romantic encounters and the issues the surround being 'out' in high school and society. Moreover, shows such as *Skins* (2007-2013), *Glee* (2009-2015), *American Horror Story: Asylum* (2012), *American Horror Story: Freakshow* (2014), *Faking It!* (2014-), *The Fosters* (2014-) and *Scream* (2015-) follow this same trajectory. Therefore, it is no longer simply: teen comes out of the closet, their straight friends come to terms with this non-normative identity, and then the LGBT+ teen departs. Now, they function principally within the narrative, provoking new non-normative storylines that are central to a programme's overarching narrative. Furthermore, these characters were once isolated to subscription only channels, such as HBO and Showtime; now they appear regularly on the primetime major American networks, such as The CW, ABC, CBS, FOX and NBC.

Fanfiction and (Fem)Slash as Queer Fan Production

Fan fiction studies originated out of fan studies as an attempt to narrow the scope of the diverse field of fan studies (Hellekson & Busse 2014), meaning that a fan studies scholar could investigate a broad range of topics with little means to categorise this research into one field. Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse (2006) did not form their edited collection with this intent; however, with the proliferation of scholarly work in the field of fan fiction studies, they created it as its own standalone field with their later work *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader* (2014). Their seminal text *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet* (2006) aided in forming the direction future research would take. While their edited collection was not the first consideration of fan fiction (see Lamb & Veith 1986; Jenkins 1992 and 2006; Jenkins & Tulloch 1995; Penley 1997; Green et al 1998; Jones 2002; Salmon & Symons 2004; Pugh 2005), they foregrounded it further within the field of fan studies specifically and within academia more broadly. Although a consideration of fan fiction as a mode of fan production will be considered in this section of the literature review, the primary focus of this thesis is on the ways in which fans negotiate non-normative sexualities and non-binary gender identities. Therefore, investigating the way fan fiction has been defined is of initial concern, but of primary focus is the literature that engages explicitly with femslash and slash fiction.

Defining Fanfiction and (Fem)slash

Fanfiction has been defined in a manner that is at first glance broad, yet upon closer consideration is increasingly reductive. Hellekson and Busse (2014) define fan fiction as 'the imaginative interpolations and extrapolations by fans of existing literary worlds' (5-6). Seemingly then, this definition allocates a space for all fan authored/created 'texts' to fall under the heading 'fan fiction'. However, they go on to clarify that 'a wide variety of texts may be included or excluded, depending on how one defines the term' (6). Further, they claim in their introduction to *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader* that 'there are a diversity of forms that fan works can take,' but that 'this volume will focus primarily on fan fiction' (5); they qualify their definition of fanfiction as 'derivative amateur writing' (ibid). While this literature review highlights the ways fan fiction studies scholars have defined fanfiction as a

category and as a form of fan production, Chapter 6 explores the limiting nature of that definition, pointing to contemporary modes of fan production such as GIFs/GIF sets to re-author narratives or 'episode fix' canon, for example.[37]

Although Hellekson and Busse (2014) define fanfiction as 'derivative amateur writing' (5), many scholars turn to the unlimited range of categories that comprise fanfiction authoring. In other words, they explore the multiplicity of genres, subgenres and devices employed by fan authors to create a malleable definition of fanfiction, and by extension (fem)slash fiction (see Hellekson & Busse 2006; Coppa 2006; Duffett 2013). The primary genres are: a) *genfic* or 'general interest fiction' (Duffett 2013, 170) that focuses on canon over shipping; b) *hetfic* or heterosexual fiction, which privileges heterosexual coupling and sexuality; and c) *femslash* and *slash* or fanfiction that deals in same-sex shipping, the construction and negotiation of those identities to play out safely same-sex sexuality. What arises out of this fan fiction studies survey is that these scholars tend to investigate the *why* element of fanfiction creation and consumption, while they oftentimes ignore or disconnect the links between the fan, their fan works and the fans' source text. While these genres often stand alone, fanfiction authors utilise varying plot devices to create subgenres of these fan works. What this means is that the fan authors use devices such as '*hurt/comfort*' or stories that 'revolve around a character being injured and another character comforting him' (Hellekson & Busse 2006, 10-11) to create further subgenres of fanfiction. Although Hellekson and Busse define this subgenre or plot device as broad and moveable (can feature in *hetfic* or *slash*), they use the gender pronoun 'him' as this is often a plot device that features with frequency in slash fiction. The distinction between femslash and slash is gender based, where slash revolves around male-male shipping and femslash female-female shipping. Moreover, slash occurs more frequently than femslash and slash is the number one fanfiction genre appearing on ArchiveofOurOwn (*AO3 – AO3 Census* CentrumLumina, 2013).[38] Even though the *AO3 Census* focuses on one fanfiction archive, CentrumLumina's fan authored study operates to represent the way fandoms and fanfiction work presently.

---

[37] This section of the literature review intends to portray how fan fiction studies ignores the relationship between the fan author and their negotiation of LGBT identities represented within their source text.

[38] The *AO3 Census* is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

Approaches to (Fem)Slash

There are three primary modes of inquiry regarding slash fiction: 1) community formation,
2) sociological and psychological implications for the consumption and creation of slash
fiction and 3) slash (and fanfiction more broadly) as a genre (Stasi 2006, 116-119).[39] The first
and second approaches inflect one another, indicating that community formation
surrounding fanfiction warrants sociological and psychological investigations into *how* and
why communities form around this transgressive fan reading practice of shipping two
ostensibly heterosexual male characters into a homosexual-esque relationship (Jung 2004).
Furthermore, because this is predominantly a female mode of fannish engagement (Russ
1985; Lamb & Veith 1986; Bacon-Smith 1992; Jenkins 1992 and 1995; Penley 1997; Jones
2002; Salmon & Symons 2004; Stein 2005 and 2015; Hellekson & Busse 2006 and 2014;
Driscoll 2006; Woledge 2006; Willis 2006; Lackner et al 2006; Lothian et al 2007), it is of
considerable interest to scholars why female fans author and read slash fiction that privilege
male homosexual relationships over heterosexual and lesbian ones. Absent from this
discussion is the role gay male fans play in slash creation and consumption (Davies 2005;
Brennan 2013). Considering the implications regarding gay male as a marginalised identity,
it is important to question why scholarship has not considered the appropriation of that
identity for female uses and gratifications and the impact this would have on the
negotiations of gay male identity specifically, but LGBT+ identity more broadly (this is
explored in more depth in Chapter 5).[40] In other words, female fanfiction authors create
stories that revolve around gay male sexuality, yet little regard has been given to the
potential impact this could have on the way these fans view and negotiate gay male
identity.

  While fan community formation and the socio- and psychological implications have
been privileged in this area, the final primary mode of inquiry questions the role these texts

---

[39] Although femslash and slash are two sides of the same coin, there is a larger volume of scholarly research
surrounding slash fiction over femslash fiction. Therefore, when referring to these two categories of fan
production, I use slash over femslash owing to this proliferation of research. This is not to say I ignore the
research conducted on femslash in this literature review; rather, I engage with the most prominent works seen
to represent both modes of fan production in spite of the fact there is a dearth of available academic inquiry
available.

[40] There is a glaring tension between this practice as being transgressive or appropriative, whereby the
transgressive practice could improve perceptions of LGBT individuals; however, as an appropriative practice, it
runs the risk of perpetuating negative stereotypes, particularly as they pertain to gay male identity when
considering the copious amounts of male-male slash available to the public.

play in terms of their literary status. In other words, consideration has been given to fanfiction and slash as subgenres of the romance tradition (Driscoll 2006 and Woledge 2006), their functions as 'archontic texts' (Derecho 2006), their ability to disclose queer narratives innate to a text (Jones 2002), their 'palimpsest' nature (Stasi 2006) and their function as female/queer pornography (Russ 1985; Driscoll 2006; Lackner et al; Brennan 2014a and 2014b). These varying modes of inquiry illustrate how interdisciplinary fan fiction studies (and fan studies, for that matter) is. Consideration, however, yet to be attributed to (fem)slash fiction is its role for fans to negotiate non-normative sexual and non-binary gender identities as represented in a given source text (or the primary text(s) fans engage with, such as *Pretty Little Liars*, the primary case study for this thesis).

The tradition of slash fiction as a discipline and as a fan practice points to a recurring trend that its primary consumers are female and they predominantly portray how 'men come to terms with, and act out their need for, sexual and meaningful encounters with other men,' (Davies 2008, 198). Further to these trends, the notion exists that women primarily consume and create these slash fictions in order to foster equitable relationships (Green et al 1998; Lothian et al 2007). What this means is that female slashers (as they are known) dramatise relationships where the power dynamics are no longer at play (Jenkins 1992; Coppa 2006) or can be considered to be neutralised or subverted. Alexis Lothian et al (2007) also note that these women perhaps portray these male-male relationships in slash fiction as there do not exist enough 'female role models […] available in media texts, or that, if they are [represented], their over determination for female viewers complicates or even prohibits identification,' (106). Sara Gwenllian Jones (2002) proposes an alternative reading of slash and femslash creation, arguing that fans are simply uncovering 'latent textual elements,' (82). Therefore, issues of identification arise primarily in that female characters are portrayed less often and with less impact, yet these female slashers are reading these texts queerly. What this means is that those female fans who author and consume slash texts are ostensibly at odds with representation on all fronts, owing to the lack of positive female representation and the masking of non-normative identity within the subtextual layer of a text; keeping non-normative identities within the subtext is also a way of not representing these identities (Dhaenens et al 2008), which reiterates why slashers slash a text in the first place.

Central to this body of work are dominant methodologies that emerge and re-emerge in the research. The primary methodology employed in early fan fiction studies is ethnography, which uses an immersive approach, whereby the scholar observes fan cultures and participates in these fan practices in order to gain a greater understanding into the ways fandom operates (Jenkins 1992; Bacon-Smith 1992). With the arrival of the Internet, scholars and fans moved online, initially populating fora and BBS (bulletin board systems), such as Use-net (Baym 1998 and 2000). These scholars adopted a netnographic approach (Kozinets 2010) to continue to immerse themselves in these new fan spaces; although they still labelled it as an ethnography of some sort. As fans moved online, so did their practices, which saw the creation of *Fanfiction.net* (*FF.net*) and other fanfiction archival websites (Kirby-Diaz 2009). However, genre and textual analyses continued to play a role throughout this shift from physical spaces to virtual ones, as evidenced above. These methodologies continue to dominate the wider field of fan studies and the narrower field of fan fiction studies; yet, these methods tend to privilege the socio- or psychological implications, thus ignoring the text or only privileging the fan authored text over the source text. While the function of methodology will be given greater consideration in the methodology chapter of this thesis (Chapter 3), it is important to understand *how* these modes of inquiry perpetuate certain kinds of readings of fandom, fans and their fan practices in current scholarship.

This section has provided an overview of the way fanfiction has been defined and the way it has been studied. While the section briefly explored how these communities have moved from physical spaces (such as conventions and fan meet ups – Brooker 2002) to virtual ones, the next section explores those virtual fan spaces in more detail. Because a large portion of every day fan activity now occurs online (Kirby-Diaz 2009; Stein 2015), it is integral to understand the roles and functions these digital spaces play in fans' everyday lives, how these digital fan communities shape their fan practices and fannish engagements with the texts (see Chapters 4 and 6) and how they come to use these spaces to explore non-normative and non-binary identities whether that be represented through their source text or in their own lives.

Digital Fan Spaces as Queer Spaces

Fan studies as a discipline has considered a wide reaching range of fan practices, community formation and fan self-identification. Key works such as Henry Jenkins' *Textual Poachers* (1992) and Matt Hills' *Fan Cultures* (2002) highlight modes of engagement, community building and what it means to be a fan under different technological contexts. Where Jenkins devoted his early research to visiting physical fan spaces (such as conventions and fan meet ups), Hills built upon Jenkins' work and the work it inspired to identify that fandom was moving with rapidity online. In spite of this, prominent works such as Will Brooker's *Using the Force* (2002) utilised the Internet to locate fans to meet up IRL ('in real life'), as opposed to employing a netnographic approach (Kozinets 2010) that would solely engage with fandom online. In other words, the Internet was just a tool to recruit respondents rather than considering its ability to foster community. Further, as Hellekson and Busse (2006) note, much of the scholarship in the late 1990s and early 2000s continued to address 'zine culture' (13), which is why their edited collection focused 'primarily on online culture' to point to how 'technological tools affect not only dissemination and reception, but also production, interaction, and even demographics,' (ibid). Rhiannon Bury et al (2013) point to an age division as a demarcator for how fans participate in online and offline fandom, suggesting that older fans stick to 'classic' Internet features (listservs, emails, fora), whereas the younger generations readily use social media (*Tumblr*, *Twitter* and *Facebook*) to participate in fandom (300-304). But again, their academic inquiry into fandom reiterates that even fans of an older demographic utilise these online tools for community building and exchange; this is to emphasise fans' heightened usage of online spaces as opposed to physical ones. Current scholarship, however, has almost moved completely away from investigating offline fan practices, particularly in the field of fan fiction studies as scholars such as Lothian et al (2007) assume that fanfiction exchanges primarily occur online (Chin 2010; Duffett 2013; Brennan 2014a and 2014b; Hillman et al 2014).

As evidenced in the previous section, slash fiction is the most prevalent type of fanfiction and is created and consumed primarily by female fans (Lothian et al 2007). However, in defining slash fiction as a fan practice Alexis Lothian et al (2007) indicate that 'slash fandom's discursive sphere has been termed *queer female space* by some who inhabit and study it,' but also that it is an engagement of 'online media fandom,' (103). Significantly

then, slash fandom is the most prevalent activity for female fans (Hillman et al 2014) and it is also a '*queer female space*' (Lothian et al 2007, 103). I reiterate this point to highlight how online fandom, the spaces on which these fan communities exist and their specific fan practices are being coded as queer. In other words, creating and consuming slash fiction occurs within an online context and is primarily driven by 'queer' motivations; this then highlights that these online fan spaces may be viewed as queer spaces themselves. Furthermore, in spite of the dearth of sociological inquiries into spaces such as *Tumblr*, the research undertaken further illuminates the predominance of queer (read as both transgressive and non-normative) culture existing on these spaces (Bell 2013; Fink & Miller 2014).

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter focuses explicitly on the methodology employed throughout this thesis, detailing the multiplicity of approaches utilised to collect data and analyse that data. While this chapter outlines the thesis' primary method for data collection and analysis, it does so through an inquiry into the debates surrounding oft-employed research methods central to Fan Studies and Fan Fiction Studies. In other words, an interrogation into the established ethnographic and netnographic (Kozinets 2010) approaches employed by Fan Studies and Fan Fiction Studies scholars (Evans and Stassi 2014) illustrates the need for new methodological approaches, particularly as much of the current scholarship excludes inquiries into the fan's source text and the relationship between that source text and fan production. Moreover, the chapter explores the debates surrounding 'internet based research' (Convery & Cox 2012) ethics as they influence Fan Studies and Fan Fiction Studies methodologies that focus on online contexts. Therefore, the chapter is divided into three sections that highlight these debates in Fan Studies and Fan Fiction Studies methodologies and the ethical issues that arise from online methodological approaches. The first section explores a reliance on ethnography and netnography (Kozinets 2010), why these methodologies gained prominence within the field of Fan Studies and why they prove useful as a method for data collection but require alternative analytical methods to approach both the fans and their source text in the data analysis phase. The second section outlines how this thesis employs a multi-sited (Marcus 1998) netnographic method to collect pertinent data, but employs a reader-guided textual analysis (Ytre-Arne 2011) to analyse the data. The final section turns to the debates surrounding online ethics to highlight where this thesis is situated in relation to those debates.

Ethnography and Netnography's Hold on Fan Studies

Henry Jenkins' (1992) *Textual Poachers* arguably initiated the field of Fan Studies, directing the channels of investigation towards fan community formation and their cultural practices. He also arguably instigated a reliance on ethnography in early Fan Studies scholarship by beginning his landmark work with the following opening sentence to his introduction: '*Textual Poachers* offers an ethnographic account of a particular group of media fans, its

social institutions and cultural practices, and its troubled relationship to the mass media and consumer capitalism' (1). Ultimately, Jenkins privileged these areas of inquiry 'to do away with the fan-as-obsessed-weirdo stereotype' (Hills 2002, 9). That is, to move beyond these stereotypes, Jenkins immersed himself within multiple fan cultures in a hope to de-pathologise fans in order to counter historically held beliefs surrounding fan identity. By immersing himself, Jenkins exposed to the academic community that fans engage with these texts critically, drawing similarities between fandom and the academy, thereby opening an investigative door that would reframe the ways in which academics view fans. Conversely, Camille Bacon-Smith's (1992) *Enterprising Women* employed ethnography in a similar fashion, yet it did not seek out to de-pathologise fans in the same way Jenkins' work did. Rather, it maintained the tradition of 'entering into the domains of Others' (Madison 2012, 108); therefore, Bacon-Smith maintained an objective distance between herself and her research subjects.[41] While Jenkins' and Bacon-Smith's works (evidenced by their subject positioning, their methodological approaches and their research philosophies regarding fan identity) are seemingly at odds with one another, they both rely on ethnography, a methodology employed traditionally by anthropologists (Moores 2000, 3-5), to "uncover" or "expose" a 'recognizable subculture' (Jenkins 1992, 2) of fans. Yet, methodology is not just a set of methods, it also 'reflects the set of ideas, concepts, theories and approaches that any researcher necessarily takes with them when engaging in research' (Evans & Stasi 2014, 8-9). Thus, when Jenkins labels *Textual Poachers* an ethnographic study, he situates fans and fandom outside of the academy, an area of media research that had yet to be investigated. By adopting ethnography as not just a set of tools to collect and analyse data, he brings forth a culture that has been pushed to the side owing to their negative fan stereotypes. It is precisely through adopting ethnography that Jenkins seeks to un-Other the othered Fan; this is methodologically intended so as to be able to theorise fannish identities, their communities and their fan practices. But, it was also a way to allow fans' own voices to be heard, which had, until *Textual Poachers*' publication, not been otherwise possible.

Ethnography refers to 'a particular method or set of methods' that 'involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives' (Hammersley & Atkinson 1993, 1). This is done in order to shed light on socio-cultural phenomena that occur

---

[41] This means that Bacon-Smith maintained an objective, researcher persona in spite of her immersion within this fanfiction community.

in a given society (Hammersley & Atkinson 1993; Marcus 1998; Madison 2012). Integral to this method is *participant observation*, which refers to what Hammersley and Atkinson note may occur 'overtly or covertly' (1). *Participant observation* is the practice whereby the researcher observes a given culture in their own environment. For Jenkins (1992) and Bacon-Smith (1992), they opted to observe these fans 'overtly', with Jenkins positioning himself as both an insider fan and as an academic researcher (or outsider). By opting to participate as both insider and researcher, Jenkins paved the way for an identity category that Matt Hills (2002) labels 'scholar-fan' and 'fan-scholar' (see Chapter 1).[42] This identity category has huge implications for research undertaken in the field of Fan Studies and Fan Fiction Studies as it influences the way ethnography is employed. Specifically, adopting this identity category ostensibly blurs the boundaries between the research subject and the researcher (Phillips 2010). Personal motivations then inflect how the researcher approaches their subject and the ways in which they investigate their (here) fandoms. This methodological approach indicates that fans exist not solely in the 'domains of the Others' (Madison 2012, 108), they also exist alongside ethnographers, thereby challenging the way ethnography has historically been employed. This is evident particularly in the works of Constance Penley (1997), Nancy Baym (1998 and 2000), Will Brooker (2002 and 2005), Jeanette Monaco (2010), Lynn Zubernis and Katherine Larsen (2011), and Tom Phillips' Doctoral Thesis (2014), for example.

While ethnography proves to be the most employed methodology for Fan Studies researchers in early Fan Studies, with the rise of the Internet, fandom seemingly begins to move online (Baym 2000).[43] This complicates the role of ethnography for Fan Studies scholars as virtual communities and virtual fan identities have become the central focus in ethnographic studies. The role of the internet for some means that a new set of tools are required to adapt ethnographic research, particularly as interviews and questionnaires are the most frequently used modes of data collection for ethnography (Madison 2012). Robert Kozinets (2010) illuminates the distinctions between ethnographies as they are employed in real life versus the way ethnography is used in a digital or online context. He argues that

---

[42] At this juncture, sociological researchers employing ethnographic methodologies had historically been outside observers looking in.

[43] I purposefully avoid the notion that there are 'waves' of fandom as this could be potentially reductive for early, foundational scholarship, thereby classing it as 'no longer of importance' and/or infantile, pedestrian and sophomoric.

netnography (Kozinets 2010) is a more suitable term for this kind of research as 'online social experiences are significantly different from face-to-face social experiences, and the experience of ethnographically studying them is meaningfully different' (5). Therefore, when Christine Hine (2000) identifies her methodology as a 'virtual ethnography', she is inferring, argues Kozinets (2010), that these experiences are lesser than the ones that occur in real life (62).

Even though netnography (Kozinets 2010) adopts many of the same methodological tools as employed by ethnography, such as *participant observation*, questionnaires and surveys, Kozinets' distinction between the virtual and the real warrant netnography as a wholly digital and distinct methodology. Thus, many Fan Studies and Fan Fiction Studies scholars have adopted this methodology in consideration of their virtual fan communities. And while they continue to employ surveys, interviews and *participant observation* methods, these methods now employ digital technology, such as *Skype*, *Google Forms* or *Twitter* observational applications, but it is particularly evident when considering Web 2.0 technologies (Hills 2013). For example, interviews often occur via Skype, FaceTime or through *Facebook* Video Messenger, whereas group interviews take place through Google Hangouts or occasionally through *Skype*. Therefore, I argue that netnography (Kozinets 2010) is not necessarily a new methodology, it is a methodology that has evolved out of ethnography rather than being 'meaningfully different' (5).[44]

'Desperately Seeking Methodology': Crying out for a Fan Studies Methodology

What stands out considerably is the notion that, save for Jenkins (1992), Fan Studies has not entered into the methodology conversation and relies on interdisciplinary methodologies to achieve its results. This glaring gap is illuminated by Adrienne Evans and Mafalda Stasi (2014), who identify that 'explicit reference to methodology or research methods was often missing' (5) from Fan Studies and Fan Fiction Studies scholarship. While Evans and Stasi find no clear or overt discussion of methodology in Fan Studies scholarship, they do point to the concept of 'culturalism' as a key motivating factor in perpetuating ethnography within the field of Fan Studies (9). They define 'culturalism' in terms of a methodological approach,

---

[44] Although I argue that netnography has evolved out of ethnography, ethnography continues to be employed in real life settings and thus warrants this distinction from netnography.

claiming that 'culture should be studied through the way people experience it' and that 'ethnography is a core method in the canon of cultural studies' (ibid.). Further, they posit that this lack of open discussion regarding methodology – in spite of the fact that Fan Studies continuously employs ethnography, and by extension netnography (Kozinets 2010) – arises out of the open critique from sociologists and anthropologists regarding the way Cultural Studies and Fan Studies have misappropriated ethnography. In other words, Fan Studies (and Cultural Studies) do not do "true" ethnographic research (Evans & Stasi 2014, 10).

The most impactful argument regarding the missing dialogue on methodology in Fan studies that Evans and Stasi make is that there is an inherently unethical researcher positioning in regards to ethnography. Chiefly, a binary replete with power structures is created whereby the researcher takes the first position in the binary (or the position of power) and the researched takes the second position (or the inferior/subjugated position). This has the potential to 'colonise the fan' (11) or, more worryingly, it has the potential to *other* the fan. While there are inherent ethical issues surrounding ethnography,[45] its implementation and the power structure binaries it creates, the tools that ethnography offers, namely interviews, surveys and *participant observation* are integral to researching fan communities, whether these tools be used individually or in tandem. However, what is missing from Evans and Stasi's discussion is the distinction between on- and offline ethnographies (or netnographies). Although they note later in their article that online/digital ethnographies should be better theorised, they conflate the two methodologies as one, which, as argued above, are disparate approaches, regardless of netnography's (Kozinets 2010) evolution from ethnography.

Where Evans and Stasi's article is most impacting is the call for this specific conversation on methodology within the field of Fan Studies, but also in its call for more Fan Studies centred methodological approaches. They specifically cite autoethnography (15) and digital ethnography (16) as integral approaches to Fan Studies research. While I concur that autoethnography as a wholly useful methodological approach, I argue for the inclusion of reader-guided textual analysis (Ytre-Arne 2011) into that limited pool of Fan Studies methodologies, as reader-guided seeks to blend audience research with textual analysis that

---

[45] This will be discussed further in the Ethics section to this chapter.

privileges audience interpretation over the researchers. Owing to this fact, it, as I demonstrate in the case study chapters, serves as an integral tool to interrogate the ways in which fans interrogate social issues arising in cultural texts.

Reader-Guided Textual Analysis

Reader-guided textual analysis (Ytre-Arne 2011) arises out of the tradition created by Janice Radway (1983; 1984). This methodology is a reader-focused methodology that highlights trends in reader/audience/fan responses and was established by Brita Ytre-Arne (2011) in her article 'Women's Magazines and Their Readers'. Ytre-Arne argues that the researcher assesses these arising trends by returning to the source text to engage with it through reader-guided textual analysis; in essence, reader-guided textual analysis is a 'combination of audience research and textual analysis' (214). Evans and Stasi (2014) recognise that textual analysis is a tradition within Fan Studies and that this method has generally been applied to fan texts through the lens of psychoanalysis (12) – for example, slash fiction; they rightly note that textual analysis has the potential to bracket the fan 'out of the relationship between text, consumer and producer' (ibid.). Reader-guided textual analysis (Ytre-Arne 2011) on the other hand has the potential to break down these restrictive barriers 'between text, consumer and producer' (ibid.), thereby including both audience response and textual analysis 'to focus on the dimensions that readers define as important to their experiences' (214). Joke Hermes (2005) employs a similar methodology stating that 'what I will mainly do is follow up on the cues given by interviewees and, whenever necessary, return to the books or programs that they mention' (17), but she does not explicitly classify her methodology. What is more, Hermes (2005), along with Evans and Stasi (2014), call for a more nuanced approach to cultural studies and Fan Studies research that foregrounds fan voices over the privileged academic voice (Evans & Stasi 2014, 11-12).

Ytre-Arne's (2011) study is shaped by ethnographic methods of data collection; however, ethnography for Ytre-Arne solely functions as a means to collect that data as opposed to a methodology in its own right, meaning that ethnography would shape her data analysis phase. She uses ethnographic methods, such as the questionnaire and individual interview, to gather responses to Norwegian women's magazines. Therefore, the voice that she is aiming to privilege is not her own academic one, rather she utilises trends

to highlight what the readers of these magazines find important. This new methodology arises out of Hermes' (2005) call for 'a methodological strategy in which the audience study remains central but feeds and directs textual analysis' (80), because 'audience-based work is more moving and points to how, in text-based analysis, we tend to overrate the meaningfulness of any single text once it is part of an everyday setting' (81). Although Fan Studies scholars seek to highlight that which the fans 'define as important' (Ytre-Arne 2011, 214), ethnography holds the potential to fall into the same trappings as textual analysis, specifically in that these works largely ignore the fan's source text, arguably the most crucial element of their fandom. What I mean here is that, although the fan's community and identity are hugely important, the trend in Fan Studies research ignores the uniting element for that fandom: the primary text, whether that be a television programme (as is the case for this thesis), video game or a specific franchise.

What makes reader-guided textual analysis (Ytre-Arne 2011) apropos to Fan Studies is that fans' textual productivity (Fiske 1992, 39), meaning fan texts such as fanfiction, MEMEs, GIFs, GIF sets and fan theory-making, are iterations of fan meaning-making. They are tangible interpretations exchanged across fan spaces and within fan communities and have the potential to point towards fan collective interpretations; this is what Janice Radway refers to as an 'interpretive community' (1984).[46] Furthermore, these fannish artefacts are generally widespread across public internet spaces, particularly on *Twitter.com*, *Facebook.com*, *Tumblr.com* and the fanfiction archival sites *FanFiction.Net* (*FF.net*) and *ArchiveofOurOwn.org* (*AO3*). This has huge implications for research ethics in that the works are created to be shared and publicised and therefore may be viewed as archived materials (Whiteman 2007, 77), which suggests that fans who publicise their own works want that material to be distributed and consumed.[47] In the next section of this chapter, I outline my research methodology reader-guided textual analysis (Ytre-Arne 2011) to illustrate its implementation throughout this thesis. Here, I detail the ways I adhered to Ytre-Arne's (2011) conception of reader-guided textual analysis, but also how I departed from her approach. What is more, by infusing this methodology with other modes of data

---

[46] While this thesis accepts the tradition of 'interpretive community' (Radway 1984), it is more concerned with the role of fan practices and the meaning-making strategies contained therein. So although 'interpretive community' is no doubt important to the ways in which fan communities are constructed, the role of the individual fan's meaning-making is privileged. For a critical interrogation of 'interpretive community' see Bertha Chin's Doctoral Thesis (2010).

[47] This will be broached further in the ethics section.

collection (such as a multi-sited netnographic approach), it highlights how reader-guided textual analysis as a methodology, and not just as a method, is ideally suited to future Fan Studies research and scholars and one that addresses Adrienne Evans and Mafalda Stasi's (2014) plea: 'Desperately Seeking Methodologies' (13).

Methods

This research project explores the ways in which fans negotiate non-normative sexuality and non-binary gender identity representations in the popular television series *Pretty Little Liars* (2010-). In order to interrogate this area of inquiry, I first needed to address my own personal motivations for completing this kind of research (Evans & Stasi 2014, 14). As noted in the introduction to this thesis (see Chapter 1), I found myself being drawn to media that represented LGBT+ identity, regardless of its genre or its intended demographic. Moreover, much of that interest was a direct result of my status as a postgraduate student, particularly in that my primary research interests pertained to popular media representations of gender and sexuality. I also self-identify as a gay male. The combination of my academic and personal identity categories alongside my research interests led to a self-acceptance of my fan identity, which had always existed, but had not been brought forward until just recently. These motivations guided me to *PLL*, a show that celebrates LGBT+ identity by foregrounding LGBT+ characters as opposed to having them exist on the periphery (Allen 1995; Davis 2004); it is also a programme that was written, directed and produced by out LGBT+ creative talent. Therefore, in constructing this research project, I had a desire to address a way to gather fan responses and negotiations to these LGBT+ identities as they were represented on screen and through the producorial staff: online fan engagement was the most apt entrée (Kozinets 2010) to achieve my research goals.

Thus, the thesis employs a reader-guided textual analysis (Ytre-Arne 2011) as its methodology, using multi-sited (Marcus 1998) netnography (Kozinets 2010) as its primary method for data collection. While I argue reader-guided textual analysis (Ytre-Arne 2011) is a stand-alone methodology, it also functions as a method to analyse data. Where Ytre-Arne analyses texts through trends arising in audience responses to women's magazines, I extend reader-guided textual analysis to include fan products that contain fan interpretations of the source text. This I utilise to return to the text, and in fans' own words (primarily through

fanfiction and fan theory-making) analyse those scenes through a queer theoretical lens.[48] In other words, when fans construct 'A's' identity as intersex, for example (see Chapter 7), I juxtapose the fan analysis contained within the fan theory against the text to highlight the ways in which the fan constructed this meaning. This goes beyond simply exploring trends as a means to guide textual analysis, it permits a greater insight into how, when and why fans interpret, providing data that was not co-opted or encouraged by the researcher; and more importantly, that analysis occurs through the fan's own words and not my own.

In order to conduct a 'reader-guided' method, there is an ostensible blending between prima facie the researcher's analysis of the text in question and secunda facie the analysis of the fantext in question. However, the analysis conducted is actually guided by the fan-produced text, pulling key sentences, phrases or words from the source text to, in the fan's own words, analyse the source text. For example, this is predominantly the case in Chapter 5, where a large focus is on written fanfiction as opposed to visual artefacts are used. Conversely, and is particularly relevant to Chapter 6, the visual artefacts hone in on key scenes or sequences of recurring images that point the researcher to key moments of importance in the text. For these digital fantexts, fannish interpretation is often visible through adjoining words, editing effects or the addition of comments above or below the object. These then become the trends Ytre-Arne references and point the researcher back to those important moments from the source text.

Data Collection

In order to sample a wide range of fan artefacts, I employed four different strategies to observe, engage with, collect and catalogue this data: social media *participant observation*, fanfiction archive collection and secondary monitoring data sampling. These four strategies arose out of the nature of the fan spaces themselves, the manners in which fans participated and/or created, and the usability (how these sites require users to employ specific functions) of the social media platforms on which these fans exist. This process occurred over an eight-month period, beginning in January 2015 and ending in August 2015; specifically, it coincided with *PLL* season 5B and 6A, which aired a total of 22 episodes across a span of six months. This specific narrative arc was selected as it provided several

---

[48] I continue to explore trends that arise in the fannish artefacts, however, trends are interpretations of their own accord, so when possible, I utilise their words over my own so as not to privilege my own analysis.

important character and mystery narrative reveals pertinent to fan reading practices (see Chapter 7).

While it is never wholly possible to ensure complete fan anonymity, I collected fannish artefacts that were widely distributed across multiple social media platforms (fan fiction, GIFs, memes, graphic memes and hashtags) and specifically those fan texts that were not user tagged (or contained the username superimposed onto specific fan products, i.e. GIFs or MEMEs). My primary method to collect this data was by engaging in fan practices on the fan-adopted spaces *Twitter.com*, *Tumblr.com*, *Facebook.com*, *Youtube.com*, *Fanfiction.net* (*FF.net*) and *ArchiveofOurOwn.org* (*AO3*), utilising features such as retweet on *Twitter.com* or reblog on *Tumblr.com* to record and store data.[49] To store this data for analysis, I created a fan username that was the same on each site (malepllers, except for *Twitter*, where I used malepller) and linked all of my social media profiles to one another, so if I posted on one fan space, it would appear on another. This then created a digital trail or narrative that I could trace later during the coding and data analysis process. While the majority of fan observation and data collection occurred primarily on social media platforms, fanfiction primarily exists on fanfiction-oriented websites (*FF.net* and *AO3*). Thus, this fanfiction is distributed and consumed in a separate space outside of *Twitter*, *Tumblr* and *Facebook*, although links to fanfiction stories are occasionally shared across these social media networks. Therefore, the first subsection focuses on social media data collection and the second subsection focuses on these fanfiction sites.

Social Media Data Collection

I began my collection process on *Twitter.com* by interacting in #PLLSocialHour every Tuesday evening during episode airings with the username @malepller.[50] #PLLSocialHour occurs the hour before a live airing of a *PLL* episode and is a live *Twitter* event where fans and the creative talent 'live tweet' to one another. During this time, fans would interact with one another and with the producers, writers, actors and other creative talent that were available before, during and after the episode aired. To be an active participant in this event, I would log into my @malepller *Twitter* account one hour before the show aired

---

[49] The functionality of the fan spaces themselves will be explored in the subsequent subsection.
[50] Although I intended to use @malepllers, I created the account on *Twitter.com* but mistakenly deleted the profile. Owing to the restrictions on *Twitter*, a username cannot be duplicated unless the account has been deleted for more than six months.

(00:00 GMT/19:00 EST) and remained active 15-20 minutes after the episode ended to gauge reactions from fans (02:15 GMT/21:15 EST); the times would occasionally be extended, but only during the season 5B finale and the season 6A mid-season finale. During that time, I tweeted (sent out a microblog of 140 characters or less), favourited (a function that lets *Twitter* users 'like' a Tweet) and retweeted (a method of reposting a Tweet onto one's personal *Twitter* feed, where each Tweet sent out is stored). What I engaged with were hashtags, 'brief keywords included in tweets, prefixed with the hash symbol #' (Bruns & Stieglitz 2012, 164); big name fans on *Twitter*; executive producers, such as I. Marlene King (@imarleneking); actors and actresses; and a random sampling of fans, primarily those that employed the hashtag #emison or had Emison in their username or on their profile. The benefit of using *Twitter* as a method of data collection is that each interaction is stored in the user's feed in reverse chronological order (the most recent tweet appears first) unless a user 'pins' a tweet, which means that the first tweet another user will see is a tweet that appears asynchronously to their *twitter* feed.

To correspond with my activity on *Twitter*, I created the *Facebook.com* fan page www.facebook.com/malepllers and the *Tumblr.com* blog malepllers.tumblr.com. These social media platforms serve a different purpose than *Twitter*, primarily in that *Twitter* is used for live interactions (Bruns & Stieglitz 2012; Zappavigna 2012). These sites primarily function for the *PLL* fan community as 'filler' in between #PLLSocialHour and episode airings. This is where the rich fan analysis occurs and longer interpretations appear (meaning longer than 140 characters, but also ranging between 500 and 3000 words); largely, this is a direct result of *Twitter*'s character limit constraint of only 140 characters. Since this thesis explores the ways fans negotiate LGBT+ representation in their fan practices, *Twitter* only permits visual fan artefacts, such as GIFs, MEMEs and hashtags (#showerharvey, for instance). In spite of the fact that each site serves a different purpose and promotes different types of fan engagement and fan practices, the social media sites are modelled closely after one another. For example, *Tumblr* and *Facebook* both utilise a similar feature to retweet – for *Tumblr* it is reblog and for *Facebook* it is share. Furthermore, each site has a user profile page where engagements are stored; for *Twitter*, that profile is called the *Twitter* Feed, for *Facebook* it is called the timeline and for *Tumblr* it is called the page. Similar are the ways in which users interact with information spread across these social media platforms: this

information is centralised into a Live Feed on *Twitter*, the News Feed on *Facebook* and the Dashboard on *Tumblr*.

Each of these spaces allow cross sharing, which means that when I published a tweet it would appear on my *Tumblr* and *Facebook* fan pages. The same would occur if I posted on *Twitter* or my *Facebook* fan page.[51] Cross sharing is largely what warrants a multi-sited (Marcus 1998) approach to data collection, particularly in that the data is shared across *PLL* fan communities that exist on different spaces. For example, tweets from I. Marlene King that contained pertinent clues to 'A's' identity would appear as a screen shot on the primary *Facebook* page observed for this research project; these tweets would also appear on *Tumblr*, also in screen shot form. For both of these sites, commentary would be added either superimposed onto the screen shot of the tweet or would accompany the screen shot either above or below the picture in text format. Furthermore, the initial fan theory explored in Chapter 7 was shared across other *Facebook* pages devoted to *PLL*, but also appeared on both *Twitter* (promoted by the host of the primary *Facebook* page observed) and *Tumblr*. This type of exchange is what led me back and forth between the differing social media sites in a trail-like manner. In other words, hyperlinks would often lead me away from a *Tweet* and direct me to a *Tumblr* blog or to a *Facebook* fan page.[52]

The main process of collection occurred during live episode airings (January to March 2015 and June to August 2015), with particular emphasis on season and mid-season finales (25 March and 11 August 2015). During these finale and non-finale episode airings, I alternated my social media presence primarily between *Twitter* and *Tumblr*, as there is a seemingly 'live' presence. In other words, I monitored my news feed on *Twitter* and the dashboard on *Tumblr* for fan commentary, interaction and fan production creation. The fans posting on my news feed and dashboard were followed as they fall into four distinct groups: #emison fans, production/cast/crew, self-identifying male fans, and what Matt Hills calls 'big name fans' (Hills 2006). *Facebook* monitoring occurred immediately after the show aired to view commentary, episode recaps and theorising on a 'big name fan's' *Facebook* fan page. The *Facebook* page operates as a fan community surrounding the show, but also a

---

[51] Further to this point, each of these spaces also allow for sharing and re-sharing of content, which was my main method for collecting these fannish artefacts.

[52] Although there is no way to ensure that pertinent information was not missed, the immersion period lasted for eight months and was built upon my own fan interactions within the *PLL* community via my personal social media accounts. Thus, my status as a *PLL* fan before commencing with the immersive data collection stage reduces the likelihood that I missed key information; albeit, it is still entirely possible.

community has been built around the page's creator, whereby fans of the show have become fans of the page's creator.

During this period of data collection, I immersed myself within fan spaces and performed my fannish identity online. What this meant is that I emulated fannish participatory practices such as reacting at preposterous reveals with sarcastic tweets; tweet at (or send out a tweet with @ followed by the username) other fans and the producorial team; retweet, share or reblog fan texts I deemed comical or humorous and telling or important at the time. In this time, I attracted a large number of followers (718 on *Twitter* and 68 on *Tumblr*), created my own GIFs and MEMEs and participated in 'fan talk' (Fiske 1992) to "authenticate" my status as a fan. Furthermore, to stay connected and to ensure I did not miss significant moments, I enabled notifications for *Tumblr*, *Twitter* and *Facebook*'s mobile phone applications, where I received 'notifications' from key figures in the fan community (BNFs, friends I made in the various *PLL* fan communities and bloggers, for example), but particularly from those fans that provided spoilers and *PLL* news solely to investigate and uncover 'A's' identity. These notifications served to fulfil my own fannish desires to remain constantly connected and to have the latest news and spoilers, but also to maintain constant *participant observation* regardless of my location.

Although I use distant or objective language to highlight my researcher positioning, this is not intended to distance myself from my fannish community or my source text. To the contrary, I use "objective" or "unbiased' language, such as 'perform' or 'emulate', as a means to legitimate further the text and us, the fans, as many within the PLLArmy represent a multiplicity of diverse identity categories that have been historically marginalised or othered by the media (Jenkins 1992), other more "serious" fans (Hills 2002) or their text has been reduced to frivolity as it is a seemingly 'female' text (Dare-Edwards 2015). Moreover, as highlighted in the introduction to this thesis, I wholeheartedly define myself as a Pretty Little Liars fan, an invested fan producer (primarily fan theory creation) and part of that multiplicity of varied identity categories. Much of my fannish self-identification stems from arriving to the text before arriving to the field of fan studies; I only come to the realisation that my fannish identity motivated my academic identity after discovering the field of fan studies.

Fanfiction Data Collection: FF.net, AO3 and Nifty.org

While the majority of my data collection process occurred on social media sites, a segment of the data collected is (fem)slash fiction (see Chapters 2, 5 and 6). The *PLL* fanfiction explored in this thesis was extracted from *Fanfiction.net*, *ArchiveofOurOwn.org* and *Nifty.org*. The former two sites are designated fanfiction websites, while the latter site is an LGBT+Q erotica site that contains slash fiction alongside non-straight erotica. As this thesis explores how fans negotiate representations of LGBT+ identities in *Pretty Little Liars*, slash and femslash fiction were central to this investigation. Each site classifies itself as a 'fiction archive' with fanfiction emphasised on *FF.net* and *AO3* and 'erotic stories' on *Nifty*. Before beginning primary research in these archives, I read the 'Terms of Conditions' for each site to ensure research was allowed to be conducted.

I employed a qualitative method of selection after surveying 150 different stories, narrowed down by (fem)slash on the websites. To determine which stories would feature in Chapter 5, I filtered them based on genre (whether they were AU or 'episode fix', for example), by pairing (Emison, Pailey, Emaya, for example) and on the quality of writing.[53] The (fem)slash fictions investigated in the chapters serve as representative samples of the fanfiction collected and reviewed. They also employ (fem)slash and fanfiction conventions as illustrated in the Literature Review. In my data sampling process, I discovered that there were considerably more femslash stories available on *FF.net* and *AO3* than slash stories; on *Nifty*, there were six available slash stories contained within the 'gay > celebrity' section and no femslash stories in the 'lesbian > celebrity' section. From the collection of stories gathered, I selected six (fem)slash fiction pieces to allow for comparison and to provide a large enough range, which are investigated in Chapter 5. Six (fem)slash fictions indicates that each section of Chapter 5 investigates two stories; these are referred to as FF (fanfiction) 1/2/3/4/5/6. The first section samples two different slash fictions collected from *Nifty.org*. The second and third sections sample two femslash pieces each, one extracted from *AO3* and the other from *Fanfiction.net*. When selecting them, each was rated mature

---

[53] I used quality of writing as a determiner for practical reasons, namely ease of understanding the story and higher quality fics have a significantly larger number of consumers. I based this consumption level off of the number of comments left at the end of the story, a feature on both *FF.net* and *AO3*.

on *AO3* and *Fanfiction.net*, while on *Nifty* all stories submitted are adult erotica.[54] The stories were then printed and trends were colour coded based on four categories: visual elements/setting (pink), dialogue (green), characterisations (orange) and narratives (yellow). By using colours to highlight the salient slash features, upon returning to the text, the colour coding facilitated the source text analysis. While a reader-guided textual analysis questions 'whether textual analysis will lead [inevitably] to some form of "implicit ideological imprisonment" of audiences' (Ytre-Arne 2011, 215), it is inevitable that my personal investments and belief systems factored into the analysis of both the source text and the corresponding (fem)slash fiction.

Finally, as these (fem)slash fictions were extracted from online resources and may be easily accessed and are viewable not contingent upon membership to each site, the importance of anonymity has figured into my analysis and the ways in which I have referenced the works of slash fiction. I have not unveiled the usernames associated with the fanfiction, nor have I provided titles of the pieces. Additionally, while some extractions from the fanfiction are embedded within the chapter, I have used ellipses when necessary to reduce the probability that these fanfictions are not discoverable in a general internet search. Consequently, while *FF.net* and *AO3* permit access and accounts to those 13 and above, which is 'in compliance with United States regulations regarding online privacy for children,' (*AO3*, Terms of Service, II. Archive Age Policy), there is no way to ensure that content extracted was not crafted by those under 18. However, by selecting mature themed content, it reduces the likelihood that these stories were written by fans under the age of 18 – though it does not ensure it. Incidentally, *Nifty* does not have an age policy, in spite of the fact that it is an erotica archive and features explicit material. Conversely, most of the stories available on *Nifty*'s archive provide disclaimers stating that the story is intended for adults only and that if the reader is under that age, or if it is illegal to access this content in one's country, then that reader should read no further.

---

[54] I use the term erotica for the slash fiction extracted from *Nifty.org*, as it is classified as an erotica archive. This should not undermine the works' classification as slash as they employ the same slash strategies evidenced by other slash fiction and the scholarship.

This 'secondary monitoring stage' occurred in the interim between seasons and episode airings, specifically the period between 26 March 2015 and 2 June 2015. During this time, I monitored multiple spaces not included in this thesis, unless it was shared or posted on one of my primary social media sites. For instance, there is a heightened presence of fans on *Instagram* and *Snapchat*.[55] The primary reason for excluding these sources is that it compromises anonymity, thereby revealing the fan's true identity to the public (you must request to follow on both applications, though it is still possible to view the material posted for some users); and for the case of *Snapchat*, content is ephemeral on the application, meaning that the content is only available for a maximum of 24 hours from publishing the photos and videos until they expire and disappear from both the fan's and subscribers 'story' or news feed – there is also no legal way to save videos posted.

Additional data was collected, however, from my primary social media platforms, as news, spoilers and theories about *PLL* filled the interim periods between seasons and episodes. I maintained the same data collection parameters (only selecting those artefacts that have been shared more than 100 times, are not user tagged) as outlined above and collected primary fannish materials that cannot be traced back to its source or creator. Though the fan community remained active and continued contributing/creating/producing fan products, this interim between seasons was a period of low fan activity; yet, this period provided rich engagements and interactions. *Facebook* and *Tumblr* were primary areas researched during this 'secondary monitoring stage' as they are spaces that allow for in depth commentary, theory-making and creation.

Data Collection and Coding

The data gathered for this thesis emerged from multiple online fan communities located on social media sites (*Twitter*, *Facebook*, *Tumblr* and *Youtube*) and on fanfiction and erotica archives (*FF.net*, *AO3* and *Nifty*). In order to assess the ways in which fans negotiated LGBT+ representations in *PLL*, I sampled a wide range of disparate fan texts. The fannish artefacts collected were hashtags ('fan talk'), MEMEs, GIFs/GIF sets, fan vids, slash and femslash

---

[55] *Snapchat* and *Instagram* are photo- and videographic applications where fans and the creative team can share photos and videos of their everyday lives, theories, and slash fan production.

fiction and fan theories. These fan products fall into two camps of textual productivity (Fiske 1992): visual and written. When collecting these fan texts, they were either stored digitally (see above) or printed.

As stated earlier, I utilised the social media platforms to collect and store my visual data. The fannish artefacts collected on *Twitter* were hashtags, videos, photos, MEMEs and GIFs, which were tweeted by myself or retweeted from other *Twitter* users and also favourited; these are stored in my personal *Twitter* feed. I have tweeted over 1,642 tweets, which contain at least one or more of the fannish artefacts collected; I have also favourited 855 tweets from other users, which contain many of the fan texts. Data collected from *Tumblr* is stored in a similar manner and consists of fan theories, MEMEs, GIFs/GIF sets, videos, photos/photo sets and 'fan talk'. The content appears on my own personal *Tumblr* page rather than a centralised 'feed', which was further categorised by hashtags, whereby using HTML code permits *Tumblr* users to create sub-category pages that connect back to the main page. Therefore, my *Tumblr* page has multiple sub-category pages that separate the fannish artefacts into theories (#stakeout), executive/creative/actor content (#thedudes and #thegirls), fashion content (#fashion), and spoilers/previews (#vids); interspersed throughout the differing pages are MEMEs, GIFs/GIF sets, photos and videos. In total, I made 339 posts, which consist of original posts by myself and reblogs of the varying fan products; I also liked 407 posts.

While I intended to utilise the *Facebook* page in the same capacity as *Twitter* and *Tumblr*, *Facebook* became less about observable fannish practices and revolved primarily around *Facebook* fan pages. Instead, the primary method of data collection and the data collected occurred on the 'big name fan' page through *participant observation*, where I liked, shared and commented on the posts generated by the BNF. From this page I collected 1 fan theory out of 8 sampled and 3 MEMEs relevant to the fan theory and the 'Big A' reveal. The fan theory was printed out, whereas the MEME posts were saved as picture files on my computer's desktop.[56] The last social networking site consulted for data collection was *YouTube*, where I sampled 15 'A' theories. The video examined in Chapter 7 formulated a theory in regards to 'A's' identity that explicitly referenced transgender identity as being a

---

[56] I could not bring myself to 'like' these posts as the content published was incredibly transphobic in nature. Instead, I wrote down the dates and times these were posted and returned to them during the data analysis and writing up stages.

motivating factor for CeCe becoming 'A'. Ultimately, this theory proved to be correct in identifying 'A'. Finally, the femslash and slash fiction and the fan theories were saved as .PDF files and subsequently printed. By collecting the data in this manner, it provided a clearer insight into how fans were using these fannish spaces, thereby signalling how fannish artefacts were received, consumed and accepted/rejected. This highlights how interpretation was negotiated across these fan spaces and the fan communities, but also how there were multiple accepted interpretations, and not just one definitive interpretation.

Once this data was collected and stored, I coded the written data manually (Kozinets 2010). This is a process whereby I printed the fanfiction and fan theories and utilised a colour schematic to highlight trends and recurring themes. In order to do this, I separated the written data into fanfiction piles and then into fan theory piles. The fanfiction was divided further into two slash stories (FF1 and FF2) and into four femslash pieces (FF3, FF4, FF5 and FF6); the same was done for the two printable fan theories (T1 and T2 or Theory 1 and Theory 2). As stated in the previous fanfiction subsection, I used the following schematic: visual elements/setting (pink), dialogue (green), characterisations (orange) and narratives (yellow). These foci were chosen specifically as a means to return to the text, providing visual and narrative clues to the scenes these fans found most important in negotiating LGBT+ identity as represented in *PLL*. However, I was unable to code the visual data collected as they would not retain their visual properties if printed; instead, I did a comparative analysis of the non-audio-visual data (excluding the *YouTube* video), exploring these same trends and recurring themes. To code the *YouTube* data, I kept a written log of these key themes and transcribed the subtitles into a word document, keeping track of the time and frame they occurred. Once I had this data in printable format, I was then able to print and code this fan vid with the schematic outlined above, while re-watching the fan theory to locate the episodes and scenes consulted, which aided in my ability to return to the text.

In addition to coding with a colour schematic representative of specific categories, I wrote handwritten notes in the margins and underlined key sentences, phrases and words that specifically related to sexual identity, relationship formation, significant scenes and crucial narrative moments. Moreover, many of these underlined instances in the written fan text were indicative of fan analysis. In other words, these utterances were the fan's own

interpretation of the narrative events, character motivations, social identity formations and representations, relationship construction and the producer and fan dynamic (Pearson 2010).

Data Analysis

Once the data was collected, sampled and coded, I began the process of data analysis. Here, I used Ytre-Arne's (2011) reader-guided textual analysis to analyse both the fan material collected and the source text. In this process of data analysis, I created an excel spreadsheet with the exact season, episode and times Alison DiLaurentis (Sasha Pieterse) and Emily Fields (Shay Mitchell) interacted with one another, as the primary LGBT+ representation presented in the text and negotiated by the fans were lesbian and bisexual female characters. Of particular importance is this same-sex relationship "teased" by the show (see Chapters 5 and 6 specifically as to how Emison is "teased") and embraced by the fans, thus further substantiating an interrogation into the data collected on 'emison' or the portmanteau ship name Emily and Alison. To analyse this data, I used the 'evaluative paradigm' (Davis & Needham 2009), the model traditionally used in Queer Theory to assess positive and negative LGBT+ representations in popular media. I specifically used this model to address the gap between scholarly assessments of LGBT+ representations and the lack of audience research in this area. While general queer theory scholarship (see Sedgwick 1990; Sullivan 2003; Halberstam 2005) supplemented the analysis, the primary intent in focusing on the 'evaluative paradigm' (Davis & Needham 2009) was to interrogate the ways fans made sense of these identities and their relationships as they were represented in *PLL*.

By positioning fan interpretation alongside the source text, it allows for an entry point into the ways fans negotiate these LGBT+ representations, but it also permits insight into why and how fans make meaning. This was done by returning to those trends and recurring themes, but also by using key interpretive phrases located in the fan texts themselves. This is a departure from Ytre-Arne's model, where she does not analyse the text against the magazine readers' words. Using the colour schematic was fruitful for locating the key scenes and key visual clues, but using the fan analysis proved invaluable for assessing LGBT+ identity as understood and negotiated by fans (see the differences

highlighted in Pailey and Emison femslash in Chapter 5 and the coding of non-binary gender identity into fan theory-making practices in Chapter 7).

Ethics in an Online Context

Central to the debate in online research or what Ian Convery and Diane Cox (2012) label 'internet-based research' is the notion of public versus private and whether or not informed consent is needed (Kozinets 1998 and 2010; Eysenbach & Till 2001; Livingstone 2004; Beckman & Langer 2005; Whiteman 2007; Ashford 2009; Bowler 2010; Convery & Cox 2012). Public versus private is difficult to discern in the digital landscape, especially when it pertains to social media research, primarily because the 'boundaries in online environments are less distinct' (Convery & Cox 2012, 51). In other words, what defines a public online space versus a private online space is contingent upon specific criteria and, for some scholars, the 'participants' expectations of privacy' (ibid.). However, if the space(s) researched do not require membership and the content is not protected by membership (or easily discoverable in a Google search), this would not necessarily require informed consent (Walther 2002; Whiteman 2007) as these would be deemed to be public spaces. Furthermore, the data collected in this thesis are forms of fan productivity and are therefore created for public distribution and consumption, as part of what Bertha Chin classes the 'gift economy' (Chin 2010).

Therefore, this thesis has taken what Amy Bruckman (2002) terms a 'moderate disguise' approach to online research ethics. This approach is a blending of 'light' and 'heavy' disguise' to reduce the likelihood of tracing the works back to their original authors. I used this approach in spite of the fact that these works are available for public consumption and that the communications and exchanges occur in public spaces. 'Light disguise' advocates naming groups, altering usernames or real names and the use of verbatim quotes, whereas 'heavy disguise' does not name these groups the fans participate in, dramatically alters or omits usernames/real names and does not allow quoting verbatim (Bruckman 2002). Bruckman's approach is guided by these debates regarding public versus private in an online environment. I therefore adopted a 'moderate disguise' ethical approach to online research. Thus, I did not include usernames, fan texts tagged with usernames, titles to fanfiction or fan theories or specify where these texts come from, unless it was difficult to do this (such

as the *YouTube* fan theory video in Chapter 7). Furthermore, when quoting directly, I inserted ellipses at key moments to minimise the risk of the fan work being identifiable in a general Internet search. Additionally, all written works are anonymised through the implementation of the numbering system outlined above (T1, for example is Fan Theory 1).

Finally, although Kozinets (2010) implores netnographers to gain consent from their research subjects (142-143), claiming that it is a 'cornerstone of ethical research conduct' (142), I aligned my research ethics with Natasha Whiteman's (2007) approach to ethical procedures regarding online research:

> Posts within these forums could be accessed without recourse to password entry points, and posters had no control over who read their messages once they had 'posted' to the boards. The public nature of these settings, and lack of the need to register membership in order to see the posts, strongly influenced my ethical approach to these sites. Whilst I wouldn't reproduce a message sent in private email correspondence without the consent of the author - as the medium seems to attribute a firm (if perhaps illusory) sense of privacy - I decided that I would quote from these publicly accessible forums without asking for the consent of the participants. (77)

Central to Whiteman's approach is the ostensible archival status of the research data. While Whiteman employs strong terms to suggest the loss of control these commenters have over their posts, these utterances were made in what the above referenced ethical research deems the public domain. The spaces I engaged with do not require membership to access content; permission is not needed to see the fan profiles, their interactions, their communications and their fan works. Furthermore, as this thesis concerns itself with the ways in which fans negotiate representations of LGBT+ identity through textual productivity (Fiske 1992) and not with how fans self-identify *as* LGBT+, their interactions, specific details from their profiles and details about their communities are subsequently omitted from this thesis.[57]

---

[57] Eysenbach and Till (2001) argue that 'researchers should contact individuals before quoting them' as 'the author of the posting may not be seeking privacy but publicity, so that extensive quotes without attribution may be considered a misuse of another person's intellectual property' (1105). While this may apply to original works, this typically does not apply to many fan texts as this would be an infringement of copy right on behalf of the fan producer (Jenkins 1992; Green et al 1998; Salmon & Symons 2004; Hellekson & Busse 2006; Coppa 2006; Chin 2010). Instead, these fan texts are *already* published in fan spaces and part of a public archive.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the thesis' primary methodology using a reader-guided textual analysis (Ytre-Arne 2011) and the methods employed to conduct this research. It argued that reader-guided textual analysis is an invaluable resource for fan Studies and fan fiction studies as it bridges both audience research and textual analysis, important to fan studies in particular as often-times, the research done in this discipline leaves out critical interrogations of the text these fans rally around. Furthermore, it is a methodology that privileges fan voices over scholarly critiques of popular media texts by examining the trends and analyses arising in fan production. The final section of the chapter outlined the key debates in 'internet based research' ethics (Convery & Cox 2012) to indicate where this thesis fits ethically, using a 'moderate disguise' (Bruckman 2002) to protect the identities of the fan text creators. With the methodology outlined, the four chapters that follow demonstrate how reader-guided textual analysis can be implemented in future fan studies research.

Chapter 4: Fan-Scholars, 'A' and Emison: *PLL* Fans' Critical Engagements

The purpose of this chapter is to contextualise the fan products investigated in Chapters 5, 6 and 7; the chapter does this by positioning *PLL* fans as 'fan-scholars' (Hills 2002). What this means, then, is that Matt Hills' (2002) definition of 'fan-scholar' will be expanded to incorporate not just those fans who position themselves as experts, but to include those fans who actively produce meaning so as to predict narrative events. This extends Hills (2002) conceptualisation of the 'fan-scholar' to view the fannish practices explored in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 as 'fan-scholar' activities. In other words, it opens up the definition of 'fan-scholar' to account for larger factions of fans who undertake these practices. Moreover, it frames certain televisual and filmic genres as integral to *how* fans engage with texts. In other words, mystery invites close fan-analysis to 'predict' narratives. This may relate to uncovering hidden identities, such as unmasking 'A', but it also relates to the way fans ship non-canonical relationships or relationships that are not narratively supported. What this means is that these relationships are constructed through this close fan-analysis, where fans rely on visual and narrative codes and symbols to validate their interpretations. Therefore, I argue that the genre (teen) mystery invites fan-scholar type engagements that are not 'pretentious' (Hills 2002, 21), rather they are normalised within these spaces and the communities. Furthermore, investigating these types of fan-scholarly engagements through reader-guided textual analysis (Ytre-Arne 2011) further highlights *how* fans negotiate non-normative sexuality and non-binary gender categories.

Where Chapters 5, 6 and 7 explore those modes of fan production that interrogate and interpret the text, Chapter 4 frames these fannish engagements through genre. Additionally, it outlines the identity category 'fan-scholar' not in terms of what Matt Hills calls a 'Big Name Fan' or a fan expert that has gained subcultural capital (Thornton 1995) in their given fan community (Hills 2002), rather, it invites a reading of fan identity that highlights *how* and *why* fans make meaning out of texts, but also that genre influences their fannish practices. Viewing 'fan-scholar' engagements as influenced by genre permits a closer scrutiny of the types of fan 'textual productivity' (Fiske 1992) that occur within the *PLL* fandom that should be viewed as fannish critical engagements with their source text.

Furthermore, it warrants a reader-guided textual analysis (Ytre-Arne 2011) over other methodologies in the subsequent chapters because of the framing of this 'fan-scholar' identity category. That is, I am arguing that these 'fan-scholar' activities function as fan analysis, thereby using these fannish modes of critical engagement to return to the text in a way that privileges their readings over my own. Finally, central to this 'fan-scholar' identity evidenced from *PLL* fans is how they negotiate these LGBT+ representations, particularly as they incorporate these LGBT+ representations into their fannish products, whether that be through the exploration of LGBT+ relationships in (fem)slash fiction; substantiating their claims that a lesbian relationship exists through MEMEs, GIFs and GIF sets; or by centralising non-normative identity categories as integral to 'A's' identity.

This chapter therefore argues that the teen and mystery genres are central to *PLL* (Bingham 2014), but also that these genres encourage fans to adopt 'fan-scholar' identities through the text's reliance on mystery and teen generic conventions. Further to this point, this identity is propelled by the television series' executive producer I. Marlene King's social media presence and the spoilers, clues, previews and social media campaigns employed by King, her staff and ABC Family/Freeform. What is more, this argument promotes further scrutiny not just into 'fan-scholar' as an adopted fan identity category, but also refocuses the debate onto 'fan-scholar' over 'scholar-fan' (Hills 2002) or 'aca-fandom' (Jenkins 1992), which has dominated scholarship in this area of fan studies. While the chapter does not theorise why fan studies has focused its attentions on 'scholar-fan' over 'fan-scholar', 'scholar-fan' has been privileged as there is still tension between bridging academic and fan identities within the academy (Hills 2002; Burr 2005; Whiteman & Metivier 2013; Booth 2015). Incidentally, while Hills outlines these identities as distinctive, fan studies scholars such as Paul Booth (2015) and Natasha Whiteman and Joanne Metivier (2013) problematize Hills' definition by employing 'fan-scholar' as their identity markers over 'scholar-fan', which insinuates that they are privileging their fan identities before their academic identities. By adopting 'fan-scholar' over 'scholar-fan' they bring 'fan-scholar' into the realm of the academy, which continues to privilege academic subjectivity over fan identity, rather than the ways in which fans critically engage with texts. Rather than adopt Hills' (2002), Booth's (2015) or Whiteman and Metivier's (2013) conception of 'fan-scholar', I position this fannish identity as one that engages with a text in a manner that is critical, but does not necessarily rely on specific academic knowledge or theories, as suggested by Hills (2002, 19). 'Fan-

scholar' is an identity construction that certain programmes invite due to their generic structure. While recognising that not all fans can adopt this identity, it is used to signify factions of viewers who undergo a critical engagement with the text through their fannish productivities.

In order to understand the way 'fan-scholar' identity is encouraged by *Pretty Little Liars*, the debates surrounding 'fan-scholar' as a category will be investigated in the first section, illustrating where this thesis situates itself in terms of that debate and how this thesis defines 'fan-scholar' beyond its reductive definition proposed by Hills (2002). Then, an exploration of the genres teen and mystery will be undertaken. This investigation in the second section of the Chapter highlights the generic conventions employed by the series itself that fans turn to in their readings of the text, which reinforces the ways in which the text encourages fans to adopt a 'fan-scholar' identity. The third section explores how fans interrogate these conventions to create certain types of fan products. While this chapter does not explicitly interrogate these fan products in depth, this section frames the necessity in exploring these fannish artefacts further in subsequent chapters. Moreover, by exploring the relationship between genre and 'fan-scholar' identity as encouraged by certain genre texts further substantiates reader-guided textual analysis as an optimal methodology to investigate these fannish products. Although the thesis employs a reader-guided textual analysis (Ytre-Arne 2011) in the case study chapters, here I employ my own textual analysis of *Pretty Little Liars* 5.25 'Welcome to the Dollhouse' in the fourth and final section of this chapter to illustrate how mystery invites this type of 'fan-scholar' engagement through my own queer reading of the text.[58] I selected this specific episode as it first introduced the notion that 'A' may be transgender and because it hinges on mystery and thriller conventions to propel its narrative. Further to this point, this episode places the central protagonists in an undisclosed location, being pursued by the masked antagonist 'A' and the episode queers familiar spaces for the Liars (the four central protagonists: Aria, Spencer, Emily and Hanna), which I argue later in the chapter are further iterations of mystery conventions.

---

[58] I read this text queerly not just to illustrate the ways in which the programme invites these 'fan-scholars' to read the text in a certain way, but also to provide my own 'scholar-fan' reading in order to illuminate the similarities between a 'fan-scholar' reading and a 'scholar-fan' one.

To Be a 'Fan-Scholar' or to Be a 'Scholar-Fan'

To begin, I first turn to what Matt Hills (2002) proposes is fan studies' 'dismaying short-sightedness' or the disregard that it is a 'possibility that fan and academic identities can be hybridised or brought together not simply in the academy but also outside of it, in the figure of the fan-scholar' (15). 'Fan-scholar' is therefore a blending of academic and fan identities, much like Henry Jenkins' conception of 'aca-fandom' (1992). Where Hills departs from Jenkins' definition is the distinction between being within ('scholar-fan') and outside the academy ('fan-scholar'; 15). And while Hills recognises that these fans have been figured as 'miniaturised academics' (10), he disavows the notion as he argues that they are 'still *not quite* academic scholars' (17). What arises in his figuration of the 'fan-scholar' is not derision, but it is not quite laudatory, as he suggests that they *almost* engage with texts critically in a similar manner to 'scholar-fans'. In fact, he concedes that these fans 'do not just write "fan fic" (fan fiction), they also produce their own critical accounts of the programme's texts' (18). In spite of this concession, at play is still the notion that these fans are '*not quite*' scholarly enough, that their expertise does not match scholarly modes of critical engagement or critical media histories. Hills notes that fans can and do become scholars within the academy, similar to how he expresses his own arrival to academia, but they must adopt an academic identity before their fan identity to situate and authenticate themselves therein. Ostensibly, Hills does not wholly conform to the notion that fans are stereotypically 'self-absent' (19), in fact he attempts to challenge the preconceived perception that there exists a divide between academics and fans. Yet, by situating the 'fan-scholar' in a manner that suggests they are lesser than reifies these tensions between academics and fans and thereby perpetuates a hierarchal binary of academic/fan in the academy and fan/academic within a given fandom.

Yet, Hills consideration of what it means to be a 'fan-scholar' only surfaces in the way fans appropriate media theory and the relevant terms associated with these academic modes of inquiry (19). While I am not arguing for something dramatically distinctive to what Hills classifies as 'fan-scholars', I am suggesting that this identity category may be drawn out to incorporate a larger corpus of fans who regularly engage with texts in a critical way. In other words, 'fan-scholar' is certainly not just limited to those small factions of fans who classify themselves as experts and/or are the 'Big Name Fans' in fandoms. Further to this

point, certain modes of fannish engagement suggest that 'fan-scholar' moves beyond solely being an identity category, but also a way in which fans negotiate their source texts and make meaning out of those negotiations. Thus, 'fan-scholar' comes to represent both an identity and a practice or set of practices, and for the case of this thesis, fannish activities that include fanfiction creation, fan theory-making and the employment of MEMEs and GIFs to respond to their source text's narratives. I do not, however, position all fans as 'miniaturised academics' (10), but I do agree that 'fans and scholars mirror each other's discursive practices' (Cochran 2009, 19).

Central to the ways these academic and fan 'discursive practices' mirror one another is the notion that they critically engage with a text. This engagement may be as simple as disagreeing with the way a storyline unfolds on screen or in a book or may be as in depth and "scholarly" by applying 'Bechdellian analyses of the roles of women' (Booth 2015, 1.7) as they are represented in a fan's source text. However, what *is* the integral component to 'fan-scholar' identity and 'fan-scholar' activities is that 'critical fans demonstrate listening skills by interacting with other fans in thoughtful ways [...] encourage discussion through individual contribution and empathetic conversation [...] encourage civil discourse, even if it's a disagreement' (1.9). These critical engagements may occur through 'fan talk' (Fiske 1992) on social media sites, through the construction of same-sex relationships realised in (fem)slash fiction (see Chapters 5 and 6), or through the ways in which non-binary gender identification figures into the formation of villainy (see Chapter 7). What is unimportant, however, is how media theory, for instance, influences the ways fans engage critically with a text; what must be brought out of Matt Hills term 'fan-scholar' is the fact that these fans *are* engaging in a *critical manner*. This is why both Tanya Cochran (2009) and Paul Booth (2015) argue for the inclusion of teaching 'fannish ardour in the classroom' (Booth 2015, 1.1), namely because 'fandom may be one of the only places where one is encouraged to think critically, to write, to discuss deeply, and to make thoughtful and critical judgments about hegemonic culture' (ibid.).

Absent from this debate about the 'fan-scholar' identity and the types of engagement that may arise out of this identity category is the notion of genre and how

genre influences fannish engagement.[59] What this means, then, is that certain types of televisual texts (for the purposes of this thesis) and their respective genres promote a critical fannish engagement. While this is not to say that not all texts encourage critical interrogations by their fans, however, there are generic conventions that actively engage fans to solve intended narrative gaps. By intended narrative gaps I point to the way 'A's' identity remains undisclosed until the mid-season summer finale 6.10 'Game On, Charles and where clues to that person's identity are distributed throughout the three seasons' narratives prior to the reveal – specifically, this relates to the conventions inherent to mystery television. Thus, fans engage with this text in a critical manner akin to textual analysis whereby they make meaning out of the text's narrative to determine who 'A' is and why. Furthermore, these fans navigate 82 episodes to uncover clues pertaining to 'A's' true identity,[60] which is central to uncovering who 'A' is, but also to determine why this person has become 'A'. The 'why' element is arguably the critical element as fans are forced to interpret or 'make meaning' out of the clues to highlight 'A's' motivations.[61] Ultimately, then, this type of critical engagement with the text as has been observed across the *PLL* fan community (see Chapter 3 and Chapter 7) indicates that fan engagement and their critical interrogations of the source text would permit a reading of these fans as 'fan-scholars'. As argued above, I do not situate these 'fan-scholars' within the same context as Matt Hills (2002), positioning them all as 'experts', rather their activities and modes of critical interrogation would suggest a broadening of the term 'fan-scholar' to incorporate more fans into that corpus.

Since I have argued that the genre mystery plays an integral role in shaping these fans into 'fan-scholars', the next section of the chapter explores concept of genre in more depth. Moreover, owing to the fact that *Pretty Little Liars* is not solely a mystery, but that it more specifically privileges teen and mystery as its predominant generic classifications, the role of teen TV will be examined in how these generic categories shape this television programme. This is especially crucial when considering the ways in which teen TV

---

[59] Although 'scholar-fan' is an identity category that is adopted by the 'scholar-fan', Tanya Cochran (2009) suggests that 'fan-scholar' may not be an identity/subjectivity adopted by fans and therefore should be viewed as an academic position constructed by 'scholar-fans'.

[60] *Pretty Little Liars* has two major reveals and has revealed two separate 'A' figures: Mona Vanderwaal (Janel Parish) in Seasons 1 and 2; and CeCe Drake/Charlotte nee Charles Dilaurentis (Vanessa Ray) in Seasons 3, 4, 5 and 6. For the purposes of this thesis, 'A' refers to CeCe/Charlotte and not Mona.

[61] As will be examined further in Chapter 7, many fans and the popular theories surrounding 'A's' identity are directly related to non-binary gender identities.

centralises social issues relevant to the teen social experience (Davis & Dickinson 2004; Ross & Stein 2008).[62]

Teen Mystery

Mystery and teen are two genres that have received little academic scrutiny. This largely stems from the cultural associations of these televisual genres, how they have been denied the same cultural significance as genres such as drama by production studios and networks and how other genres negotiate social issues "better" than teen or mystery (Bingham 2014). While it is not the intention of this chapter to explore the cultural politics of genre (Mittell 2004), inevitably this will surface in an exploration of the conventions associated with these generic categories. Genre politics refers not to the socio-cultural issues that arise out of genre, rather it refers to a cultural hierarchy that positions certain genres over others (Bingham 2014, 102), such as drama over sitcom, for instance. Further to this point, generic-hybridity is largely what shapes teen television (Davis & Dickinson 2004, 5) as teen TV, as it has been argued, may be considered to evoke more of a 'sensibility' rather than exhibiting overt generic conventions (9). Although I argue there *are* teen TV conventions, many of these conventions arise out of the specific themes and social issues pertinent to a teenage viewership (i.e., High School settings, coming-of-age narratives, (cyber)bullying, exploration of teen sexuality, the liminal state between adolescence and adulthood). These socio-cultural themes and issues are then hyperbolised through the employment of mystery in *Pretty Little Liars*.

The socio-cultural issue that is central to *PLL* is the way identity is constantly in flux, i.e. that identity is not a stable category. This is evoked not only through the notion that identity is ever-changing during the teen adolescence years, a convention innate to teen TV but also arising out of the programme's title itself *Pretty Little Liars*. While the word 'liar' denotes falsehood or deception, because the TV programme is associated with teen identity and the instability of identity, it also suggests that these are not only outward falsities or deceptions, but that they also affect the self as well. In other words, the 'Liars' as they are referred to are not just lying to their parents, their peers, the police and their community,

---

[62] Although I am highlighting mystery and teen as the predominant generic categories that shape *Pretty Little Liars*, this does not preclude the television programme from employing other generic conventions, such as those arising out of soap-opera, melodrama, comedy, and horror, for example.

they are also lying to themselves about their own identities. This is particularly evident in the pilot episode (1.01) where Emily denies her feelings towards the same-sex, the feelings she has for both Alison Dilaurentis and new girl Maya St Germain (Bianca Lawson) and her heteronormative conformity within a system that is ostensibly antagonistic towards non-normative sexuality. Emily conforms to heteronormativity by maintaining a heterosexual relationship with Ben Coogan (Steven Krueger) that masks her lesbian identity from her "traditional" parents, an evocation of the nuclear family that dominates the suburban landscape and enforces (hetero)normativitiy.

Affluent suburban landscapes are a defining feature of the American teen TV programme (Dennis 2006), as suburbia represents stability, success and middle-class identification. Moreover, suburbia represents a liminal space or an 'in-between space' as it is 'located beyond the heart of a town or city, yet still [exists] within its urban orbit' (Murphy 2009, 4). 'In-betweenness' is an ideal sensibility for the teen TV programme to privilege as it speaks overtly to the teen experience that positions teen identity both within and outside of adulthood. Teen, then, evokes being simultaneously child and adult (Osgerby 2004a). More specifically however, the 'in-between' or liminal nature does not *only* comprise teen identity or suburban landscapes, it also positions teen TV as a liminal generic category as well. And as Bill Osgerby argues (2004a), 'the characteristics that seemed to set "youth" (teen) apart as a distinct cultural group were not their bio-psychological attributes, but their distinctive patterns of media use and practices of commodity consumption' (9). Thus, these programmes highlight those characteristics of the everyday that suggest the 'in-between' nature of the teen experience and identity formation.

Teen TV then becomes an ideal generic category to negotiate non-normative identities as it permits viewers to 'play' vicariously with identity in a safe manner. I locate this quality of teen TV and teen identity as one of the foremost reasons as to why fanfiction becomes an integral aspect of fan identity, particularly as teen TV is a prominent genre that promotes fannish engagement. Further, it is precisely this vicarious 'play' that allows the negotiation of non-normative and non-binary identifications that feature in (fem)slash fiction. Viewing teen TV in this manner then extends the purview of fan fiction studies to move beyond solely 'cult' texts as primary instances of fanfiction creation, which has been reiterated by fan studies scholars (Jenkins 1992; Bacon-Smith 1992; Penley 1997; Jones 2002; Hellekson & Busse 2006; Coppa 2006; Lothian et al. 2007). What this means is that fan

studies scholars have focused primarily on the other elements of TV texts that read as 'cult', permitting Hills (2004) to claim that teen TV texts with large fandoms should be classed as 'mainstream cult' texts (63), specifically because of their 'online fandom(s)' (ibid.). While I concede that many of the texts that boast large fandoms that engage in 'textual productivity' do fit within the definition of 'cult', 'cult' and 'mainstream cult' tend to privilege fantasy, science fiction and horror generic categorisations, which are largely read as masculine genres or what Joanne Hollows refers to as the 'masculinity of cult' (2003). By coding teen TV series that also have large fandoms as 'mainstream cult' (Hills 2004) "sanitises" these texts, indicating that male fans/viewers may consume these gendered texts because they fall within the confines of male genres. Furthermore, by reading these texts as 'mainstream cult', it moves the focus away from teen TV and re-centres the attention onto the salient elements of those ostensibly masculine genres.[63] This has particular implications for the ways in which texts are read, indicating that there *could* be a privileging of masculine readings over feminist or queer ones if the focus remains on 'cult' or 'mainstream cult' over a focus on other generic categories.

Teen TV Conventions

There are three primary conventions that comprise teen television: teen locales or the teen setting, young adult or teen characters as the protagonists and teen-oriented narratives that tend to privilege melodrama (Davis & Dickinson 2004; Ross & Stein 2008). Each of these three characteristics of teen TV complement and reinforce one another.[64] Further, teen TV programmes continue to incorporate these elements even when the characters age beyond high school years as they often willingly return or narrative events force them back to their high school hometown. As argued above, suburban settings are optimal and oft used locations for these teen TV programmes because they mirror the liminal state of teenaged identity. Yet, within these suburban environments that the teen TV programmes explore, there is often a sense that only one high school exists in that community. For example, Rosewood High School is suggested to be the only high school in the fictional Philadelphia

---

[63] While the horror genre has been figured as a masculine genre (Clover 1992; Creed 1993), there is evidence to suggest that there is a wide female viewership (Cherry 1999 and 2002) and that certain sub-genres of horror, such as the vampire subgenre tend to be more readily consumed by female viewers (Williamson 2005).
[64] Although I speak here to teen TV programmes more generally, the examples provided come from *Pretty Little Liars* as it is the focus of this thesis.

suburb of Rosewood, Pennsylvania, the centre of *Pretty Little Liars* action. While suburbia and its setting mirror teen identity, I have argued, for many of these teen TV programmes, generally only one high school tends to exist.

Centring the programme around one fictional high school not only serves to focus the narrative, it also hyperbolises the centrality of these settings for teen identity. In other words, the high school in adolescent years serves as a second home, where the teen spends just as much time there, if not more, than in their family homes. This then suggests that high school becomes the centre of teen identity, a notion that makes unimaginable for the teen the possibility of attending other institutions of learning beyond their local community. Everyday associations with high schools (classrooms, desks, lockers, ringing bells, authority figures in the form of teachers and principals and fashion and fashion accessories) take on new semantic meanings in the realm of the teen TV programme and can thus serve as metaphors for or symbols of teen-centred socio-cultural issues. Rosewood High is where the four Liars can come to terms with the fact they are being stalked by someone who knows all of their secrets, but it also functions as that safe-space for the Liars as they can hide these secrets in their own personal lockers, the only space that is theirs and does not belong to their parents. They are the only ones that have access to this designated space, a sentiment that would ostensibly resonate with the teen viewer/fan (the positioned, "ideal" viewer and not actual viewers). Further to this point, the locker for Emily serves as a tangible representation of the metaphorical closet, a place where she can keep her non-normative sexuality 'locked' away in a place that only she can access. The locker then becomes a physical manifestation of the teenaged brain, where academic and personal knowledges are stored and retrieved when necessary, represented as well through the textbooks, homework and school supplies (representing the academic knowledge) and personal effects, such as personal correspondence, pictures, love letters, clothes and accessories (representing social or personal knowledge). Thus, when Emily opens up to her friends about her sexuality, so too does her locker. What this means is that as Emily comes out, the contents of her locker become more on display to the general Rosewood High populace, where personal effects are not clouded behind the academic textbooks.

Existing in these designated teen spaces (i.e. the high school) are the teenagers themselves. Although teen TV often features adult characters, many of these serve as parental or authoritarian figures. However, as Glyn Davis and Kay Dickinson (2004) argue

'current cultural understandings of "youth" (or at least the youth market) could be seen to welcome anyone from pre-teens to people in their forties' (11). Therefore, the recurrence of adult characters may also be read in terms of a youthful 'sensibility' rather than as purely distinguished between adolescence and adulthood. Or more simply, the parents portrayed in *Pretty Little Liars*, for example, are in a constant state of flux themselves as they must negotiate their own identities alongside guiding their children through the murky terrain that is being a teenager. Thus, liminality is an ever occurring and constantly shaping concept that pervades the teen TV programme, which serves an ideal function to negotiate LGBT+ representations. Davis and Dickinson (2004) also argue that these teen TV shows often 'root for the outsider, celebrating otherness and rarely sympathising with "the jock" or "the cheerleader" unless these characters are themselves insecure in these highly fabricated and difficult to maintain social roles' (7).[65] The four central protagonists in *PLL* fit this pattern as each character represents a distinctive Othered teen identity: Spencer represents the bookish, nerdy overachiever; Aria serves to highlight the punk or goth outsider; Hanna is the "fat" one, desperately trying to fit in; and Emily is the closeted lesbian. Although they are transformed into a "mean-girl" clique, united by Alison and her popularity, Alison's queen bee identity only serves to reinforce those character types by her incessant manipulation and bullying tactics used to keep her as the 'it girl' both within her clique and within Rosewood High.

The final convention employed by teen TV programmes are the teen-oriented narratives that speak to the teen condition and teen identity. Many of these narratives surface out of the socio-cultural issues relevant to the teen experience, such as cyberbullying, but most of these teen-centred narratives additionally speak to the larger socio-cultural issues in wider, adult society. For example, Emily's coming out narrative is a hyperbolisation of the fear many LGBT+ individuals experience as they are still determining and defining their sexual identity. Part of that fear is the notion of one's true identity being uncovered and revealed to family, friends and (work or school) colleagues during that time of sexual insecurity. This becomes a terrifying reality as 'A' (Mona in this narrative arc) toys with Emily, teasing that 'A' will out her to her parents, her friends and the rest of the school. In this context, then, 'A' represents the internal and external struggles LGBT+ (youth) fight

---

[65] They also recognise that this is especially true in regards to science fiction and fantasy teen TV programmes.

to overcome when choosing to remain within or come out of the closet. Although 'A' is an external pressure forcing Emily's sexual identity into the public arena, 'A's' threats can also be read as internalised pressure (or one's subconscious, internal struggle over his/her own non-normative sexual identification battle), particularly as 'A' leaves the intimate photos of Maya and Emily kissing in Emily's textbooks and in her locker. This internalised pressure to come out marks what Kirsten McLean (2007) notes as the battle between disclosure and non-disclosure, where disclosure is represented as good and non-disclosure as bad. While McLean (2007) problematizes this disclosure binary as it relates to bisexual identity, particularly in that bisexuals often feel they do not fit in (153), this also speaks to the uncertainty of coming out as an LGBT+ youth, primarily in that being out in high school may position one in isolation to their peers. It is this internal struggle with regards to Emily's sexuality that has manifested through the 'A' figure.

Mystery Conventions and the Queer Connections

Where teen TV uses settings, character types and narratives that emphasise melodrama (which in turn speak to the teen experience) as conventions to establish teen as a generic category (Davis & Dickinson 2004; Ross & Stein 2008), mystery uses serialisation (cliff-hangers, for example), distorted camera angles, chiaroscuro and plot devices such as the twist or reveals (for example, CeCe or Mona being revealed as 'A'; see Glick & Levy 1962, Cawelti 2004 and Bingham 2014). Each of these mystery conventions operates to distort viewer perceptions. Moreover, these conventions as will be evidenced in the subsequent chapters are integral to the ways in which 'fan-scholar' is encouraged by the text. But these conventions also serve to emphasise the aforementioned social issues discussed in the previous subsection as it relates to *Pretty Little Liars*; namely, the links between undisclosed and disclosed sexual identities. In other words, queer and mystery operate along a similar axis, where queer discourses highlight that which is non-normative (Doty 1993), mystery and teen TV utilise queer aesthetics and conventions to speak to these social issues. What this means, then, is that mystery may position queerness through its salient textual features in a similar manner as has been argued about horror (Halberstam 1995; Berenstein 1996; Benshoff 1997; Miller 2011; Elliott-Smith 2012 and 2014; Bingham 2012; Scales 2014). For example, while the viewer is aware of Emily's struggle to define her sexual orientation, for

her boyfriend Ben, who represents heterosexual and societal expectations, Emily and Ben do not quite function. This is particularly evident in episode 1.02 'The Jenna Thing' when Ben teases Emily about engaging in sexual acts with Maya as a point of sexual objectification and not as a reading of Emily's sexuality. Yet, a more overt link between queerness and mystery in *PLL* is the figure of 'A'. 'A' exists within the shadows and on the fringes of society. They ('A') utilise technology to exist inconspicuously and to hide their identity much in the same way LGBT+ youth use technology and the internet to explore their sexuality in a safe space, but also in a space where they can ensure their anonymity when required (Driver 2007; O'Riordan & Phillips 2007; Pullen 2010). Thus, the ubiquity of technology and the reliance on mobile and internet platforms in *PLL* reinforces this interpretation of 'A' as a queer (read transgressive) character, but also that queerness and mystery are interlinked with one another. Further, and as will be explored in Chapter 7, 'A' is revealed to be the transgendered character CeCe Drake, which is a pseudonym for Charlotte Dilaurentis, nee Charles Dilaurentis.

Inherent, then, to mystery conventions as they are employed in *PLL*, but also in other (teen) mystery television programmes (this is particularly evident in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *The Vampire Diaries, Teen Wolf* and *Scream*) is queerness. Queerness can disrupt narrative flow, a technique serialisation requires, as cliff-hangers, plot twists and reveals demonstrate in *Pretty Little Liars*. This is particularly evident as 'A' scenes conclude each episode, teasing the viewer/fan with glimpses of gloved hands and over-the-shoulder shots that merely display a hooded figure; but these scenes also invite fans/viewers to scrutinise the scenes closely for pertinent clues that would reveal 'A's' identity, a sign that the text is inviting a 'fan-scholar' engagement via these mystery generic conventions. Oftentimes, these clues are figured as props relevant to the specific episode these scenes conclude, such as the intimate photographs that feature Emily and Maya kissing that were stolen by 'A' in 1.03 'To Kill a Mocking Girl' or the missing parrot Tippi that was stolen by 'A' and is subsequently shown eating cooked chicken in the 'A' concluding scene of episode 4.02 'Turn of the Shoe'. In both of these 'A' scenes, queerness is conveyed explicitly by being expressed in a photo of the two girls kissing or a parrot consuming another bird's flesh. While these two scenes seem disparate from one another, the parrot eating poultry could be seen to mirror the kiss from the missing photos in 1.03, specifically in the gendered discourses

surrounding the word bird, which is British slang for woman.[66] Moreover, homosexuality and by extension lesbianism have been constructed in popular discourses as monstrous, that it counters pro-creative models of human existence, but it has also been linked to 'bestiality, incest, necrophilia, [and] sadomasochism' (Benshoff 1997, 3). Thus, the associations between 'necrophilia' and homosexuality/lesbian identity invite this queer reading of Tippi eating roasted chicken. Although these 'A' scenes work to conclude each episode, they are employed to emphasise the mysterious identity of 'A', but also to provide viewers/fans with clues to determine 'A's' identity. Furthermore, these ubiquitous scenes serve to serialise the programme.

Integral to these concluding 'A' scenes is how the figure of 'A' is framed within the shots. Typically, close-ups and medium-body shots are employed so as to tease 'A's' identity without exposing their face or any defining physical features, which are used to antagonise the 'fan-scholar' by providing little information with regards to 'A's' identity, but enough to warrant further scrutiny. Returning to the final scene in 4.02 'Turn of the Shoe', the scene opens with a close-up of a half empty plate that has sprigs of rosemary and green beans on it. Behind this plate is a bowl of rice and a wine glass. Because Tippi the African grey parrot was stolen to prevent the four protagonists from discovering clues to 'A's' identity, the dinner set-up is teased to suggest that Tippi has been cooked and will be eaten. As the scene progresses, 'A's' black-gloved hands add rice and then a roasted bird carcass, which solidifies for the viewer that Tippi has been killed. Birds become a theme in this 'A' scene as the salt and pepper shakers are porcelain owls that season what the viewer assumes to be Tippi. As 'A' begins to consume this bird, they utilise a sharp, retractable hunting knife and a large carving fork, thus queering the scene further by utilising non-traditional cutlery, which is a disruption from normative dining habits. From the hunting knife, parallels can be drawn between 'A' stalking the four Liars and Tippi's death, suggesting that 'A' will go to any lengths to harass and even murder the four central protagonists. After cutting the roasted bird flesh, the camera follows 'A's' hand with the roasted bird speared with a sharp fork and as the hand raises, a cage begins to appear on screen. Tippi takes centre frame, locked in an antique cage, bending down to consume what the viewers can only assume is a tiny, roasted

---

[66] Ostensibly, British slang would be irrelevant to an American television programme; however, when this episode aired, 'A's' identity had not been revealed, and the most prominent and popular theory amongst the *PLL* army was that the British character Wren was 'A'. Furthermore, there are links to British culture throughout *PLL*, which are explored further in Chapter 7.

chicken. The shots employed suggest queerness from the start of this scene to its concluding moments. Close-ups here are used to disrupt dining norms, where parrot would not normally be a staple of American household cuisine, nor would the use of hunting knives or carving forks to cut the flesh. Furthermore, the close-up of the bird carcass details the defining features of what the viewer would assume to be Tippi: the roasted skin displays pinpoint holes that would indicate the feathers have been freshly plucked; the wings are still intact and the feet have been cut off from the leg bones; the carcass is smaller than the average structure of a roasted chicken; and finally, the roasted bird has been placed on its back to emphasise death and vulnerability, two recurring themes associated with 'A'.

Another recurring feature both within this scene from 4.02, but also in (teen) mystery TV is chiaroscuro. Chiaroscuro is the blending of lightness and darkness to centralise focus onto a specific object or person, but also to distort or blur the edges of a shot in a mise-en-scene. Pia Hekanaho (2016) locates chiaroscuro in the tradition of the Gothic (65), a literary, filmic and televisual tradition that has been linked explicitly to queerness (Sedgwick 1985, 83-96; Halberstam 1995). Furthermore, detective and crime novels are argued to have arisen out of the second wave of Gothic literature in the mid-to-late 19th century (Punter 2013), which would indicate that mystery conventions are also influenced by the Gothic tradition. Thus, employing chiaroscuro emphasises mystery by blurring or distorting edges to concentrate focus onto a specific prop, costume or character; but, it also highlights the tradition of the transgressive or queer nature inherent to both the Gothic and (teen) mystery TV.

Returning to the example drawn from episode 4.02, the close-up shot of the dinner plate with the roasted bird, the viewer's attention is not only drawn to the plate and the carcass by the distance of the camera, its importance also arises out of the lighting:

Figure 1 4.02 'Turn of the Shoe'

As is evident from this still, it has been framed through contrasting shades of dark lighting and colouring; yet, the centre of the frame is considerably lighter than the edges. The differing degrees of darkness and lightness work to draw the viewer's attention to just above and to the right of the impaled roast bird. Chiaroscuro here encircles the plate creating an iris-like frame, a technique employed in classic cinema to suggest that one is viewing the scene through a mask (Bordwell & Thompson 2008, 187). Masks and the framing of scenes as if viewing through a mask are further iterations of the importance of chiaroscuro to mystery and is a convention employed through *PLL*, but particularly when 'A' is in close proximity to the camera or to the Liars. Furthermore, the iris effect through chiaroscuro is also employed when one witnesses 'A's' action through point-of-view shots.

Finally, a significant mystery convention explored is the twist or the reveal. While these two narrative techniques can function together or as separate generic conventions, they work to achieve the same end: confusing or disrupting audience expectations. In mystery texts, they can also serve to allow viewers to theorise a text's narrative outcomes, especially if fans and/or viewers are "teased" by producers that major reveals will arise

most notably in season or mid-season finales.[67] However, they can also operate on a smaller scale, such as is the case in the example used throughout this subsection. Further to this point, reveals and twists can be directly related to sexual or gender orientations that disrupt heteronormative expectations, such as 'A' being revealed to be transgender or on a smaller scale Tippi consuming prepared poultry. I draw from this example as I argued above that a correlation between monstrosity, 'necrophilia' and queer (read non-normative) sexuality has been framed through public discourses (Benshoff 1997, 3). The twist or reveal is especially important to mystery narratives as the audience and/or fans "work" actively to interpret the text to predict narrative outcomes (see Chapter 7 for more on this). It is this "working" that I turn to in the next section to investigate how (teen) mystery texts invite fans to engage in 'textual productivity' (Fiske 1992) via the 'fan-scholar' label.

Genre, Fan Engagement and Textual Productivity

While it is not the intention of this section to explore in detail those fannish modes of 'textual productivity' (Fiske 1992) investigated in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, it is necessary to explore the ways in which the generic categories teen and mystery invite fannish engagement through 'textual productivity'. Furthermore, this section synthesises the previous two sections to argue that these fannish artefacts are the result of a fannish engagement originating from 'fan-scholars' (Hills 2002). I arrive at this juncture through the expanded definition of 'fan-scholar' proposed in the first section, but also the ways in which the text itself implements teen and mystery generic conventions. Moreover, this section explores the three modes of fannish production engaged with throughout the rest of the thesis. This is achieved by exploring the three main types of fannish artefacts I investigate in Chapters 5, 6 and 7: fanfiction/(fem)slash fiction, MEMEs/GIFs/GIF sets and fan theory-making. Although I briefly define these terms here, greater exploration of these definitions are given in their respective chapters. Here, the definitions are used to illustrate how these modes of fannish 'textual productivity' may be viewed to arise out of specific genres of texts.

'Fan-scholar' in this section is viewed not just as an identity category, whether that identity be adopted by an individual or affixed by a researcher onto fans, it may also be

---

[67] Thus, 'fan-scholar' identity here is seen to be further encouraged by the text.

viewed as a theoretical positioning invited by the text. Framing 'fan-scholar' as such may be viewed to be problematic, especially when considering identity politics regarding gender and sexual orientation. However, using 'fan-scholar' as a theoretical textual positioning can be useful if focusing primarily on the ways in which a text invites the spectator to make meaning out of it. By this, I do not mean the ways in which the spectator is supposed to negotiate non-normative sexual and/or non-binary gender identifications represented through the text (or, more simply, reading Emily's sexuality as positive because *PLL* positions Emily and her sexual orientation as such, for example). Here I point to the aspects of the text (such as close analysis of the text to find clues pertaining to 'A's' identity) that invite readings of the narrative that would predict narrative outcomes.[68] Nor does this speak to the ways in which fans will and *do* negotiate these onscreen socio-cultural polemics. It does, however, suggest that teen and mystery texts invite critical engagements from 'fan-scholars'. By this, I refer to the ways in which 'fan-scholars' explore beyond the surface of the text to infer greater meanings, but also through the ways in which they create fannish artefacts to explicate those meanings. The primary example here are the ways in which these fans are invited to adopt 'fan-scholar' identities to theorise 'A's' identity as evidenced above and further elaborated on in Chapter 7.

The first way teen and mystery invite critical engagement with the text is the manner by which fans ship Emison.[69] Emison is the portmanteau relationship name that refers to Emily Fields and Alison Dilaurentis. This relationship or 'ship' has been constructed by fans via textual evidence, but Emison is also a ship that is encouraged by the text itself. For example, in 2.12 'Over My Dead Body' Emily has been kidnapped by 'A' and locked inside an enclosed garage-like space with the motor of a car running; 'A' (here, Mona) has done this to murder Emily by asphyxiation.[70] The scene ends with Emily laying on the concrete floor, coughing and on the verge of passing out. A jump cut is then used to provide a close-up of Emily's face as she is lying on the ground, coming back to consciousness. Here, the hue and texture of the scene changes from natural lighting to golden-hued. These types of changes in lighting and texture indicate a significant alteration to the events that would suggest a dream-like state is occurring, where Emily may actually be succumbing to the exhaust fume

---

[68] This is not to say that the text does not engage with socio-cultural issues.

[69] For a further exploration as to *how* these fans do this, see Chapters 5 and 6.

[70] This is a scene Emison shippers reference frequently in their fannish artefacts and thus serves as a prime example for the ways in which these fans engage in 'fan-scholar' activities.

toxins. As the camera zooms out, it cuts to a narrow gap between trees, which allows blinding sunlight to shine through. The camera begins to pan downward and Alison fills the frame in a medium close-up shot. Her skin radiates a golden hue that mirrors the lighting of the scene. Two possibilities arise in this instance: Alison is alive or Emily is dying and being supported by Alison's ghost through that process. Both of these possibilities reflect upon the mystery of Alison's disappearance, allowing the fans to speculate Alison's fate (whether she is alive or not). But it also reiterates the intense amorous feelings Emily has for Alison and is a scene commonly referenced by fans when substantiating their claims about the existence of Emison.

Alison's skin tone is almost ethereal as she gazes longingly at Emily, uttering that 'It's okay. You're with me now.' (32:57), a further suggestion of Emily's impending doom. However, anticipation of Emily's forthcoming death is disrupted as the camera uses a shot/reverse shot structure that maintains the golden hued texture on Alison, but returns to the natural tones and lighting when featuring Emily's face. Contrastedly, whether Alison is alive or dead remains integral to this scene, providing the 'fan-scholar' with shots, lighting and dialogue to analyse and decode. This scene also provides the 'fan-scholar' engaging in queer politics the opportunity to conjecture over Emison's reality. Emison is thus framed through the same camera work as the mystery conventions, indicating that Emison may be read as a burgeoning, queer teen TV convention that engages in contemporary queer politics that address the boundaries between teen identity and sexuality. Like the homosexual monster posed by Harry Benshoff (1997), Alison exists (until season 4) along the fringes of the narrative, primarily appearing in flashbacks that also employ a golden-hued texture, and on the edge of scenes in the area obscured by chiaroscuro. Furthermore, this is a direct parallel between Alison and 'A', where they do not coexist until three seasons later. What this means, then, is that both Alison and 'A' are iterations of queerness, as they are not permitted to exist openly within the same heteronormative world the liars occupy; thus, the camera work that promotes mystery conventions to invite fans to adopt a 'fan-scholar' identity to determine Alison's fate also operates to suggest that queerness exists on the fringes, away from that heteronormative world.[71]

---

[71] As I am arguing that 'fan-scholar' is not solely an adopted identity marker, but an identity type that can be encouraged by the text, as argued previously, any fan that engages critically with a text may here be viewed as a 'fan-scholar'.

Bound together here are two entry points for 'fan-scholars' to engage critically with the text, as evidenced by the example above. Also stated above are the two distinct readings available to the 'fan-scholar' dependent upon their own negotiation or privileging of the text's dominant genre: mystery or teen. In other words, if the 'fan-scholar' engages more critically with the mystery of 'A's' identity and Alison's status as dead or alive, that 'fan-scholar' might view the simultaneously coded conventions as primarily privileging mystery. Conversely, the 'fan-scholar' that centralises the importance of Emison to their modes of fannish engagement they might view this scene through the lens of teen first and mystery second. This is not to say however that 'fan-scholars' cannot engage simultaneously with both mystery and teen conventions to justify not only a reading that Emison is real, but can also ascertain through their reading of the text that Alison is either alive or dead.[72]

Central to conveying either or both of these readings occurs through the replication of these types of moments via GIFs/GIF sets, MEMEs or the reinterpretation ('episode fix') of this scene through genfic/femslash fiction. What this means is that the fans will somehow remediate (Bolter & Grusin 1999) the integral moments of the text that substantiate or validate their analysis of either Emison, their theories in regards to 'A's' identity and/or their position on Alison's status as either dead or alive. Further to this point, 'fan-scholars' who engage in fan theory-making often incorporate some or all of these types of fannish artefacts into their theories. These theories can take the form of fanfiction, can simply be a MEME or GIF with accompanying text either superimposed onto the digital fannish artefact itself or can accompany the fan product through additional commentary below or above the digital artefact. Fan theories can also appear in essay format that is influenced by academic style writing (see Chapter 7 for a more in depth exploration of fan theory-making). Jason Mittell (2013) refers to these 'fan-scholars' as 'forensic-minded fans' and the texts with which these fans engage as 'drillable texts'. He defines the 'drillable text' as texts that 'encourage a mode of forensic fandom that invites viewers to dig deeper, probing beneath the surface to understand the complexity of a story and its telling'. Although I concur with his definitions of 'drillable text' and 'forensic fandom', I take issue with the terminology itself as these terms speak specifically to solving or uncovering nefarious activity. This has

---

[72] Although in this thesis I am focusing on the ways in which fans negotiate LGBT representation through their meaning making practices, this does not indicate that these are the only readings available evidenced through fannish 'textual productivity' (Fiske 1992).

wide reaching implications when 'fan-scholars' or 'scholar-fans' investigate texts for their queer undertones for example, such as readings by *Teen Wolf* (2011-) fans who ship Sterek (Stiles Stillinski and Derke Hale). In other words, slash pairings and the investigation by those 'forensic-minded fans' who 'dig deeper, probing beneath the surface' (ibid.) might reify anti-LGBT+ discourses that position 'contra-straight' (Doty 1993) or non-binary gender identities as illegal, villainous or anathema to "good, law abiding" members of society (read heterosexual). It also denies opportunities for these to be represented overtly.

This section of the chapter highlighted the ways in which the text positions 'fan-scholar' similar to the way the spectator has been constructed as a theoretical positioning of the text. Exploring 'fan-scholar' beyond the way Hills (2002) conceptualised the term points to textual moments where these 'fan-scholars' could interrogate or 'dig deeper' into the text to engage critically. The next and final section of this chapter implements a textual analysis of *Pretty Little Liars* Season 5 finale 'Welcome to the Dollhouse'. Employing my own textual analysis here through the lens of queer theory, particularly the ways in which non-binary gender identity has been privileged as central to 5.25's structure further highlights the entry points for fan analysis. Although these entry points are brought forward through my own critical engagement with the text's queer undertones, I am doing so to reinforce the theorisation of 'fan-scholar' as a theoretical positioning arising out of the text as argued above.

Queer Trappings and Kidnappings

Investigating the queer undertones in *Pretty Little Liars* permits not only an exploration of the key moments 'fan-scholars' (Hills 2002) are invited by the text to engage critically, but it also allows an interrogation into my own personal meaning making strategies as both a fan and a scholar.[73] In spite of the fact that this thesis seeks to privilege fan meaning making over academic ones, it is also important to demonstrate, through my own evaluation of the source text, the ways in which I approach these fan analyses. What this means, then, is that my own personal analysis of 'Welcome to the Dollhouse' through a queer theoretical lens will confront the personal biases I bring to a text; or more simply, it will illuminate what I

---

[73] Queerness, here, refers to that which transgresses hetero- and homonormativity (Sedgwick 1990; Doty 1993; Halberstam 1995 and 2005; Benshoff 1997; Sullivan 2003) and not the umbrella term used to represent LGBT identity.

privilege in my own queer readings of a text. Moreover, parallels can be drawn here between a 'scholar-fan' reading of a text and a 'fan-scholar' one. This has particular ramifications not only for the ways in which I as both a scholar and a fan view the queer nature of the text, but it also shapes how I engage with other fans and their fannish artefacts. Specifically, this frames the types of fan analysis with which I engage, but it also gives credence to the remaining chapters of the thesis that privilege an interrogation into the ways in which fans negotiate non-normative sexuality and non-binary gender identity represented in *Pretty Little Liars*. Therefore, this section explores the ways in which Harry Benshoff's (1997) 'monster queer' figures into 'A's' characterisation and is examined through the queerness by 'A's' dollhouse, a space that is central to this episode. Themes of artificiality are integral to this reading, as 'A' traps and "plays with" the four Liars and Mona Vanderwaal in a recreation of the Liar's domestic settings and 'A's' own childhood spaces.

'Welcome to the Dollhouse' is the Season 5 finale and aired 24 March 2015. It is an episode that begins the end to *PLL*, which will air its series finale in June 2017. This season finale brings the four central protagonists Aria, Spencer, Hanna and Emily into 'A's' dollhouse, where they become 'A's' living dolls. Throughout the episode, the Liars are forced to plan and attend 'A's' high school prom amidst a crowd of dressed and masked mannequins who stand in for the patrons of Rosewood High. They are also provided with prom dresses and play the iconic Mystery Date Game to determine who their prom dates will be. Further, they ready themselves in their own 'rooms', modelled after their home bedrooms that include identical furnishings, wallpaper and decorations. However much these "identical" rooms are presented as mirror images, just outside the windows and behind the walls lay a concrete façade that radically disrupts that mirror image. Further, in their own spaces, the Liars can come and go as they please, but here they are denied agency, as they are told when and where they can go and become literal prisoners in their "own" rooms.

Artificiality comes to the fore, not just through associations with the words 'doll' and 'dollhouse'; reconstruction and control pervading this episode also focalise artifice as integral to the dominant themes arising from this finale. But when queerness is highlighted – which is also a dominant theme perpetuated throughout the entirety of the TV programme (see above) – alongside notions of the artificial or the "not quite", discourses of sexuality and gender identity are arguably shaped through this constructed artificiality. In

other words, the ways in which *PLL* visualises discourses of sexuality and non-binary gender identity by LGBT+ representations and through employing queer themes disrupts the positive change the show is striving for (see Bingham 2014 for the ways in which the network ABC Family promotes LGBT+ diversity through its selection of television programming). Queerness, then, is figured as artifice and therefore, LGBT+ identity is almost, "not quite" or falls short of being a legitimate identity. This surfaces in spite of the fact that Emily is openly gay, as are her girlfriends, but it is reinforced by the 'almost' quality of Emison as highlighted previously in this chapter and in Chapters 5 and 6. Thus, Emison is teased, because it is a relationship that is "not quite" legitimate.

However, episode 5.25 positions queerness in opposition to homosexuality, which destabilises the collective LGBT+ community by normalising lesbian and gay identities but not transgender or bisexual ones. Therefore, 'A' is an apt stand in for Harry Benshoff's (1997) 'monster queer' as 'A' is revealed to be transgender in 6.10 'Game Over, Charles', but 'A' is also juxtaposed against Emily, a character stand-in representing homonormativity (Duggan 2002) or what I argue in Chapter 5 is a figuration of "acceptable" lesbian and gay identities. Benshoff constructs the 'monster queer' in opposition to heterosexuality as he argues that 'the multiple social meanings of the words "monster" and "homosexual" are seen to overlap to varying but often high degrees' (1997, 3). While there is no doubt that segments of society continue to associate homosexuality with monstrosity, the general shift in public acceptance since the 1990s (Becker 2006) to the adoption of gay marriage by many western countries from the mid-2000s suggests that public attitudes have shifted more in support of homosexuality and the associated identities lesbian and gay (Miller 2011).[74] Sam Miller (2011) marks this acceptance and lesbian and gay assimilation into mainstream society as the death of the 'monster queer' in film, and by extension television. Although there has been a considerable dearth of available filmic and televisual 'monster queers' to wreak havoc on heteronormative society, norms and ideals/ideologies in the post-9/11 cinematic and televisual landscape (Miller 2011), a new 'monster queer' has emerged in the form of the transgender villain 'A'. But 'A' not only disrupts heteronormativity, 'A' is positioned in contradistinction to homonormativity and thus battling against new and

---

[74] I am reluctant to incorporate bisexuality into this category of "accepted" non-normative sexual orientations as there is evidence to suggest that bisexuality is not only derided by heterosexual communities (Mulick & Wright 2002), but also by lesbian and gay communities as well (Mulick & Wright 2002; McLean 2007).

emerging homosexual discourses and ideologies shaped by neo-liberal politics (Duggan 2002). Even though 'A' has been constructed through themes of artificiality as argued above and that this artifice suggests an "almost" quality, for many 'monster queers' that artifice *must* be constructed in order to live out their lives meaningfully.

'A's' dollhouse, then, functions as a queer space whereby 'A' may recreate or "play" with their conception of heteronormative society. In other words, the dollhouse represents idealised heterosexuality/homosexuality and prescriptive gender norms. This is particularly evident in the reconstruction of the girls bedrooms, particularly in that picture frames are not filled with photos taken from the Liars' rooms; instead, these frames are empty, retain the original photo from the time of purchase or are filled with photos that feature mannequins:

Figure 2 5.25 'Welcome to the Dollhouse' Aria's "Family" Photo

Here, the photo used in a frame that is seen in both Aria's real room and her dollhouse room contains a photo that features a mannequin family. It not only stands in for Aria's nuclear family (mother, father and two children), it also represents the idealisation of that nuclear family that many contra-straight individuals have strived to recreate through assimilation (Sullivan 2003). As Aria is a literal prisoner within her recreated room, the photo takes on further significance as it represents a rejection of the nuclear family, hetero- and homonormativity. Thus, the confluence of artifice and queer here act to destabilise these hetero- and now homonormative ideals to situate Aria as not only 'A's' prisoner/doll, but

also a prisoner of heteronormative society and the gender roles and expectations associated with heteronormativity. While these notions are bound together through queer theory's evolution from feminism (Sedgwick 1990; Butler 1990), these gender and sexuality constructs are also linked by 'A's' representation as transgender, but also through Harry Benshoff's (1997) conceptualisation of the 'monster queer'.

Furthermore, "play" is central to dollhouses, dolls and the owner of these toys. Thus, when 'A' "plays" with the four Liars, that "play" can occur in any manner and at any time, which is evident throughout this episode and throughout the series as a whole. In other words, while "play" connotes innocence or joy, for example, "play" can also be linked with deceit and malignancy, but it may also be associated with gender, especially so with drag performances and transgender identity.[75] However, here, gender play is hinted at through the rejection of gendered and sexual archetypes by recreating family photos using mannequins as opposed to people, which is a bald display of artificiality. Thus, artificiality is used not just to reinforce (here) Aria's current situation, but also to comment on the artificiality of these social constructs of gender and sexuality.

While these ostentatious displays of artifice as they appear in 'A's' dollhouse are visible in the props and the recreated settings, artificiality also is figured through the cinematography. That is, 'Welcome to the Dollhouse' adopts certain lighting stylistics to emphasise that, not only are they trapped within a volatile dollhouse of horrors, but that the lighting used is not natural lighting, thus indicating that they are underground. Grey tinged lighting is used to create a below-ground effect, but it is also a colour associated with their captivity as the lighting recalls images of concrete and bars, or more simply, the way one would imagine prison lighting to be; this is further emphasised by the Liars' costumes, as they are wearing orange, prison jumpsuits when they are abducted by 'A' and are deposited into 'A's' prison-like dollhouse.

More importantly however is the notion that femaleness is trapped within a physical (masculine) structure. While the girls may be trapped in 'A's' dollhouse, the Liars also refer to it as a bunker, a space commonly associated with war and a space relegated to maleness and masculinity, particularly through the historical connotations of soldiers and the

---

[75] To clarify, I do not insinuate that transgender individuals "play" with gender the same way drag queens and kings do. However, the perception in popular discourses is that transgendered individuals *do* "play" with gender, but as a way to come to terms with their realised gender identity that may not reflect their birth gender (Shewe 2009).

military.[76] Furthermore, this space relies upon digital technology to assert 'A's' control over the girls. The reliance upon technology and the assertion of control through that technology in a traditionally female oriented space (the dollhouse) invites a reading of male dominance and control, particularly in that technology has been coded masculine (Wajcman 1991 and 2006; Bingham 2016). Furthermore, Judy Wajcman (1991) argues that technology is designed by men for men, but also that 'domestic technology has reinforced the traditional sexual division of labour between husbands and wives and locked women more firmly into their traditional roles' (87). What makes this technological control particularly pernicious is that it comes primarily in the form of surveillance – cameras are installed in the corners of each room, including the Liars' faux bedrooms. Thus, the dollhouse is both a masculine and feminine space, where masculinity controls and dictates rules, order and movement, whereas femininity manifests itself through the female occupants: The Liars and Mona. In other words, femininity and female identity are literally trying to escape a physically male space that relies on artifice to interpret femaleness and femininity. The dollhouse and the bunker then represent a battle between female identity freeing itself from the trappings of male identity, male gender conventions and heteronormativity.

This internal battle is allegorised through 'A's' queerness, the blurring of male and female spaces and the liars themselves. It should also be read as the battle transgender individuals face when coming to terms with their identities. Although this specific battle represents the transition from male to female, this conflagration of gender norms and gendered trappings could be altered to speak to female to male transition as well. While "conflagration" is not a word commonly associated with overcoming gender constructs and the rigidity of gendered society, particularly heteronormativity and patriarchy, an actual fire destroys the innards of the dollhouse/bunker in 6.01 'Game on, Charles', thereby allowing the Liars, and thus femaleness and femininity, to escape. Therefore, 'A's' villainy may also be viewed as a struggle between maleness and femaleness, because 'A's' primary victims are her family who consigned her to maleness,[77] but also the four central protagonists Aria, Hanna, Spencer and Emily. 'A's' villainy, then, is an explicit representation of Benshoff's

---

[76] This is a theme that is also explored in Chapter 7, where a fan theorist postulates the importance of military garb to 'A's' identity.

[77] In the mid-season 6 summer finale 6.10 'Game over, Charles', viewers learn that Charlotte/CeCe was ostracized by her father for her gender identity struggle. This resulted in Charlotte's parents committing her to Radley Sanitarium, an asylum for the mentally disabled. The only family visitor Charlotte receives is her mother.

(1997) 'monster queer', as the internal battle 'A' wages within herself manifests itself in the tyranny of 'A's' actions. In other words, the monstrosity of 'A' is a result of that internal struggle, but also that struggle between acceptance and denial by heteronormative, and now homonormative, society. Where lesbian women and gay men battle for acceptance in the heterosexual world, often against heteronormativity and patriarchy, transgender individuals must overcome adversity doled out by both the heterosexual and homosexual communities as not only do transgender individuals challenge the gender status quo, they also challenge "accepted" sexual orientations.[78]

Conclusion

This chapter was structured to contextualise the key fannish artefacts interrogated in the following case study chapters of the thesis. In order to contextualise these fantexts, the chapter reframed the debates surrounding 'fan-scholar' by locating this identity category as firstly constructed by 'scholar-fans', but also the ways in which genre texts can invite fans to engage with the text as a 'fan-scholar'. By expanding Matt Hills' (2002) 'fan-scholar' to account for the ways in which genre invites such an engagement, it permitted a theorisation of 'fan-scholar' that looks beyond the academic labelling of certain fans as such to explore those textual moments that would summon fans to 'dig deeper' (Mittell 2013) into the text. In order to frame 'fan-scholar' as such, I explored the specific teen and mystery generic conventions that are used in genre texts, providing examples from key episodes to demonstrate the ways in which these conventions invite fans to participate in fannish activities that can be likened to a 'fan-scholar' identity. After examining these conventions, I provided my own textual analysis of 5.25 'Welcome to the Dollhouse' to highlight the similarities between 'scholar-fan' readings of a text and the forthcoming 'fan-scholar' readings in the case study chapters.

By pointing to the similarities between 'scholar-fan' and 'fan-scholar' readings, this substantiates the necessity to explore further not only fannish artefacts that engage critically with the text, but it also warrants an exploration into how fans negotiate non-normative sexuality and non-binary gender identity. More importantly, however,

---

[78] "Accepted" is not to be read as acceptable. As argued above, just because there has been progress towards wider acceptance in mainstream society, there are still major struggles LGB individuals face. Transgender individuals face a wholly disparate challenge, which is the primary focus of this section of the chapter.

contextualising these fannish artefacts as fan analysis further justifies the importance of adopting methodological approaches to privilege these analyses over my own, which in this thesis is achieved through a reader-guided textual analysis (Ytre-Arne 2011). This promotes a more holistic understanding of the ways in which these fans interrogate and negotiate these LGBT+ representations. Thus, reading *PLL* through a queer theoretical lens frames not only the forthcoming case study chapters, but also the chapters' focus on the ways in which fans make meaning out of the text with a heavy emphasis on negotiating these LGBT+ representations within their fannish 'textual productivity' (Fiske 1992). Chapter 5 is the initial case study chapter that investigates the ways in which *PLL* fans negotiate these LGBT+ representations. It does this by investigating not only the role of (fem)slash fiction within the *Pretty Little Liars* fandom, but also what fans do to negotiate the representation of Emily Fields, Alison Dilaurentis and Paige McCullers. Furthermore, it juxtaposes canonical femslash relationships against constructed slash relationships to explore when (fem)slash stops being (fem)slash in order to arrive at a better understanding of the ways in which fans make meaning out of these LGBT+ representations.

Chapter 5: Slashing the (Fem)slash: Fan Production, Consumption and Narrative Interpretation

> '*This work could have adult content. If you proceed you have*
>
> *agreed that you are willing to see such content.*' *– Archive of*
>
> *Our Own* (n.d.)

While Chapter 4 contextualises fannish 'textual productivity' (Fiske 1992) and the ways in which the genres teen and mystery encourage these modes of engagement, Chapter 5 investigates what I class as the more 'traditional' mode of fan engagement: fanfiction. As evidenced in the literature review, fanfiction has been a primary area of academic inquiry, especially as this type of fan productivity has been deemed to be a resistant form of fan engagement. In other words, fans have been seen to expand their primary text to fill in gaps in the narrative (gen fic), explore textually and non-textually supported heterosexual relationships (het fic) and non-normative or same-sex pairings (slash or femslash fic). Henry Jenkins (1992), Camille Bacon-Smith (1993), Constance Penley (1997), and Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse (2006, 2014) have been integral in shaping fan studies' exploration of this mode of 'textual productivity' (Fiske 1992). Further, and as highlighted in the literature review, much of this scholarship emphasises the importance of community to the fanfiction writers/readers and fanfiction's ability to encourage transgressive readings of the text. Methodologically, these studies have generally employed ethnographic modes of inquiry, whereby fanfiction authors are interviewed, whether in person (at conventions, in their home or, in a more contemporary fashion, through digital means –Skype, instant messaging applications and FaceTime, for example) or through participant observation (either digitally or in person) with particular emphasis on the scholar's immersion into specific fanfiction communities. Furthermore, studies also examine fanfiction's genres and plot devices to highlight the importance of these fan engagements to fandom at large and individual fans. In spite of the textual exploration of these fanfictions, community is still emphasised as integral to its shaping, formatting and distribution/consumption.

Ostensibly then, fanfiction is a mode of engagement that is almost viewed by scholars as being ubiquitous and would expect *PLL* fanfiction to appear with regularity; however, as Bertha Chin notes, fanfiction is not always the dominant fan engagement, and

is occasionally viewed as taboo by fans (Chin 2010) and in the case of *PLL* is not a dominant activity.[79] After a thorough exploration of the available fanfiction on *AO3* (archiveofourown.org), this examination of available fanfiction gives clear indication that fanfiction is not highly prevalent in the *PLL* fan community. Major teen programmes such as *Supernatural* (2005-), *The Vampire Diaries* (2009-) and *Teen Wolf* (2011-) boast large quantities of fanfiction entries on *AO3*: *Supernatural* contains 130,119 entries, *The Vampire Diaries* contains 12,513 entries, and *Teen Wolf* contains 72,636 entries. Similarly, on *Fanfiction.net*, the other largest fanfiction website available to fan authors and readers, *Supernatural* has more than 113,000 entries, *The Vampire Diaries* has more than 36,400 entries and *Teen Wolf* has more than 20,400 entries. When we compare this to *PLL* with 833 entries on *AO3* and 9600 entries on *Fanfiction.net*, fanfiction for *PLL* is arguably less central to its fanbase.[80]

In light of this disparity, what is most striking and particularly evident on *AO3* is that more than half of the available fanfiction centres on same-sex pairings, whether these are narratively or textually supported same-sex relationships or slash pairings. The most dominant slash pairing on *AO3* and which is also echoed across the *PLL* fandom is the Emison ship (Emily Fields and Alison DiLaurentis). Furthermore, while slash has traditionally revolved around male-male pairings (Coppa 2006), *PLL* fanfiction available features a meagre 36 entries in its *AO3* fanfiction archive (the programme archive is where the fanfiction stories are contained) that explicitly engage with male-male pairings, many of which are fandom crossover stories or AU stories.[81]

One final space that has been ignored by fanfiction scholarship is *Nifty.org*. *Nifty.org* or *Nifty Erotic Stories Archive* is a space that privileges same-sex erotica. This archive, established in 1992, has featured erotica under the heading 'Celebrity' since its foundation and describes this section as containing stories relating to 'fantasies about celebrities, fan

---

[79] Although fanfiction production and consumption is not as widespread across the *PLL* fanbase, fanfiction is still a rich area of inquiry, especially as it pertains to non-normative sexuality.

[80] While there is a considerably larger quantity of *PLL* fanfiction available on *Fanfiction.net*, this infamous fanfiction archive has gained notoriety for deleting explicit fanfiction from multiple fandoms, deleting large swaths of fan produced fiction and suspending or deactivating user accounts in violation of an unenforced policy banning explicit or violent stories (Hannah Ellison 'The Book Burning That Wasn't', *Huffington Post* 13 August 2012).

[81] Fandom crossover fanfiction are stories where narrative and characters from one show are blended with another or multiple other shows/media series, whereas AU or alternate universe fanfiction alters the TV programme's narrative to incorporate new characters, new settings (particularly in space or in another dimension), changes character genders, for example.

fiction, slash fiction'. *Nifty* receives brief mention in Francesca Coppa's (2006, 55) 'A Brief History of Media Fandom' but is quickly reduced to a website devoted to 'celebrity based erotica which was absent the fannish fan fiction context,' (Hale 2005, 34 quoted in Coppa 2006, 55). In other words, the derision comes not from its designation as an LGBT+ space, rather, these authors are viewed to be not 'devoted' fans because these stories do not feature on fan designated spaces, such as *AO3* or *Fanfiction.net*. While this may be an accurate position in regards to *Nifty* itself, Laura Hale's (2005) argument that *Nifty* is not a designated fan space does not consider the background of the fanfiction contributors and does not consider that these contributors may privilege their sexuality over their fan identity, thereby finding it more accommodating or 'comforting' to contribute to a space that revolves around his/her sexual orientation. Additionally, and as Hale notes herself in 'A History of Male Involvement in the Fan Fiction Community' (Hale 2008), male involvement in fanfiction production and its communities has been positioned as virtually non-existent, and fanfiction falls under the domain of female (media) fandom. Therefore, male contributions, and in this case gay male contributions to fanfiction may exist in non-fan spaces owing to the arguments presented by fan studies that women control media fandom and/or their designated fan spaces (see Jenkins 1992; Bacon-Smith 1993; Penley 1997; Busse 2002; Hellekson & Busse 2006 and 2014; Coppa 2006). Ultimately, *Nifty* may be viewed as a predominately gay male space (regardless of the fact that it features content from lesbian, bisexual and transgender authors) for a variety of reasons: 1) there is a larger quantity of stories under the 'gay male' category than any other available category; 2) the site was founded by a cisgender, identifying gay male and continues its operations and daily maintenance by other cisgender gay men; 3) the primary financial donors and backers have historically been cisgender gay men, 4) its official *Tumblr* account reblogs gay male featured stories, and 5) its announcements on the *Nifty* homepage largely centre on gay male issues or featured stories.

Because there is a considerable lack of fanfiction created and consumed in the *PLL* fan community, especially when compared to comparable teen television fandoms, and that the stories that do exist primarily revolve around same-sex couplings, this chapter therefore argues that LGBT+ representation, LGBT+ relationships and LGBT+ issues are of considerable importance and focus to the *PLL* fan community. Considering that scholarship around slash fiction has traditionally deemed it to be a resistant reading strategy rather than privileging

LGBT+ identity (see Jones 2002 for this debate),[82] this argument made by the fan fiction studies scholarship does not necessarily carry the same weight, as historically slash has shipped non-textually supported same-sex male-male relationships (Green et al 1998). Furthermore, slash has been argued to provide a space for female fans to explore 'equitable' relationships, indicating that slash readers and writers do so to destabilise normative, heterosexual binaries and to derail power structures that dominate heterosexual romantic and sexual relationships (Lamb & Veith 1986; Jenkins 1992; Bacon-Smith 1993; Penley 1998; Salmon & Symon 2001; Coppa 2006; Woledge 2006; Willis 2006; Lackner et al 2006; Busse 2006; Lothian et al 2007). In terms of *PLL*, the generic construction of slash is blurred, as much of the same-sex couplings within its fanfiction revolve around overt lesbian representation. In other words, Emily Fields is an out lesbian and her 'slash' pairings include other out lesbian characters (Maya St. Germain and Paige McCullers), sexually ambiguous Alison DiLaurentis, and the three other principal female characters: Aria Montgomery, Hanna Marin and Spencer Hastings.

It is thus important to ask: how are LGBT+ relationships explored in slash fiction if these relationships are constructed by viewers?[83] And if slash has historically situated non-textually supported pairings, then does it remain slash if there is textual support for same-sex pairings? Finally, if a relationship developed through slash fiction has nominal textual support (i.e. Alison and Emily have been romantically linked through flashbacks and have been depicted engaging in sexual acts in the narrative present), do the meaning making strategies explored in the fanfiction and evidenced from the text retain its queer and destabilising potentials? In order to answer these questions, I have divided this chapter into three sections. The first section seeks to investigate 'traditional' slash fiction (i.e. male-male non-textually supported pairings) created for male erotic purposes. This is important as this demographic has had virtually no voice in fanfiction scholarship and it also provides a point of comparison to the first section that explores slash's generic conventions. Using a reader-guided textual analysis (Ytre-Arne 2011), section one analyses specific trends that surface in these slash fictions. In other words, I catalogue the relevant visual elements, dialogue,

---

[82] Jones 2002 and Lackner et al 2007 make similar arguments and suggest that not enough scholarship considers LGBT+ identifications or that queerness exists as a textual element as opposed to it being a resistant reading strategy for heterosexual slash fiction authors/readers.

[83] Queer in this sense functions as interchangeable for LGBTQ+ and not its transgressive, resistant reading position.

characterisations and narratives expounded upon in the fanfiction and return to the source text to investigate why these specific trends and why in this specific episode/narrative arc. Specifically, I extract key text from the fanfiction and use this to supplement my own analysis, thereby replacing my own words with the words of the fanfiction author. Crucially, these words, phrases and sentences are the author's and not my own, thereby illuminating the level of analysis and critical thinking these fanfiction authors undertake when creating fanfiction and negotiating non-normative sexual identities. This is not to question its legitimacy as a slash text, but rather to explore how LGBT+ audiences destabilise heteronormativity through fanfiction via the representation of explicit sexual acts. By focusing on this transgressive element of the slash fiction, it becomes evident that gender plays an integral role in the construction of slash fiction, as well as in the ways in which relationships are formed, sustained and valued.

The second section investigates Paily (Paige and Emily) 'slash' fanfiction in order to address whether or not textually supported same-sex relationships imagined in fanfiction should continue to be categorised as (fem)slash fiction. Strategies which fanfiction authors use to create fanfiction, such as closely analysing homoerotic moments in the source text, are investigated through analysing similar trends investigated in section one and by employing the same method outlined above but are applied to Paily fics instead of the slash texts explored in section one.

While the second section explores slash generic conventions to highlight how slash is constructed or elided, the third section addresses Emison (Emily and Alison) fanfiction specifically. This section works to synthesise the findings in sections one and two, as Emison is both a textually and non-textually supported pairing and many fans' OTP (one true pairing). Maintaining a reader-guided textual analysis of the selected Emison fanfiction through the same means as in sections one and two highlights the integral moments fans return to originating in the source text, but also blends those moments with the homoerotic ones (i.e. glances, hand grabs, Emily and Ali brushing against one another, etc...) arising out of the source text. Juxtaposing the fanfiction with the source text illustrates how fans construct a relationship that they believe should be evident within the source text, but it also elucidates the importance of same-sex relationships and the actualisation of those relationships for fans. Furthermore, this fanfiction blurs the boundaries of slash fiction, not

solely as a means to question its existence as slash, but also how these readings invite and destabilise heterosexual and queer readings.

Doing Reader-Guided

Important to reader-guided are the ways analyses are layered and blended. What this means is that reader-guided is not solely a means by which to analyse the source text; rather, at first instance, analysis of the fannish text must be conducted. Therefore, throughout this chapter and the chapters that follow, I provide a contextual critical analysis of the fantext to frame these texts within the larger context of *PLL* or a specific episode of this television programme. Thus, when the trends arising out of these fan-produced fictions have been established, these then guide me to those key instances fans find critical to their understanding and evaluation of their source text. Using this evidence and the original fan-authored words, phrases and sentences, I can arrive at a more nuanced understanding of how fans negotiate mediated representations of LGBT+ identities. In order to accomplish this, however, I am required to first analyse the fannish product, then, using the trends, interrogate those key scenes by using the fan's own authored words as analysis. I highlight when I do this by citing the fan's fanfiction as outlined in Chapter 3: Methodology.

'I, umm…Oh, god, a Chevy': Gay Male Authored Slash Fiction

This section engages with two slash fiction stories originating on *Nifty.org* and located in the 'Celebrity' archive section.[84] Both stories deal with M/M slash as opposed to the current trend in *PLL* fandom revolving around F/F slash or what is commonly referred to as femslash in fandom more generally. A focus on M/M slash fiction that ships non-canonical relationships follows in the tradition of previous slash fiction studies (see Salmon & Symons 2004; Lothian et al 2007; Dhaenens et al 2008), but it also frames the rest of the chapter in two distinct ways: it challenges the debates about what constitutes slash fiction, as it has

---

[84] The slash fiction that exists on *Nifty* is positioned within the 'celebrity' archive section, rather than a general slash fiction section, owing to the site's general nature as a LGBT+ erotica archive. Although Hale (2005) claims this warrants it not being a fan space, as I have previously argued, it may in fact exist on this site as the slash fiction authors may feel more comfortable playing out these fictional relationships in a safe space designated for LGBT+ audiences. Further to this point, its status as a predominantly gay male space (see evidence in the previous section) may also figure into why it is contained here over the specific fanfiction archival sites.

been argued that this is primarily a female oriented genre (Lothian et al 2007); and, it also functions as the "control" when conducting a reader-guided textual analysis (Ytre-Arne 2011). While it was my intentions to locate *PLL* femslash on the *Nifty* Erotica Archives, no work was to be found contained within the Lesbian, Bisexual or Transgender archive categories; however, three different M/M slash stories were found under the Gay category. Although this is a seemingly minimal number of slash stories available in the *Nifty* archives, fanfiction is a niche category of fan textual production and is primarily authored by female fans in general (Hellekson & Busse 2006; Coppa 2006), but is also true of *PLL*. Furthermore, when returning to the fanfiction numbers for *PLL* as highlighted previously on fanfiction archive sites such as *AO3* and *FF.net* (short for *Fanfiction.net*), there is considerably less fanfiction authored for this fandom, especially when comparing it to other fandoms such as *Supernatural*, *The Vampire Diaries* and *Teen Wolf*. Similar to the findings on *AO3* and *FF.net*, the available slash fic on *Nifty*'s 'Celebrity' archive mirrors *AO3* and *FF.net* in terms of the available slash fic for the aforementioned fandoms. Again, because this site caters to more than just fandom, the available content is less than what would be found on a more traditional fanfiction archiving site; however, as acknowledged, the fact that this site caters to more than just fan authored stories does not delimit it from inclusion within the world of slash, rather it opens up debates around gender within the fanfiction community and provides a re-evaluation of where male and female fans go to acquire fanfiction in general and slash specifically.

Though slash and fanfiction have been defined and debated since arguably the beginning of fan studies (Lamb & Veith 1986 as one of the first and landmark pieces on slash fiction; see Hellekson & Busse 2014), this has primarily revolved around female authorship and female consumption. And while there is considerable justification for an emphasis and focus on the pleasures of fanfiction and slash fiction for female fans, virtually no consideration has been attributed to the, albeit minority, male consumption and creation of fanfiction or slash fiction. Furthermore, as highlighted above, the primary site I discovered for gay male slash fiction is located on *Nifty.org*.

What problematizes an exploration of male contribution to fanfiction and slash fiction creation/consumption practices on sites such as *AO3* and *FF.net* is the fact that users may hide behind anonymised or pseudonymic usernames, often crafted in a manner that shows allegiance to their primary fandom (i.e. malepllers) but it does not necessarily provide

any discernible demographic information. This is particularly true with fandoms such as *Harry Potter* or *Teen Wolf*, as many fans can and do create usernames that illustrate their proclivities for specific male characters or specific M/M ships. However, gender may be evidenced through syntax and/or word selection (Otterbacher 2010), as these are conscious decisions made by the author. Conversely, this may not function as conclusive evidence, owing to the fact that they (in this case, the slash author) may choose to adopt masculine or feminine constructions in their writing styles as a means to convey a specific character's gender. Madeline Kahn (1991) refers to this as 'narrative transvestism' (2), whereby an author adopts an opposite gendered "voice". Kahn investigates this in her exploration of 18th century novels to highlight that gender may not necessarily be discernible solely through language construction; however, she is quick to note 'that narrative transvestism…may be unsuitable for women,' conceding to outdated notions of transvestism, whereby 'most psychoanalytic descriptions of transvestism…agree that there is no such thing as a female transvestite,' (ibid.). Of course, this definition is highly problematic, not so much in its conveyance – that we as authors can adopt opposite gendered positions to author texts – but it ignores the transgendered viewing/reading positions adopted by the consumers of texts. Rhona Berenstein (1996) considers how the viewer/reader is textually positioned upon watching/consuming a text, whereby viewers of the classic horror film participate in a mode of 'spectatorship-as-drag' (32-59). In other words, viewers adopt varied subject positions during viewing, reading and inferring meaning from a text; this allows for a cross-gender and multi-sexual reading of a text. Berenstein indicates that texts (narrative cinema, here) are 'a fantasy scenario, a confirmation of, and temporary release from, the subjectivities engaged in by spectators in their everyday lives,' (47). Those subjectivities she defines as 'identification and desire formed on the basis of race, class, ethnicity, nationality,' (ibid.).

While Kahn and Berenstein speak to different points of a text's creation and consumption (one critiquing the construction of the literary canon and the other speaking specifically to film spectator positions), this does not account for the way fans act out both roles: initially as the reader/consumer of the text, and, secondarily, as the creator of new texts as interpretations of the original. Considering the fan's dual position as both consumer and creator, this duality then illuminates the debates surrounding gendered writing and reading practices noted earlier and raises questions in regards to how academic scholarship

on slash has considered only one side of the creator/consumer coin. But what pleasures do (gay) men get from reading and writing M/M slash fiction in the *PLL* fandom? This is a particularly relevant question as lesbian and transgender characters appear more regularly in *Pretty Little Liars*, yet gay male characters are non-existent.

Ostensibly, then, as male viewers engage in *PLL* fandom and seek out relationships and characters they can identify with, they appear to not engage in the cross-gender slash that has often occurred with female fans. In other words, the gay men who have written slash on *Nifty* continue the tradition of M/M pairings, whereas (non-normative) women have traditionally crafted M/M slash as a means to convey 'true love and authentic intimacy [that] can exist only between equals,' (Lamb & Veith 1986 in Hellekson & Busse 2014, 99). Particularly, the slash fiction that gay male authors have created for *PLL* revolve around two primary ships: Mike Montgomery/Noel Kahn and Toby Cavanaugh/Jason Dilaruentis.[85] These specific ships are not necessarily supported or encouraged by the fandom at large, yet they are the predominant ships amongst self-identifying gay/bisexual male viewers.[86] Several themes recur in both slash pieces: reliance on *PLL* narratives that imbue dynamic power structures or the imbalance of those power structures, FF1: Noel blackmailing Ezra in regards to the romantic student-teacher relationship between Ezra and Aria; emphasis on the physical attributes of the male actors portraying their characters, FF2: 'his six-pack stomach rippled'; FF1: Noel…in a tight wifebeater that showed of (sic) his muscled arms'; promiscuity reiterated as sex-positive, FF1: 'Ezra Fitz was an enormous sex pervert'; FF2: 'Jason's former fuck buddy'; considerable focus on large genitalia size and euphemisms for them, FF1: 'Noel's mighty, 10-inch dick', 'Noel's meat', 'massive iron rod', 'lovepole'; FF2: 'Jason's hardness', 'his manhood', 'Toby's boner', ' "Almost 9 inches," Jason grinned.'; and erotically charged 'dirtiness', FF1: 'slightly turned on by the aromatic and musky stench', 'damp with hot schoolboy jock sweat', 'sweat started to form…which trickled down onto his balls and dick, making them even saltier'; FF2: 'Sweat…dampened the waistband to where it appeared noticeably moist', 'licking the sweat from Toby's ear', 'It was salty…but didn't

---

[85] The virgule indicates a pairing or (relation)ship in fandom.

[86] Owing to the fact that these stories appear under the gay male stories archive on *Nifty.org* (as opposed to stories appearing in Lesbian, Bisexual or Transgender archives) and the fact that they deal with representations of explicit gay male sex, I classify these slash fiction authors as self-identifying as gay at least to *some extent*. While this does not ensure that these slash fiction authors and their readers are cisgender gay men (see Foster 2015), the raised evidence would suggest that this space's designation as a gay male one would warrant that these authors are gay/bisexual and male.

disgust him'. While these are original stories and sexual scenarios, the authors rely on narratives and situations extracted from the source text. Consequently, space limitations inhibit me from exploring each of the relevant themes arising out of the fanfiction; more importantly, however, as this thesis investigates fannish textual productivity through a lens of reader-guided textual analysis (Ytre Arne 2011), a singular focus on the narrative trends located in the slash fiction are the primary site of investigation for this section.

Narrative Trends

FF1 extrapolates homoerotic undertones from a scene and narrative arc appearing in Season 1 Episode 13 'Know Your Frenemies', where Noel has received a low grade on an assignment and uses Ezra and Aria's romantic relationship as leverage against Ezra to increase that grade from a C to an A. The slash fiction utilises dialogue verbatim as a means to highlight the homoerotic charge emanating between Ezra Fitz and Noel Kahn. Furthermore, the author employs soliloquy as an interpretive strategy that brings forth what can be deduced as the author recognising homoerotically charged moments that would promote an internalised thought process suggesting, simultaneously, annoyance and arousal: '"Shit, this guy's a fucking douche." Ezra though, "But a fucking hot douche"' (FF1). Ytre-Arne (2011) found that readers of women's magazines emphasise the importance of the 'textual structure' (220) of the material in question, much in the same way the slash fiction authors found the dialogic structure important in uncovering the homoerotic (under)tones.[87]

By investigating this particular scene through the lens of the slash fiction, the author positions Ezra as both narrator and subject of the action. The scene as it occurs in 1.13 commences with Ezra's backside as the camera's focal point, using his right hand to write on the chalkboard, while his left hand is positioned in between the board and the genital region of his body; it does not move until a shot/reverse-shot breaks the focus on Ezra's body to focus on Ezra and Noel's faces in a close up sequence. When the camera begins to move in

---

[87] Here, I frame the fanfiction within the wider context of the television programme through analysing its key elements; I also bring forward the key trends arising out of the fanfiction to return me to the source text. This sets up the first element of the reader-guided method, whereby analysis of the fannish text is pertinent to later analyse the source text through those trends. The advantage of using fanfiction is that the author's original words can supplement my own. What this means is the fanfiction allows the fan to provide their own critical judgments/analyses instead of me interrogating their meanings and surmising their interpretations.

closer, the scene emphasises Ezra's focus by way of intense concentration on inscribing his teaching material onto the board, but it also, for this particular fan, provides a context whereby Ezra's slim frame and taught physique are hiding 'a boner' (FF1). The author scrutinises this scene, illustrating how the figuration of Ezra's form permits a reading that he is 'nursing a boner' (FF1; read touching or moving his genitals, an act that would be hidden to viewers, but identifiable to the fan author). Ezra's sexual state is constructed through the mundane activity of writing on the board, where the author envisions Ezra's '[mindless] writing' (FF1) as a moment he can be lost in a fantasy 'where his two hottest students, the blonde jock Sean Ackard and the heartthrob Noel Kahn were double stuffing the teacher's eager tight ass' (FF1).

Slowly, the camera tilts upward, capturing Ezra's profile superimposed onto the word 'the American' (1.13), indicative of everydayness, ideality and suggestive of the personification of idealised masculinity for this fan author. The slasher (or one who writes slash fiction) subverts Ezra's ideal masculinity and arguably heterosexual qualities by figuring him not just as 'an enormous sex pervert' (FF1), but 'an enormous sex pervert' notorious for 'his overwhelming urge to get fucked silly by his hot, studly students' (FF1). This subversion is evident through the juxtaposition between the fan's authored text, their interpretation of that text and by examining that key scene in 1.13. Further, this is a primary means by which reader-guided can draw out fannish interpretive strategies, as it permits a three-fold scrutiny whereby the layers of analysis compound to present a more wholesome understanding of LGBT+ identity and sexuality.

While not baldly stated in the slash fiction, subversion is a leitmotif that appears regularly in M/M stories authored by these slashers as a means to challenge hegemonic masculinity. [88] Therefore, by subverting heterosexual male authority figures as not only gay, but also pointing to his insatiable sexual appetite for his young male students, it subverts not just the figure, but the social system of heteronormativity within which the figure exists. This subversion would have particular resonance for an LGBT+ student who is currently within the secondary educational schooling system, but also for those where memories of homophobic bullying have gone unnoticed or receive little to no punitive responses

---

[88] This theme repeats itself in FF2, but also in slash fiction from other fandoms, most notably Harry/Snape slash from the *Harry Potter* Franchise that appears on *Nifty.org*. It is also a technique employed in many of the jock/teacher erotica located in the 'high school' and 'college' sections in the 'gay' archive on *Nifty.org*.

(Phoenix et al 2003; Walton 2004; Espelage & Swearer 2008; Birkett et al 2009), whether that be current or graduated students or even those within systems outside of education that provide little to no support for self-identifying LGBT+ persons. To figure this particular scene from 1.13 into the author's slash fiction and converting/subverting it to fit within queer discourses of sex and desire would indicate that pleasures arise out of the cross-identification with dominating someone and being dominated. In other words, the fan takes pleasure from reading Ezra in a dual position of dominator (teacher, read authority figure) and then characterising him through slash fiction as a submissive (the one desiring invited sexual abuse, not unwanted sexual abuse, by his 'God-like' students).

In this scene in the source text, the initial shot/reverse-shot sequence discerns a homoerotically charged exchange between Noel and Ezra: it highlights Ezra's surprise, a moment the fan author picks up on and fills in with Ezra's internalised monologue: 'Shit. It was the boy that Ezra had often been name-calling and screaming about at night while tugging at his cock in bed. Noel Kahn' (FF1); and also functions as a moment to demonstrate Noel's sexual dominance over Ezra, or what Catherine Hakim (2010) refers to as 'erotic capital'. Hakim argues that 'erotic capital is…a combination of aesthetic, visual, physical, social, and sexual attractiveness to other members of your society,' (501). While she claims 'women have a longer tradition of developing and exploiting it,' (499) and admits that this form of capital certainly applies to 'minority gay cultures,' (503), she focuses her attention predominately on heterosexuality and women as primary 'erotic capital' "specialists". In other words, even though all people can have and develop 'erotic capital,' it is a form of capital primarily attributed to women. There is a glaring theoretical gap exposed in this theory when considering the role of 'erotic capital' and its implementation in the everyday lives of gay men, their desires and the manner through which looks and sex appeal are emphasised with high frequency in gay media and gay men's consumption thereof. By focusing on how 'erotic capital' surfaces in these texts, particularly through the forms of idealised masculinity and the sculpted male body, this extends the intent of 'erotic capital' beyond constructions of heterosexual desire to incorporate homosexual desire. Furthermore, the language employed to discuss the idealised male form mirrors advertisements that solicit male/male sex as they appear online (Reynolds 2015) and on gay male 'hook up' mobile applications, such as Grindr (Gudelunas 2012).

The fan fiction's narrative departs from episode 1.13's narrative through altering dialogue. Noel insists that he needs the grade changed in order to 'suit up for Friday's game' (1.13), whereas in the fan authored version Noel threatens exposing Ezra's secret relationship with Aria, threatening 'I'm pretty sure you need to keep your career, Fitz'. This departure invites the forthcoming sexual scenario originally crafted by the slasher. More than that, however, it highlights the precariousness of Ezra's situation, positioning sexual and romantic relationships in a punitive hierarchy of sorts, whereby sex with underage girls is lesser of a crime than sex with underage boys: (in reference to Ezra's relationship with Aria) 'Despite the obvious problems…he was at least content that…it would appear to be *just another teacher-girl relationship* and not the actions of a *serial, gay sex pervert*' (FF1 – my emphasis). This departure from the source text promotes an environment whereby the fan can play out their interpretations of the characters' sexualities; further, by creating a new scenario, it allows the fan author to critically engage with the sexual roles they read onto the male characters, thus reinforcing Ezra's dual positioning as dominator/submissive highlighted above. Moreover, the function of reader-guided here serves to highlight these gaps the fan producer identifies and provides greater insight into the importance sexual positions have for this fan's narrative evaluation and reimagining.

FF2 re-envisions a sequence of scenarios as opposed to narrative allegiance to the source text. For this slasher, Toby's role as live-in handyman, his romantic connections to the Hastings family via Spencer (the Hastings' youngest child), and the knowledge of the DiLaurentis' home neighbouring the Hastings' provide a means by which the slasher could suture season 2 and 3 narratives to realise a sexual encounter between Toby Cavanaugh and Jason DiLaurentis. Whereas FF1 crafted their story by retelling the black mail narrative originating in 1.13 as means to instigate a sexual encounter between Noel and Ezra, the FF2 author interweaves recurring *PLL* narratives throughout to demonstrate knowledge of the source text, but also to instil a sense of verity into the slash piece. For example, the author recycles a dialogic exchange between Jason and Toby originating in 2.03 'My Name is Trouble', but not by recreating the exchange in the exact manner it occurred on screen. Instead, the slasher internalised Jason's statement to Toby 'just for the record, Toby, I never believed you were guilty of anything' (FF2) to justify, in a manner, Jason's desire for Toby in

the sexual scenario that occurs in the fanfiction.[89] Framing the fanfiction in the wider *PLL* context elicits the ongoing interpretive strategies this fan applies to the seemingly homoerotic scenes that recur throughout the series. Further to this point, positioning the fanfiction within this wider context allows the researcher to approach a substantially greater number of instances to review in the source text, suggesting that, at least for these specific characters, transgression can occur and be supported by the source text. What is more, the fan author reads sexual positioning, as will be evidenced below, much in a similar manner to FF1's fan author, suggesting that these characters are being read in a specific way that is invited by the text and explored in the fanfiction.

Here in FF2, the author situates toby within a new narrative context, whereby he is doing manual labour for the Hastings' in their backyard, as opposed to being employed by Jason to do landscaping for his home. However, the slasher remains committed to the scene's structure, describing Toby as being 'clad in…a pair of old jeans with boots' (FF2):

Figure 3: Toby Cavanaugh (Keegan Allen) and Jason Dilaurentis

(Drew Van Acker), 2.03 'My Name is Trouble'

---

[89] This declaration centres on the narrative arc that pinned Alison's murder onto Toby, in spite of the fact that he was exonerated, the denizens of Rosewood continue to believe Toby killed her.

While the episode provides a visual depiction of Toby's sweaty state, the slasher employs the literary device 'tableau' to recreate this scene verbally.[90] There is a long tradition of homosexual male authors employing the tableau as a means to convey a homoerotic subtext within an ostensibly 'conventional' (Markley 2001, 270) text. While *PLL* does not rely on these tableaux frequently to convey such a homoerotic subtext, slash fiction authors often investigate scenes, such as in Figure 3, to subvert heterosexual themes and characterisations. Therefore, the slasher alters the narrative of this episode in order to employ a seduction narrative. By seduction narrative, it insinuates that there is an ulterior motive in regards to character actions, narrative construction and visualisations. Focusing intently on this image and rewriting through a queer lens allows the slasher to subvert the narrative and provide insight into the slasher's sexual pleasures and desires. Further to this point, Fred Fejes (2002) argues that 'although gayporn (*sic*) raises similar issues of identity, masculinity, sexual desire and objectification, sexual violence and power, and viewer consequences, in the context of the tension between gay male sexuality and heterosexual society, these issues are articulated very differently, as are the meanings and consequences' (96). In other words, the slasher's sexual desires and sexual pleasures derive from seducing a 'straight boy', a common theme found in many gay erotica stories, gay male pornography (*Baitbus*, *BoyNextDoor*, *Suite703* and *Men.com* are all gay pornography studios that recreate this sexual fantasy of gay men seducing heterosexual men), and, of course, in slash fiction (Brennan 2013).

Queer Desires

Utilising reader-guided textual analysis as a lens to analyse simultaneously the slash fiction and the source text provides insight into the pleasures derived from creating such fannish artefacts. What has arisen out of these gay male authored slash fictions is the notion that retaining narrative allegiance is employed as a means to elicit homoerotic subtext as innate to *PLL* and largely figures between the small pool of male characters. This of course has implications for the focus on gay male fans of arguably "female-oriented" texts.[91] This is not just the pleasures derived from fannish production and fan engagement with the primary

---

[90] Tableaux (pl. form of Tableau) are a method whereby the author uses 'visual aspects alone to tell the story,' (Markley 2001, 270).

[91] See Reinhard and Miller (2015) for an exploration of men engaging with "female" oriented texts.

text, it also points to narrative and visual moments that gay male fans find particularly stimulating; it grants a better understanding of gay male motivations for authoring slash fiction and particularly sheds light on visual stimuli as integral to gay male sexuality and the pleasures therein. In the next section, I interrogate the definition of slash fiction itself as I explore femslash that figures canonically LGBT+ characters and their relationships in fan fiction. In other words, the very definition and understanding of slash itself comes into question, as historically: a) slash has primarily revolved around M/M fiction; b) has developed a subgenre of that fiction known as femslash (F/F fiction); and c) begs to question whether (fem)slash is still (fem)slash when the ship is evidenced by the source text's narrative.

'It's Considered Gen…It's a Pairing That's Actually Canon': Re-evaluating Slash

Femslash explores F/F pairings/ships in much the same way as slash plays out M/M relationships. However, the underlying or recurring theme echoed across the scholarship (and amongst fans themselves) is that (fem)slash is subversive (Bacon-Smith 1993; Penley 1997; Jones 2002; Salmon & Symons 2004; Davies 2005; Woledge 2006; Stasi 2006; Willis 2006; Lackner et al 2006; Lothian et al 2007; Dhaenens et al 2008; Foster 2015). By claiming that these texts are subversive, scholarship aims to illustrate that (fem)slash transgresses heterosexual narratives/positionings in order to challenge heteronormativity and the patriarchy, regardless of the slasher's gender or sexual orientation. Where the gay male slashers in the previous section located the homoerotic in the way narrative constructed or figured heterosexual male/male interactions, for slashers investigating same-sex relationships in texts that have 'a pairing that's actually canon to the series' universe itself,' (Ruby Dynamite, fan comment 2014), (fem)slash becomes a destabilised category. In simple terms, (fem)slash transgresses a text by constructing same-sex relationships that are not explicitly recognised in the source text, and the same-sex relationships that are explicitly stated in the source text should be viewed as gen fic. Gen fic, or general fan fiction, are stories that expand, interpret or 'fix' the source text's narratives, characterisations and relationships.[92] Following the same trajectory as the first section in this chapter, I investigate

---

[92] This will be challenged in the final section of this chapter as it explores a semi-textually supported lesbian relationship between Alison and Emily in *PLL*.

two 'femslash' stories. Furthermore, I focus on narrative allegiance (or sticking to the source text's narrative) as my primary area of investigation. However, the stories do not surface out of the same fanfiction archive; rather, one has been extracted from *AO3* and the other from *FF.net*. The primary motivation for selecting texts that come from two different sources highlights the conventions employed in (fem)slash; but, it is also a qualitative decision to select only two texts (FF3 and FF4) and ones that come from different fanfiction archives. These texts are representative samples of the fanfiction served, a decision employed in the subsequent section.

FF3 is an explicit form of gen fic fanfiction in that it deals primarily in the sexual machinations between Emily Fields and Paige McCullers, an established, canonical relationship – this means that it is a relationship realised in the text itself and is an explicit representation of a lesbian relationship. FF4 highlights the evolution of that relationship between Emily and Paige. Both rely on narrative to explore these relationships, but do so in a drastically different manner from one another, but also dramatically different from FF1 and FF2 in the previous section. Even though FF3 centres on sexual encounters, these are not positioned as trysts or one-night-stands; rather, they are an expression of sexuality in a monogamous relationship. It is easy to surmise that feelings and emotion are privileged in FF3 and FF4; and when sex does occur, it is an expression of those feelings, hyperbolised through their lust, their adopted sexual roles and their ability to connect mentally and physically. For FF1 and FF2, however, emotion and connection are ephemeral, where lust and sexual pleasure take over the slasher's characterisations and understanding of *PLL*'s narratives. Furthermore, even though the slashers and their fictions investigated in the previous section relied on specific characterisations and narrative situations, the characters in the slash fictions themselves could easily be extracted and replaced with other male characters, as the descriptors emphasised prototypically hypermasculine qualities that are easily identifiable in many of the other male characters. Moreover, these prototypical qualities can be found throughout many teen and adult oriented television programmes currently; thus, crossovers (or fanfiction that puts characters from one show with another can and do occur with frequency) may easily occur and readily exist.

Alternative Universe (AU Femslash) and the Peripheral Narrative

The most common type of Pailey fiction on both *AO3* and *FF.net* are AU fictions. These are set in what the fanfiction authors label as an alternative universe. AU does not necessarily indicate that they are in a different world or different time; rather, it can indicate that the romantic narratives fostered in the fiction itself can extract the characters from the source text's universe, using the narrative as a frame. For example, in FF3, the fanfiction author frames Emily and Paige's sexual encounter within the Season 3 Halloween episode (3.13 'This Is a Dark Ride', 23 October 2012). They (the fanfiction author) do this not by recreating narrative events originating in the episode; instead, they focus on specific settings and costuming from the episode's diegetic world: 'Paige was wearing monochrome tuxedo (sic), complete with cream coloured waistcoat, black silk top hat and […] 3 inch heels' (FF3), 'trying to think up some way that they could get it out of the train unseen' (FF3), 'what's the point […] if we're not going to make use of […] this very private (train) car' (FF3), 'Emily […] reached over for her Barbarella costume' (FF3). These details provide a frame of reference for the reader so they can locate what season and episode the author is drawing their inspiration from. Furthermore, by providing this context, the author creates an alternative universe whereby they can explore in a safe space how Emily and Paige live out their relationship and express themselves sexually. The construction of fanfiction as a safe space to play out non-normative relationships or relationships of equality is a theme that is highlighted in much of the fanfiction scholarship (Lothian et al 2007; Foster 2015). However, while this is seemingly transgressive in that it depicts same-sex sexual acts in an explicit manner, *PLL* does allow Emily to express her sexuality on screen; a particularly applicable example comes from the 100th episode:

Figure 4 5.5 'Miss Me x100', 8 July 2014[93]

What this means, then, is that, even though the fanfiction author is playing out sexuality in an explicit manner (as in the femslasher explicitly details the same-sex sexual act), and even though there are restrictions in place against explicit depictions of sexuality on ABC Family (now known as Freeform), whether it be heterosexual or non-heterosexual depictions, the fanfiction author is not necessarily transgressing or subverting the text. Rather, the author is imagining beyond what is permitted on ABC Family (Freeform). Although exploring Emily and Paige's sexual encounter may appear to be a transgression of what is permitted narratively by the production company and ABC Family, the sexual nature of Pailey's relationship is implied and also recalls Sarah Gwenllian Jones' argument that this is a latent textual feature (Jones 2002).[94]

While FF3 is framed through costuming and setting to recreate or re-envision the narrative, FF4, also an AU fic, sutures narratives from a wider range of episodes. What is important to note is that both of these completed fanfictions are situated within a world absent of A and their influence on the narratives. A, then, seemingly disrupts true expression of sexuality for these fanfiction authors, an absence that does not go unnoticed by the reader. In FF4, for example, the fan author figures Alison DiLaurentis as the primary A figure, not in so much as it was a secretive identity, rather she used similar tactics as A does to coerce or manipulate the girls into acting or behaving in certain ways. Instead of an A

---

[93] This GIF highlights the expression of same-sex sexuality and is one example of how *PLL* permits non-normative sexuality to be represented on screen.

[94] Where in the previous section I relied heavily on the descriptive sexual language from the fanfictions, here in this section I rely more heavily on the trends stemming from the Paily fanfictions. Ytre-Arne (2011) focuses predominantly on the analysis of trends against the source text as opposed to a focus on what her audiences say about Norwegian women's magazines.

figure emerging in Ali's absence, the memory of Ali and her blackmailing behaviour persist throughout this fan fiction: 'she used to learn our secrets just so that she could blackmail us into doing what she wanted us to do' (FF4). While this was characteristic of Ali before her disappearance in the source text, she returns changed from her experiences of being constantly sought out and tormented by 'A'. However, this author blends narrative truths from the Sara Shephard novels (and the original source material for the television series). In the novels the Alison DiLaurentis that disappeared and who was friends with the four girls is was actually the real Alison's twin sister Courtney, who was later found dead. This information is clearly embedded within the fanfiction, yet the twin narrative arc is not prevalent in this fiction. Therefore, the memory of Ali and her crimes shapes the formation of Paige and Emily's relationship. Just as Emily comes to terms with her own sexuality, she comes to terms with the notion that her first (unreciprocated) love was the real bully, which allows Ali to stand in for the 'A' figure in both the books and the television series.

As I argued previously, deploying these techniques within the fanfiction works to explore same-sex relationships as they appear in the source text (meaning canonical relationships); therefore, these techniques do not categorically subvert the source material. Instead, these fanfiction authors subvert the narrative structures to expand or retell the events through a fan-read lens, but they do not subvert them for a purely queer purpose (read transgressive purpose). Moreover, there is a large body of queer scholarship that focuses on representation that is fixated on positive/negative representations of LGBT+ characters, their relationships and the expression of their sexuality, but these criticisms are hinged upon how the heterosexual/non-normative binary operates to maintain the status quo (Doty 1993 and 2000; Creekmur & Doty 1995; Demory & Pullen 2013). This is referred to as the 'evaluative paradigm' (Davis & Needham 2009). In other words, these critiques operate to contest the continued positioning of queer subjectivity within the inferior position of the heterosexual/non-normative binary. Peri Bradley (2013) locates this within the privileging of heterosexual stories, while Ben Aslinger (2013) traces LGBT+ characters' asexualisation on public television as opposed to queer produced programmes in order to make same-sex identification more 'palatable' for the unassuming audience. Similar to Aslinger (2013), Ron Becker (2006) investigates the cultural context that allowed LGBT+ identity to become visible during the period he argues is rife with 'straight panic', where gay male characters are coded as non-sexual. He claims this arises as 'what happens when

heterosexual men and women, still insecure about the boundary between gay and straight, confront an increasingly accepted homosexuality,' (23). Thus, the fanfiction crafted to expand or retell canonical same-sex relationships and their formations are attempting to move beyond the politics of representation to tell the stories in more detail, to give these relationships and identities more agency, but also to privilege the stories in a way that the source text may not. Ultimately, however, where (fem)slash fiction operates along the lines of queer theory, whereby the viewer/reader unearths a queer subtext, gen fic that centralises canonical same-sex relationships can be located within queer representational politics.

While the first section investigated 'traditional' slash (M/M pairing) through the lens of gay male authorship, the second section explored how canonical relationships can be viewed as 'normalised' gen fic (hence general fiction). However, the final section problematizes fanfiction generic categories as it investigates the semi-textually supported same-sex ship: Emison (Emily and Alison). While these types of relationships have minimal support in other fandoms (particularly in *Glee* fandom, where fans will ship either Kurt or Blaine with (an)other heterosexual character(s)), many of these constructions are read at the level of connotation as opposed to being overt or explicitly stated within the narrative itself. Moreover, these constructions in other fandoms do not yield large quantities of fans who figure, for instance Blinn (Blaine and Finn) from *Glee* (2009-2015), as endgame or their OTP; for a substantial number of *PLL* fans, Emison is endgame.[95]

'My sweet mermaid': Shipping Emison

The first two sections explored non-textually and textually supported relationships. That is, the first section investigated fanfiction that sought to couple two characters together that have no overt romantic history or explicit source text evidence to warrant such a ship. This means that the slasher interpreted or envisioned these relationships/same-sex sexual encounters through homoerotic subtext. Conversely, the second section explored the

---

[95] Endgame is a fan term that signifies that these fans believe certain relationships will transpire before or by the final episode of the source text. OTP or 'one true pairing' has connotations of endgame, in that the fan or group of fans desire a specific relationship to form by the end of the programme; however, OTPs such as Joey and Dawson from *Dawson's Creek* (1998-2003) can occur and end at any point. Even if the relationship ends, fans will still vie for those relationships.

canonical relationship Pailey (Paige and Emily), a relationship that is developed through the show's overarching narrative and not through fan interpreted subtexts. While the first section sought to investigate the role of male fanfiction/slash authors in what has been argued is a predominantly female fan practice, the second section complicated the definition of (fem)slash by positing that a canonically supported same-sex pairing and the fanfiction surrounding it functions more as gen fic (general fanfiction), as opposed to the transgressive (fem)slash subgenre of fanfiction (Lothian et al 2007). Complicating matters further, this section investigates Emison (femslash) fanfiction, or the fanfiction that centres on the romantic pairing of Emily and Alison. Owing to the fact that this relationship is semi-textually supported, it warrants an examination of not just fan interpretations of a text but also the heightened visibility of LGBT+ characters on television, the narratives that are told, the relationships that develop through these narrative and the fans' engagement with those characters/relationships.

While there are many popular fan ships surrounding *PLL*, Emison is one of the most popular and widely 'theorised' or constructed couplings (for more on fan theorising and fan theories, see Chapter 7). Fans utilise numerous methods to 'legitimate' their Emison readings, primarily through GIFs, GIF sets, MEMEs and graphic MEMEs (see Chapter 6 for more on these digital forms of what I argue function similarly to femslash fanfiction), but through also 'traditional' fanfiction.[96] Similar to the previous two sections, I employ a reader-guided textual analysis (Ytre-Arne 2011) to highlight fan interpretations, investigating how the numerous *PLL* narratives shape their interpretations and meaning making process when viewing *PLL*. However, before turning to the femslash itself, I investigate the Emison ship by analysing the *AO3 Census* (2013), a fan survey conducted on *AO3* users that provides relevant and pertinent information regarding the demographics surrounding fanfiction authors. This unique fan study was conducted by fans for fans and published on *Tumblr.com* by CentrumLumina.

Both FF5 (*AO3*) and FF6 (*FF.net*) return to the events that occur throughout Season 5, a season that is particularly important to Emison fans as this marks Alison's return and

---

[96] By 'traditional' fanfiction, I mean the written story format (Pugh 2005) that has been the focus of this chapter.

regular appearance on *PLL* as a living character and not arising out of gold-hued memories.[97]

FF5's author indicates that the events in their story develop immediately after 5.8 'Scream for Me' aired; whereas FF6's author develops their 'oneshot' story to predict the events that will occur in 5.25 'Welcome to the Dollhouse', the Season 5 finale, which promised a major 'A' reveal.[98] Though FF5's author understands the importance of 'A' to the series' overarching narrative, they proclaim that '-A isn't going to have a huge part in the story' (FF5), because they are 'more interested in the characters themselves' (FF5). Conversely, FF6 utilises the 'A' mystery to validate Emison and combines their theories revolving around 'A's' identity to 'play out' Alison and Emily's relationship.[99] Both femslash pieces engage with differing episode narratives to frame their chapter and they both rely heavily on canon (what fans understand as series' narrative truths) to construct their figurations of Emison to highlight how the programme 'hides' Emison's reality. In other words, they frame their fiction through allegiance to canonical characterisations, narratives, settings, dialogue structures and costuming, for example, to indicate that Emison is a legitimate couple that has not yet been realised. Or as FF6 puts it: '[Ali] knows she loves [Emily] deep down.' Thus, these trends frame the analysis of the source text as occurs below. Further, juxtaposing these identified trends against the source texts to promote an establishing context allows reader-guided textual analysis to indicate discernible fan negotiations of lesbian identity, lesbian relationships and lesbian narratives.

'she'd loved her all along': The Construction of Emison Fans

Fans employ a variety of interpretative strategies to validate their OTP, particularly as they craft their fannish artefacts with authorial interjections as evidenced in the title of this subsection. These interjections function within the femslash primarily to indicate that something is being restrained, held within the metaphorical or producorial closet. *PLL* femslashers privilege those moments where Alison and Emily share a glance, graze

---

[97] This was a regular occurrence throughout the previous four seasons as the viewers were led to believe Alison had been murdered, when in actuality she was fleeing 'A's' torments.

[98] 'Oneshot' fanfictions are stories that are self-contained in that they are not 'works in progress' (Hellekson & Busse 2006, 6) and will conclude with this sole iteration.

[99] This femslash fiction functions similarly to the fan theories investigated in Chapter 7. As this was a particular fan theory regarding Emison, I explore this femslash in this chapter as it appears on *FF.net* and is meant to be read like fanfiction. However, it does not preclude it from being assessed through the same framework employed in Chapter 7.

shoulders, hug; they also relish those three moments where Alison and Emily kiss. While (fem)slash has historically involved a construction of same-sex relationships (predominantly male ones), 'especially on a show that does not explicitly feature or indicate this homoerotic subtextual reading,' (Chin 2010, 11-12), this does not speak to those shows that explicitly *do* feature same-sex pairings. Moreover, consideration has not been given to those ships that are semi supported by the narrative.[100] Furthermore, it does not speak to the concerns of those (fem)slashers that self-identify outside heterosexual configurations, yet subscribe to a ship and construct that relationship in a way that mirrors their own world views. Moreover, the scarcity of F/F ships corresponds to what many fans argue is a dearth of female characters interesting enough to ship. Though this seems to be tangential to the ways in which these femslashers have configured and constructed Emison in their fannish artefacts, it is precisely this quasi acceptance that the LGBT+ community is experiencing that I would argue makes Emison such a strong and important ship to highlight.

In spite of the fact that this thesis' primary investigation lies in *how* fans interpret or make meanings out of texts, gaining a better understanding of the social make up of those fans, particularly the fans that produce and consume fanfiction, gives a better sense as to why those fans concentrate their attention on certain textual features that validate, not just their ship, but their emotional connections to the text itself. In the large scale fan study the *AO3 Census* (CentrumLumina 2013) organised by and for fans, it was determined that only 29% of slash fiction readers and authors self-identify as both female and heterosexual. The study surveyed 10,005 *AO3* users and provided indication that M/M slash was the predominant form of fanfiction consumed. Furthermore, there is a glaring lack of femslash produced and created, to which the study's primary author provides a comprehensive list of possible reasons for this lack. The most recurring one is that: 'in a world where most media rarely, if ever, passes the Bechdel test, it's unique enough to see one female character, let alone two who are rivals or friends. When a woman does exist, her "other half" is a guy— think Mulder and Scully, Abbie and Ichabod, Sherlock and Joan,' (porluciernagas, 12 November 2013, 'Why Is There So Much Slash Fic?').

---

[100] By semi supported, I point to the fact that Emily and Alison have kissed, which for fans indicates that Emison is canon, but then it is steadfastly disrupted by Alison's disappearance, the introduction of male counterparts for Alison and Alison "toying" with Emily's feelings.

PLL has been acclaimed and lauded for its LGBT+ inclusivity (*GLAAD Network Responsibility Index 2015, 2014, 2013, 2012, 2011*) and has received notoriety in the press for its feminist messages (Morgan Glennon, 19 May 2012, 'The Feminism of *Pretty Little Liars*', *Huffingtonpost.com*). It is owing to this that *PLL* and the Emison ship fills this visible lack in LGBT+, female characters; but the queerness of the relationship also speaks to the heavy LGBT+ fanbase (of slashers). This would perhaps explain why femslash is more of a regular occurrence amongst *PLL* fans and highlights the low amount of M/M slash occurring in its fandom. Yet, at odds with this insight is the low support for Emily's other pairings as investigated above. As I argued in section two, Emily's relationship with Paige appears not to be transgressive enough for what we can assume to be this LGBT+ contingent of fans.

Emison Is Canon

One feature that runs through both of the femslash pieces is their reliance on canon to guide their interpretations of the texts. That is to say, each story takes canon and expands it beyond what will be seen on the TV show. Both femslash stories provide disclaimers to frame the reader's attention to very specific episodes that have yet to be aired or will be aired in the ensuing week(s): 'I wrote this before 5x09 aired, and it begins immediately after 5x08 ended' (FF5); and 'I really wanted to post it before the episode [5.25] airs [… and this] is my take on […] doing "Welcome to the Dollhouse", Emison style' (FF6). While both of these stories perpetuate Emison as readable through the text, they also function as a means to make fan theories (see Chapter 7). Emison, therefore, functions in three ways for fans: the ship represents a queer dynamic not necessarily depicted on screen, as evidenced above; it highlights fan reading and interpretation strategies, thereby allowing fans to make their *own* meanings from the text, as opposed to producorially inferred ones; and, it highlights the under researched fan practice of theory making, which occurs across numerous fandoms.[101] I position this queer reading practice as oppositional owing to the disdain Emison fans exhibit towards Ali and Emily's other narratively constructed

---

[101] Fan theories are an oft discussed fan practice that occurs in multiple fandoms, particularly around ships and plot elements that are restrained to create seriality, suspense and returning viewers. For example, see 999 Gaming's highly viewed video analysing *The Walking Dead* (2010-) Season 6 finale to determine who Negan killed: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZMdFrhHOYdY. For further insight into fan theory making, see Chapter 7.

relationships (meaning the relationships that arise out of the text itself). Further to this, these stories operate to 'episode fix' just as much as they permit an exploration of Emison as a semi-canonical ship. Although fan theorising about Emison may be viewed as a prediction of the end of the narrative that will eventually permit the actualisation of Emison, Emison shippers are reading these relationships as hurdles. Thus, they reject these relationships as they play out on screen, regardless of their canonicity, through various modes of fan production (see Chapter 4 and 6).

Adherence to canon is crucial for non-AU (alternate universe) fictions, but Emison shippers invert canonical events to draw attention to the textual margins wherein Emison arguably exists. For example: 'Alison had left town – *left Emily behind* – and even though *it's the hardest thing that she'd ever had to do* she'd still done it, had been absent for two years and she can't take any of that back, can't get that time back, *has wasted countless days and weeks and months that she could have had with Emily*, if only she hadn't been such a bitch,' (FF5; my emphasis). In this example, the femslasher fills in the ostensible gaps pertaining to Allison's thought process behind leaving and what she would lose. Much in the same strain as in FF1, soliloquy is employed as a means to interpret key encounters or scenes featuring Alison in the source text. This is a common trope in the construction of both slash and femslash; it is a device used as a means to fill in gaps in the narrative to demonstrate *how* Emison or other ships could exist. Whereas with other (fem)slash ships, Emison shippers return to three specific kisses that seemingly justify these readings: 1.09 'The Perfect Storm', which aired 3 August 2010; 2.12 'Over My Dead Body', which aired 30 August 2011; 5.05 'Miss Me x 100', which aired 8 July 2014.

What arises out of these trends is the ways in which reader-guided not only justifies a textual analysis of both the source text and the fan-produced text, but it also highlights how gaps in narrative, that which is left unstated, are integral to fan meaning-making. This is historically true as regards unearthing a text's homoerotic tendencies (Sedgwick 1985 and 1990), which points to why all of these fan texts rely so much on gaps. This also speaks to how marginalised identity until recently has always existed beyond the periphery of normative society and beyond normative narratives. Conversely, by the fans exposing these gaps in their fannish artefacts, reader-guided as a method opens up the opportunity to explore the text through fannish interpretive strategies, thereby illuminating the importance with which LGBT+ identity figures into *PLL*, its fandom and its fannish artefacts.

Further to the point above, FF5 inverts these canonical events through internal monologue and reimagined memory, FF6's femslasher employs the use of fan theory to warrant an Emison reading; both stories continue to rely on the unstated to frame Emison. FF6 is contextualised through episode 5.25's teaser trailer, depicting the girls' abduction by 'A' as they are en route to a juvenile detention centre:

Figure 5 5.25 'Welcome to the Dollhouse' Promo Video Still

Framing the femslash through promotional teaser trailers for the upcoming finale and the #BigAReveal provides a context whereby the femslasher can incorporate wide spread and popular *PLL* fan theories with regards to 'A's' identity and the potentiality of a twin theory that circulated at the time of this season 5 finale episode: 'The haunting figure's face is covered by a mask and he/she/it flings the other door wide open, revealing a second hooded, masked person coming around the corner and throwing a person forcefully to the ground like a ragdoll. A blonde,' (FF6). Incorporating this 'second hooded, masked person' is

a device this femslasher utilises to stage Emily's seduction further along in the piece. 'Imposter,' 'doppelgänger,' and 'the *real* Alison' (FF6) are words used to describe the second figure during Emily's seduction scene, as a means to allow 'the *real* Alison' a chance to come to terms with her true feelings 'of loving the girl she knows she loves deep down,' (FF6). This emotional scene is inflected with intrapersonal dialogue, giving insight into Ali's true feelings for Emily: 'she's about to lose the very person she loves […] or at least watch Emily lose her-…oh god she can't think about *that*,' (FF6). Implied in the second ellipsis is the word virginity, and though it is implied through the programme's narrative that Emily is not a virgin, here, the femslasher refutes these implications in a means to reject the producorially constructed relationships between Paige and Emily and Maya and Emily.

What has been understated thus far is that these femslashers utilise intrapersonal monologues or dialogue to substantiate Emison. Ytre-Arne (2011) labels these reading strategies as occurring through 'recurring textual structures,' indicating that they 'might provide readers with relevant information and opportunities for reflection,' (222). As evidenced above, both femslash pieces employ internalised dialogue to give greater insight into the motivations and feelings attributed to characters, which does not occur within the programme. There are no voice overs, other than '*Previously on Pretty Little Liars*'. This allows fans an opportunity to interpret character motivations and actions, but also relationship formations that may or may not be interpreted through queer reading strategies. Furthermore, as the fan-led study indicates, many fanfiction authors do not subscribe to heterosexual identity formations and therefore it is arguable that these femslashers and their readers *are* interpreting or reading Alison's character as non-normative and reject the assimilated, homonormatised relationships presented by the show's producers, writers and creative staff.[102] While it may be argued that a realised Emison ship in canon could become homonormative, the simple fact that fans *read* or *interpret* Emison through the inversion of canon and through subtext indicates that this is a transgressive reading strategy, particularly in that it would pair two central characters as opposed to one protagonist and one supporting character. This positioning, I argue, has

---

[102] Lisa Duggan (2002) coined the term 'homonormativity' as an emulation of heterosexual modes of consumption, privacy and the desire for mainstream assimilation, thus rejecting queer (read non-normative and non-binary) worldviews. While 'homonormativity' is framed through neoliberalism, I am extending its use to indicate that 'homonormativity' operates as a means to assimilate queerness into the mainstream, thus destabilising queer's radical potential.

brought *PLL*'s lesbian subtext to the fore, thus enshrining the show as one of the queerest (read transgressive) programmes on mainstream American television.

Conclusion

This chapter investigated the role of fanfiction as a method of fan interpretation and meaning making. It highlighted the gender dynamics regarding fanfiction production, but also questioned fanfiction's generic categories as defined through existing scholarship (Hellekson & Busse 2006 and 2015; Lothian et al 2007) in a manner similar to Sara Gwenllian Jones (2002). Jones proposes that (fem)slash is not necessarily transgressive, as the (fem)slashers are reading the latent homosexual elements that already exist within the text. Furthermore, by investigating three different types of (fem)slash fiction surrounding one fandom, the chapter not only brought forward the different manners in which fans read and interpret texts, but it also highlighted the predominance of non-normative identities and the different interpretative reading strategies. In other words, gay men interpret texts along the lines of homoeroticism, utilising homoerotic codes (the gay male gaze and body objectification, homosociality (Sedgwick 1985), and homoerotic narrative constructions) similar to how Alexander Doty (1993 and 2000) re-evaluated classic Hollywood cinema through a queer lens. Whereas gay male fans continue to create non-canonical ships, Pailey fans are able to visualise beyond the purview of the text to grant same-sex sexuality continued agency. Though I argued that this type of fanfiction created around canonical relationships ceased to be femslash, Pailey allows non-normative fans the chance to experience same-sex desire in a safe space. While Pailey is a ship that is canon, I argued that those non-normative or non-binary fans rejected this ship in favour of a semi-textually supported ship (Emison) that operates against heteronormativity and homonormativity. Since these modes of fan engagement provide further insight into fan interpretation and meaning making, I utilised a reader-guided textual analysis methodology that provided the fans a voice to instil these characters with agency. Employing this methodology sought to privilege fans' interpretations over my own, academic (read privileged) interpretations.

As stated at the start of this chapter, the *PLL* fanbase does not engage with fanfiction in the same manner as other fandoms. This is not to say that fanfiction creation and consumption within the *PLL* fan community is not valued or important; rather, other forms

of fan production are more prevalent. For this reason, the subsequent chapters engage with those forms of fan production found more prevalently on social media platforms, particularly GIFs and GIF sets, MEMEs and graphic MEMEs. I explore these digital forms of fan production through the lens of fanfiction in Chapter 6, proposing that in a digital age, fandoms use these similarly to the way fanfiction has been a primary mode of fannish engagement, thereby expanding what scholarship has previously identified as (fem/slash) fanfiction.

Chapter 6: Visualising Emison: Digital Fannish Artefacts as Digital Femslash

Where Chapter Five investigated how fans interpret queerness as a 'latent textual element' (Jones 2002, 82) and expressed it through fanfiction, Chapter Six explores how fanfiction has evolved through Web 2.0 technologies. Particularly, this chapter explores this evolution not solely through novelised, long- or short-form, written slash fiction (i.e. traditional slash), but also through what I argue are its digitalised, pictorialized and videographic forms. Chapter Six explores then how slash has advanced beyond the written word and has entered into a new digital terrain: as popular memes, GIFs and graphic memes. These, I argue, function as evolved iterations of not just slash fiction, but fan fiction more broadly. Chapter Six investigates how fans employ these digital fannish artefacts to highlight existent queer narratives within *Pretty Little Liars* (2010-), whether textually or non-textually supported, or in fannish terms: canonical or non-canonical. In other words, fans are simply 'exposing' 'latent textual elements' (Jones 2002, 84) through their fannish practices. Employing the same line of arguing as advanced in the literature review and in Chapter Five, this chapter continues to examine fannish artefacts, their salient elements and their interpretive properties through a reader-guided textual analysis as outlined in the methodology chapter and as employed in Chapter Five and Chapter Seven.

The first section of this chapter provides a brief explication of the fan studies literature that investigates fan production – i.e. the creation of fan fiction, vidding, filking, for example. Although comprehensively covered in the literature review, this chapter re-evaluates this literature to expand the definition of fanfiction to include the relatively understudied, digital forms of contemporary fan production: GIFs, MEMEs and Graphic MEMEs. Whereas in the literature review I particularly emphasise how fan studies researchers frequently ignore the source text to focus on how fan production forms communities, this brief evaluation of the literature surrounding fanfiction investigates the practices and methods to define fanfiction (or not define it). Through examining *how* fanfiction is defined, I argue that the definition itself can be expanded to incorporate these digital fannish artefacts owing to the fact that fanfiction has been defined by both scholars and fans as malleable and diverse: it incorporates an array of generic categories or narrative tropes to provide endless construction possibilities; its community of users has recently

been argued to be diverse in itself (see Chapter Five). Furthermore, why digital necessitates a separation from the original or traditional modes of fanfiction is that, although fanfiction is created online and has existed online for some time (Coppa 2006), fanfiction was created and consumed in a physical landscape (predominantly the zine culture surrounding early fandom [ibid]), whereas these newer modes of fan production can only exist through computer mediated technologies and on virtual spaces.

The second section investigates how these new fannish artefacts have been appropriated by fans to legitimate their ships. Where in Chapter 5 the fanfiction authors can create new narratives or extend existing ones through the written word, digital fanfiction creators rely on visual imagery to tell a story. In other words, this Chapter investigates digital fanfiction that relies on images and moving images from the source text to (re)tell Emison's creation as it happens in the source text and not in the fanfiction authors' readings of the text. Thus, the act of shipping, especially those semi- or non-textually supported ships, is a constant need to legitimate or validate fans' readings and interpretations of the source text. That is, fans constantly return to the text with a fine tooth comb to highlight those moments they 'read' or interpret as indicative that a ship exists natively in the text. Therefore, these fans know to be true that, when the time comes, their OTP (one true pairing) will be endgame (the show will end with those two characters, here Emison, being in a romantic, life-long relationship). This is one of the significant reasons why fans utilise multiple forms of fannish textual production to justify their readings.

Additionally, fanfiction, it has been argued (Hellekson & Busse 2006 and 2014), functions as a means to correct unsatisfactory events (killing off a favourite character), to extend the source text (to explore the source text's universe beyond what is capable on television, for example), and for (fem)slash to allow fans to explore non-normative relationships that are not always explicitly stated in the source text's narrative. What this means is that these digital modes of fan engagement allow fans to play out relationships that may or may not be expressed in the source text as a way of safely experimenting with same-sex sexual desire. Therefore, this section explores how these digital fan artefacts function similarly to (fem)slash fiction as explored in Chapter Five. To do this, I investigate the salient features of slash fiction as defined by fan studies and explore how slash fiction

has moved beyond solely written texts and evolved into digitalised visual works as well.[103] In the final section, the chapter investigates the properties of GIFs, MEMEs and Graphic MEMEs as they are employed by Emison fans and provides an in depth analysis of both the fantexts and the source text (here *PLL*). This section synthesises the previous sections to illustrate how fans 'make meaning' from the (latent) textual moments – for the case of Emison, and has been argued in Chapter Five, Emison is a semi-textually supported ship, indicating that there are scenes whereby Alison and Emily kiss and show romantic desire for one another, but it is a relationship that is denied actualisation/realisation. These digital fan practices emphasise these trends and key moments taken from the source text and provide insight into how and why fans read texts.

Fanfiction, Fantexts and Their Digitalisation

This section of Chapter 6 briefly outlines the implications of digital fannish artefacts that have been relatively un(der)explored in current fan studies scholarship. While this has been broached in the more comprehensive literature review (Chapter 2), it is important to revisit this literature to frame how these digital fantexts may be viewed as 'types' of fanfiction. Because these fantexts operate in a similar manner to fanfiction, as will be exemplified in this section and the subsequent sections in the chapter, it is important to structure this review by defining fanfiction and then identifying its salient features. By doing this, it not only expands the definition of fanfiction to incorporate these particular types of fannish artefacts, but it will also incorporate those ostensibly disparate fannish artefacts such as vidding and filking under the fanfiction definition. This inclusive definition provides a more wide-ranging set of terms by which fan studies scholars may discuss fan production in a more cogent manner. While it is not the intention to essentialise fan production into a neat, deterministic box; fanfiction as an all-encompassing definition would act as a more diverse umbrella term that would represent not only its diversity in format, construction and uses,

---

[103] In spite of the fact that filking, vidding and fan art have a long history as forms of fan engagement, these practices have often been excluded from studies surrounding fanfiction, in spite of the fact that many of these recreate or retell narratives in a way that extend the source text in a similar manner to fanfiction. Even though this thesis does not engage with these specific fannish artefacts, expanding the fanfiction definition to incorporate these newer, digital forms of fannish productivity opens up the possibility to incorporate these specific fan practices within the remit of fanfiction as well. In other words, by expanding fanfiction to include GIFs, MEMEs, GIF sets and Graphic MEMEs, the definition would include written, visual or aural fannish artefacts into the category of fanfiction.

but would also represent the diversity of the fan creators themselves. Fanfiction does not only speak about the source text and its narratives, but it also speaks to the LGBT+ community that creates and consumes it (see Chapter Five for more on fanfiction consumer/creator demographics). While 'textual productivity' (Fiske 1992) has commonly functioned as the umbrella term for *all* fan practices, it is important to draw out fanfiction from textual productivity as a specific mode of fan engagement, considering specifically that textual productivity may be argued to incorporate 'fan talk' (Fiske 1992; Baym 1998 and 2000; Hills 2013). Though 'fan talk' is an interpretive strategy, it is a dialoguing between fans that does not make meaning through narrative creation; rather, they employ 'fan talk' as way to spread news and spoilers (details about a programme's narrative before it has aired), discuss fan theories and participate within a fan community on a communicative level (everyday talk, for example).

Fanfiction itself has been debated in numerous journal articles and in a few key edited collections, namely in Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse's (2006) collection *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities*. This work sought to bring forward fanfiction to the academic community, providing differing approaches to its study. Despite being one of the most comprehensive and initial academic undertakings, Hellekson and Busse (2006) do not explicitly define what fanfiction is; rather they define it through its various iterations, genres and subgenres (10). Francesca Coppa (2006) works to trace the history of media fandom and its early allegiance to science fiction (43), identifying that women are the primary authors of fanfiction, beginning largely with *Star Trek* (1966-69).[104] Providing the first, "cogent" definition of fanfiction, Abigail Derecho (2006) defines these fannish artefacts as 'archontic literature' (63-66), a term that stems from 'archive' and thus indicates that fanfiction is a work that has been developed and inspired by texts that have come before it. Derecho uses 'archontic' to describe fanfiction in order to rid it of its 'negative connotations' (64) or being simply 'derivative' or 'appropriative'. Her definition therefore treats fanfiction specifically as an expansion of the source text's archive. By loosely defining fanfiction in this manner, Derecho, I argue, has thereby permitted the incorporation of *all forms* of fan textual

---

[104] Coppa does cite *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* (1964-68) as a predecessor to early media fandom, however she notes that *Trek* was the catalyst that propelled media fandom into something akin to what we have today (43-46).

productivity into the realm of the archive,[105] and it is thus possible to incorporate those other forms of fan produced texts under the heading fanfiction. It is through this 'archontic' property that these visual fannish artefacts may be viewed as fanfiction. Derecho goes on to claim this herself, stating that 'one might say in a sense, all texts can be called "archontic",' (65). Finally, her last claim solidifies the idea that fan production may broadly fall under the category fanfiction, because she describes this 'archontic' work as 'only those works that generate variations that explicitly announce themselves as variations,' (65). While this seemingly unhinges the notion that these visual extractions from *PLL* may not be 'variations' of the text, they work as such as they tell their own stories through their isolation and redistribution in their appropriated forms. Further, because these extractions may be edited in a way similar to vids (see literature review for the definition) and often incorporate superimposed text over the (moving) image, fannish artefacts such as GIFs, MEMEs, GIF sets and graphic MEMEs could therefore be incorporated as examples of fanfiction.

By examining fanfiction's salient aspects, it will further destabilise the presumptive definition of fanfiction that has been delineated throughout much of the fanfiction scholarship;[106] but it will also allow for the expansion of that discussion to incorporate visually rendered fan production. In other words, these salient aspects allow for the inclusion of vids, filksongs, MEMEs, GIFs and GIF sets into the broader definition of fanfiction.[107] What is the necessity in creating an umbrella term that incorporates most modes of fannish textual productivity? Implementing an umbrella term that covers a large proponent of fannish activities has the potential to break down gender barriers, particularly as this pertains to fanfiction creation, which has been labelled a female space (Lothian et al 2007) with predominately female consumption and creation (Salmon & Symons 2004; Coppa 2006). Furthermore, it opens up the possibility to explore in greater detail the way queerness inflects narratives and how queerness is imbued in the fannish artefact. Moreover, by organising most modes of fannish textual productivity under the umbrella header fanfiction, it takes on the same radical properties that queer has, where both queer and fanfiction can serve to undermine or transgress dominant ideologies (Lothian et al

---

[105] Here I refer to the ways fans create new fannish artefacts as opposed to more communicative modes of fan production, i.e. 'fan talk' (Fiske 1992).

[106] By presumptive, I mean that it has been assumed by scholars thus far that fanfiction is a written prose form of fiction and has historically excluded filking, viding and fan art and now excludes MEMEs, GIFs/GIF sets and graphic MEMEs.

[107] For a more in depth analysis of fanfiction in its written form, see Chapter 5.

2007; Dhaenens et al 2008). In other words, fanfiction can be viewed as a transgressive action, whereby the fan creator can instil their own meanings and valuations into the text and not just accept the dominant codes and messages contained therein. This is one of 'queer's' primary functions as a term (Doty 1993) as it not only functions to demonstrate that 'queerness can be anywhere' in popular cultural texts (Doty 2000, 15), but also that it can function as a deconstructive practice, whereby this strategy is 'concerned with deconstructing heteronormativity by exposing how its discursive practices operate' (Dhaenens 2014, 521).

Textually, 'salient aspects' go beyond the simple construction of the fanfiction itself, i.e. how it is written, narrative structure, character development, setting, etc. These 'salient aspects' also extend to types of fanfiction, and for the case of this thesis and this chapter, particularly slash or femslash. Slash or femslash are a type of fanfiction 'in which same-sex television or film characters are subversively made into queer subjects,' (Dhaenens et. al 2008, 335). While gen fic (general fanfiction) and het fic (heterosexual fanfiction) are important categories of fanfiction, slash (male-male sexual relationships) and femslash (female-female sexual relationships) are a dominant category of fanfiction that have been in existence since Trekkers began writing it in the 1960s and 1970s (Jenkins 1992; Bacon-Smith 1993; Busse 2002; Jones 2002; Stein 2005; Coppa 2006; Stasi 2006; *AO3 Census* 2013).

In spite of the fact that slash has predominately revolved around male-male sexual relationships, there has been a substantial increase in the amount of femslash, particularly in regards to *Xena: Warrior Princess* (1995-2001). Of course, femslash is not limited to *Xen*a: popular media such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), the *Twilight Saga* franchise (both the books and the films), the *Harry Potter* franchise (books and films), *The Vampire Diaries* (2008-), and *PLL* have seen a dramatic increase in female-female slash fiction. Similarly, with the rapid availability of newer digital technologies, the ability to access fanfiction spaces that permit all forms of fanfiction have arguably increased this femslash proliferation. Because the internet has become the dominant fan space (Duffett 2013) and Web 2.0 has propelled internet fandom onto social media platforms beyond forums and BBS (bulletin board systems) (Hills 2013), the everyday social media interactions and digital technologies have pervaded fan activity. Bringing with that to the digital fan terrain are MEMEs, GIFs and GIF sets; and thus, as femslash has evolved, so have digital iterations of fan practices that I argue have also evolved or joined fanfiction online.

With a more inclusive definition of femslash outlined, it is necessary to understand how it is crafted, the types of stories it tells, what it privileges and where it is consumed (read shared). The first and last points (how it is crafted and where it is consumed) can be evidenced through the fanfiction websites *AO3* and *FF.net* (see Chapter Five for an exploration of these spaces) and the large numbers of both readers and writers. This indicates that authoring and consuming fanfiction occurs in online spaces, particularly in that fanfiction creation now occurs at home on a personal computer (Thomas 2007) and then is distributed through these online fanfiction 'archives'. Originally, (fem)slash would have been produced by hand, on a typewriter, and/or less likely, on a personal computer and then distributed through subscription-based fanzines or at fan conventions (Jenkins 1992; Bacon-Smith 1992; Coppa 2006).[108]

'Beta Readers'/'Beta Viewers'

Slash fiction/fanfiction is not created in isolation; it is an ever growing, expanding 'work in progress' (Busse & Hellekson 2006, 7). Generally, fanfiction authors 'preview' their work to 'beta readers'. These 'beta readers' are readers that edit the fanfiction piece for content, flow, spelling and grammar; they are also relied upon to ensure adherence to canon – this is to ensure that the characters are developed to emulate those depicted in the source text or to ensure that the narratives developed or retold adhere to the source text's 'universe' (its narrative world). This process serves two primary purposes: to improve the fiction created, but also to advertise it to potential readers. While this is not a commercial venture per se, the connections forged may be imbued with a producer-consumer relationship. The fanfic creator relies on the feedback of the consumer or 'beta reader' so as to better the creator's fan 'product' for wider consumption/readership. This process is largely unfounded in pre-internet times (Karpovich 2006, 172), and has become a fully integrated component of crafting [slash] fanfiction. Angelina Karpovich claims that the 'beta reader' is an evolutionary aspect that 'was adopted as a cross-fandom fan fiction practice from its inception,' (173). She argues further that 'the adoption of a term from the lexicon of software development

---

[108] This points to the evolution of (fem)slash creation and distribution practices as they shifted from handwritten and photocopied to typed and printed in fanzines until their establishment on online spaces, such as *AO3* or *FF.net*. Furthermore, this highlights that not only have distribution and creation altered, but also that these (fem)slashers have evolved their practices to incorporate visual forms of (fem)slash.

into the social practice of the online fan community is an early example of the medium-enabled convergence between the linguistic and social practices of seemingly entirely diverse online communities,' (173). These 'beta readers' arise out of different conditions and may take an editorial position (Karpovich 2006) or act as co-author (Thomas 2007). In other words, occasionally a 'beta reader' is unnecessary when fanfiction authors are collaborating together on a joint piece (Thomas 2007). Oftentimes, however, 'beta readers' are not always a singular entity (equalling to one person), many times there is a smaller community of 'beta readers' that provide feedback to the fanfiction writer (Hellekson & Busse 2006; Coppa 2006; Karpovich 2006; Stasi 2006; Thomas 2006).

Foregrounded here is the notion that 'beta readers' have evolved over time and arisen out of a pro-technology climate embraced by fans. What is striking here are the similarities between GIF and GIF set creations occurring on *Tumblr.com*.[109] Like fanfiction as a broad category, these digital fan practices revolve around communal efforts, meaning that a GIF or GIF set is not shared without proper feedback from, what I have termed, 'beta viewers'. Although 'beta readers' typically operate on a closed circuit basis, meaning that the piece of fanfiction is privately sent and feedback returned to the original author for editing and then it is released to the public, 'beta viewers' are those individuals within a close network of fans, or what Bertha Chin refers to as 'micro communities' (2010), that work in tandem to advance specific narratives or themes originating in the text and reiterated in their digital fannish artefacts. What this means is that these 'beta viewers' are still the first ones to 'consume' the fannish object and their feedback can occur in a variety of manners,[110] but the most frequent is to recirculate the fannish artefact to their groups of followers and friends (Karpovich 2006; Thomas 2007). Additionally, while the 'beta reader'/author dynamic continues to occur on *AO3* and *FF.net* for written fanfiction, the 'beta viewer'/creator dynamic operates on a system of feedback that privileges high amounts of 'notes'/'likes'/'favourites' or 'reblogs'/'shares'/'retweets' for these visual forms

---

[109] There is a looming dearth of literature revolving around *Tumblr*, irrespective of its contemporary importance to fans. Furthermore, literature surrounding GIFs and GIF sets is virtually non-existent, therefore personal experience with this fan practice has been presented. Alternative practices may occur in other fandoms, but this is the experience documented in the *Pretty Little Liars* fandom.

[110] Additionally, another method for 'beta viewers' to provide feedback is through the receipt of these digital fanfictions, who then provide comments to the creator through what is termed 'fanmail' on *Tumblr.com*, 'messages' on *Facebook.com* and 'direct tweet' on *Twitter.com*; they are then either given permission to share the digital fannish artefact or are told to delete said GIF/GIF set, MEME or graphic MEME.

of (fem)slash.[111] Specific to this chapter are these GIFs or GIF sets that exist within the *PLL* fandom; namely in that they primarily revolve around shipping practices with particular emphasis on Emison (Emily and Alison), Haleb (Hannah and Caleb), Spoby (Spencer and Toby), Sparia (Spencer and Aria – not necessarily a sexual relationship) and Ezria (Ezra and Aria).

The second aspect of (fem)slash surrounds the types of stories told by the fan producer. These vary tremendously and have endless possibilities, but there are a handful of key archetypal fanfic stories: '*hurt/comfort*', '*Mpreg*', '*deathfic*', '*curtainfic*', '*episode fix*', '*episode tag* or *missing scene*', '*alternative universe*', '*crossover*', '*fluff*', '*PWP*', '*badfic*', '*Mary Sue/Marty Stu*' (Hellekson & Busse 2006, 10-11).[112] These types of narratives range from the pornographic ('*hurt/comfort*', '*Mpreg*', '*PWP*', '*Mary Sue/Marty Stu*'); to the romantic ('*hurt/comfort*', '*Mpreg*', '*deathfic*', '*curtainfic*', '*episode fix*', '*episode tag* or *missing scene*', '*alternative universe*', '*crossover*', '*fluff*', '*PWP*', '*badfic*', '*Mary Sue/Marty Stu*'); and to the transgressive ('*Mpreg*', '*curtainfic*', '*episode fix*', '*episode tag* or *missing scene*', '*alternative universe*', '*crossover*', '*fluff*', '*badfic*', '*Mary Sue/Marty Stu*').[113] Furthermore, there are endless possibilities for? as they may be combined to create any number of narratives. Since digital technology has advanced editing software, many of these archetypes may be explored in digital fanfiction (as in the broader, umbrella term defined earlier). It is therefore possible to express '*hurt/comfort*' (or '*h/c*') through any number of combinations of GIFs, MEMEs, GIF sets, or graphic MEMEs.

While fanfiction serves a multitude of purposes (to explore relationships safely or to correct or expand the source text's narratives for example), shipping stories are the most common fanfics constructed and consumed,[114] with (fem)slash figuring as the most consumed and produced.[115] As I have argued, shipping may occur as a written or visual

---

[111] These terms originate from *Tumblr.com* ('notes' and 'reblogs'), *Facebook.com* ('likes' and 'shares') and *Twitter.com* ('favourites' and 'retweets'). For more about *Tumblr*, *Facebook* and *Twitter* as fan spaces see Chapter Three.

[112] For detailed definitions of each of these fanfiction archetypes, see Literature Review.

[113] Although transgressive has been used in relation to 'queer' and the practices employed by fans to destabilise heteronormativity, transgressive in this sense can also refer to a rupture or departure from the original narrative. For more in depth consideration of these terms, please refer to the literature review.

[114] 'Ship' often functions as both a noun and a verb in fandom. Therefore, a fan may 'ship' Emily and Alison or have Emison as their *OTP* (one true pairing) 'ship'. These fans are commonly referred to as 'shippers', or those that 'ship' 'ships'.

[115] The *AO3 Census* (2013) conducted by CentrumLumina surveyed 10,005 *AO3* (*archiveofourown.org*) users and found that 15% of users (4413 respondents) read femslash (F/F) and 31% of users (8978 respondents) read

iteration. Consequently, and as indicated in Chapter Five, there is a glaring dearth of available fanfiction for *PLL* in the written form. However, there is a heightened presence of ship related fanfiction located on *Tumblr*, *Twitter* and *Facebook* expressed through fans' use of MEMEs, GIFs, GIF sets and graphic MEMEs. Further, shipping culture may be expressed by way of the fan producer's username; the integration of hashtags (represented by # and followed by the ship name: #Emison); through reblogging, retweeting, or sharing many types of fanfiction (in the broader sense as defined previously); following Big Name Fans that are well-known to 'ship' slash relationships; and through creating their own fanfiction. *Pretty Little Liars* fans use this knowledge regarding usernames and hashtags as search tools to consume, recycle and produce these fannish artefacts, thus perpetuating digital fanfiction across social media platforms.

Exploring Visual (Fem)Slash

What remains to be explored in slash fiction literature is what happens to (fem)slash when one or both of the characters 'shipped' are LGBT+? While this was specifically addressed through fanfiction examples in Chapter Five, this subsection explores this question through the predominant (fem)slash literature. Considering (fem)slash has historically been positioned as a transgressive reading practice (Jenkins 1992; Bacon-Smith 1993; Busse 2002 and 2006; Hills 2002; Jones 2002; Salmon & Symons 2004; Stein 2005; Driscoll 2006; Woledge 2006; Stasi 2006; Willis 2006; Lackner et. al 2006; Lothian et. al 2007; Davies 2005; Dhaenens et. al 2008; and Kohnen 2008), the available literature on (fem)slash has yet to address the heightened presence of LGBT+ characters represented on television that feature in fan ships and fanfiction. In other words, the literature suggests that the reason (fem)slash is transgressive is that fans are uncovering queerness within the text that has not been explicitly stated; therefore, by unearthing that queer subtext and the non-normative relationships evinced from these readings would then destabilise both patriarchy and heteronormativity (Lothian et. al 2007, 106). While shipping two (or three – called OT3) LGBT+ characters and the ship is canon (textually supported), it does not necessarily mean that the fans are no longer employing transgressive reading strategies. However, much of

---

slash (M/M). Furthermore, 37% of users (4013 respondents) produced slash (M/M) and 10% of users (1043 respondents) produced femslash.

the literature suggests that what makes (fem)slash transgressive is the simple fact that fans are 'reading' these characters in a non-normative way because they are represented as normative (read heterosexual and cisgender).

Although Sara Gwenllian Jones (2002) recognises that (fem)slash has been identified as being transgressive, she argues that this transgressive reading strategy may not actually be transgressive, because these queer readings are really 'latent textual elements' (82). In other words, Jones suggests that queerness has been written into the text itself and therefore, (fem)slash may not necessarily be a wholly transgressive reading strategy (Jones refers to this as 'resistant reading'). Even though there is merit to this argument, Jones' article centres on fantasy or 'cult' texts; these types of texts have been the source of scrutiny for queer scholars (Doty 1993 and 2000; Berenstein 1996; Benshoff 1997), who locate queerness as innate to the text, as a transgressive spectatorial positioning and as a reception strategy. Harry Benshoff (1997) employs a similar reading strategy to the horror film, arguing that queer is located at the site of both production and reception according to the contextual history that parallels the figurations of monstrosity with gay male sexuality. In other words, gay male identity has been constructed by the media and public stereotyping as 'monstrous' or deviant, bringing with it death, plague, and destruction to the nuclear family, and thus society in general. Jones is therefore using a transgressive queer reading strategy by suggesting queerness has been written into the text itself (Gross 1991).

In order to address this (fem)slash conundrum, an evaluation of how queer reading strategies have historically been positioned both within slash scholarship and within queer theory is therefore integral to the subsequent sections. Re-evaluating this body of scholarship serves two primary functions: 1) it provides a framework for the analysis in the second and third sections of the chapter; and 2) it solidifies 'queer' not as a distinctive category, but as a potentiality. Potentiality suggests queerness is an abstracted component or quality of the text that arguably exists 'outside the borders of heteronormativity,' (Dhoest 2015, 88). I do this through the literature to evaluate how queerness has been historically 'read' as being innate to the text, though not always explicitly stated. Although this could be evaluated through textual analysis in the source text, the reader-guided textual analysis (Ytre-Arne 2011) employed in this chapter bridges that textual analysis with fan 'meaning making' to understand better how *fans* are interpreting queerness within the text.

By (re-)evaluating these reader strategies, it offers a valuable method to consider this yet unanswered anomaly: to determine if slash is still slash when one or both of the fictional characters are explicit LGBT+ representations.[116] Moreover, by addressing this distinction, it addresses the positive/negative representation debates that have dominated queer scholarship in recent years through fan evaluations of LGBT+ representation. What this means is that, fanfiction (in the broader sense) and therefore fans can bridge theoretical gaps through their everyday fannish engagements and textual productivity (see Chapter 4 for the ways in which these practices may be read as 'fan-scholar' activities that are invited by the text itself). This strategy does not delimit the academic voice; rather, it provides an alternative context (audience critique) to what has oftentimes been attributed to the spectator and its positioning by the text – the theoretical construction of the viewer over the 'actual' or 'real' viewer.[117]

In *Making Things Perfectly Queer* (Doty 1993), Alexander Doty argues that queerness exists as a subtextual positioning in popular culture media. In other words, Doty indicates that queer exists at the level of connotation (xii) and that it is 'related to any expression that can be marked as contra-, non-, or anti-straight,' (xv). Further, he claims that it must occur at this level, because 'certain sexual things [cannot] be stated baldly,' (Doty 2000, 1). This is the perfect climate in which (fem)slash can arise, highlighting how these texts can be interpreted and re-written; it demonstrates that: 'those complex circumstances in texts, spectators, and production that resist easy categorization, but that definitely escape or defy the heteronormative,' (7). Slash toys with the destabilisation of heteronormativity simply by positioning characters in contradistinction to straightness, suggesting that these are equitable pairings, where power struggles ostensibly exist in heterocentrist couplings. In other words, by rewriting a narrative to convey same-sex relations, fans can experiment with power structures in a controlled environment as opposed to the more volatile real

---

[116] Despite investigating queer theory as a reading strategy in popular media when considering explicit representations of LGBT identities, this chapter will not consider the literature that focuses on explicit representations. The rationale to leave this literature out of the conversation is to investigate the theoretical readings of non-LGBT texts, how these texts have been 'transgressed' by way of a queer reading, similar to how slash has been historically configured. For an exploration of these debates regarding queer scholarship focused on explicit representation, see the Literature Review in the Introduction to the thesis.

[117] For an overview of the development of queer theory, its reading strategies and its critiques on popular media more generally, see the Literature Review in the Introduction to the thesis. The inquiry into queer reading strategies in Chapter 2 serves to evaluate the phenomenon of slash fiction as it relates to digital fanfiction.

world setting. Alexis Lothian et. al (2007) cite real world examples, where their fan interviews highlight real world sexual experience versus virtual reality or fictional sexual experiences: 'I was aware of fan hook-ups taking place, but it's a very different thing when you're confronted with an actual body…In some ways it wasn't until I got home and logged on…that I felt "free" again,' (Jintian as quoted in Lothian et. al 2007, 107). While this is a broad example that is contained within scholarship regarding slash fiction, it is particularly applicable with regard to the ways in which queerness is expressed in popular media. This means that queerness as imagined or sub-textually connoted has the potential to be more impacting than overt or explicit LGBT+ representations. Furthermore, by extending this example, the 'reality' of LGBT+ characters explicitly represented in popular media carry the potential to derail queer's destabilising ability. Finally, it could be expressed that these overt or explicit representations normatise queer binaries, thus creating a system that locks LGBT+ identities into specific, stereotyped, identity categories. Consequently, the stability of (fem)slash as a radical reading strategy comes into question when contemplating the existence of one or more LGBT+ characters as central to a (femme)slash fiction.

In the next section, I investigate digital femslash in the form of MEMEs, GIFs, GIF sets and graphic MEMEs. This exploration assists in solving the (fem)slash dilemma presented in this section. Drawing from the scholarship presented here, this section explores the types of narratives presented through these digital artefacts to suggest that (fem)slash has become homonormatised (see the ways in which Pailey fiction may be viewed as homonormative in Chapter 5), as the queer readings of the text are not necessarily transgressive in nature, rather, like Jones (2002), they are expanding on not-so 'latent textual elements'.

'Those Kisses weren't Just for Practice': Reconstructing Emison and the 'Homonormal' Relationship
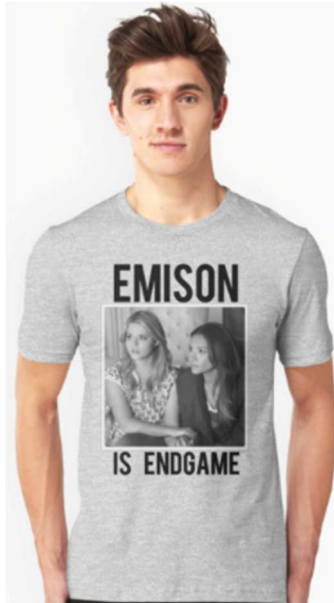
Figure 6 'because we don't have an endgame shirt and are the only ones'

Emison shippers use a variety of methods to legitimise their OTP (one true pairing), ranging from long text fanfiction to short, visually rich memes (as evidenced in Figure 6). This strategy to extract visual evidence from the source text itself to insinuate that a same-sex relationship exists between Alison Dilaurentis and Emily Fields has occurred since *PLL* first aired in June 2010. While shipping, and more specifically slash, has been explored in a large number of academic publications, little attention has been paid to how shippers ship digitally, meaning beyond solely exploring long text fanfiction and looking at digital fan production. This section synthesises the literature outlined in the first section of this chapter in order to highlight the ways in which Emison fans play out their OTP. Owing to the fact that Emily and Alison share a lurid, sexual history, coupled with the fact that Emily is an out lesbian character, these Emison fans are not reading subtextual elements, per se.[118] Rather, they are reading something that they argue is consciously evoked, yet denied by ABC Family (now Freeform) executives and on some level by I. Marlene King, the show's producer. However, and as questioned in Chapter Five, if these fans are romantically linking two characters that have a shared sexual history, is this still (fem)slash? And if this still

---

[118] I am hesitant to use lesbian as a sexual identity marker, as the show has never openly classified Emily as such. The language used during Emily's coming out was that she was gay, but she never stated that she was a lesbian. Therefore, I use the word 'queer' to enunciate the fluidity of Emily's sexual identity.

constitutes (fem)slash, does it retain its radical, transgressive potentialities that have become commonly associated with the (fem)slash genre of fanfiction?

In Figure 6, the meme points to one obvious, glaring issue: Emison shippers do not have their own 'endgame shirt'. Endgame 'represents how they [Emison shippers] would like their otps to end up together at the end of a series,' (Hillman et. al 2014, 7). Thus, it would be safe to assume to see 'Emison is endgame' attached to any number of Emison fans' profiles and evident in the material they create, consume or (re)distribute. Furthermore, Figure 6 almost encapsulates their fandom, as they are often teased with Emison moments by King during live tweets or tweets leading up to an episode being aired. Because there is no 'official' 'Emison is endgame' t-shirt, yet it is acknowledged by the producer as ostensibly legitimate and substantiated by the text itself, it leaves Emison fans to do a lot of the proverbial heavy lifting to ensure 'Emison is endgame'. This occurs in a variety of ways, but most prolific are the GIFs, GIF sets, MEMEs and graphic MEMEs; and in many ways, they replicate the varying subgenres of fanfiction.[119]

They Profess Their Love

A common theme running throughout the various MEMEs is the notion of unspoken love being spoken. This occurs in many ways, but in particular arises out of moments that depict Emily and Alison making physical contact:

Figure 7 4.16 'Close Encounters' GIFs

---

[119] While it is being argued in this chapter that fanfiction has been roughly defined and merely defined through its ostensible categories/classifications and a broader definition that encompasses all creative forms of fan productivity should fall under the larger Fanfiction heading, for the purposes of this section, fanfiction refers to 'traditional' fanfiction. In other words, fanfiction refers to the written, novelised format, whereas Fanfiction refers to its larger category.

In this example, Emily is turning away from Alison, when Alison suddenly grabs her wrist. Fans attribute this to an emotive response, whereby 'love' or sexual feelings for Emily are controlling Alison's reactions; a similar point is highlighted in Chapter 5 that arrives to this conclusion through the perpetuating "filling the gaps" evident in fanfiction, a conclusion that is surmounted because of the trends arising out of the fannish texts that emphasise these textual moments. This still comes from season 4 episode 16 'Close Encounters'. Emison fans often turn to moments such as the one represented in the GIF above, as they are representative of revelatory moments or moments of confession. In this scene, Ali 'confesses' to Emily that she missed her and that Emily has 'no idea how hard it's been to stay away' (4.16 Alison Dilaurentis). The scene is shrouded in darkness, evoking many of the same elements characteristic of *PLL* to highlight its mystery narrative (see Chapter 4 for the ways in which generic conventions are employed to invite fannish engagement, such as creating or distributing Emison GIFs), further evidenced by Emily's shocked expression, hues of blue lighting emphasising the darkness and mustiness in an industrial (read foreign) location, evasive camera work (the camera focuses on corners, floors, feet, hands, shadowed figures), and an ominous score. The shot-reverse-shot editing suggests a reunification of two friends/lovers, retained in the GIF above. Just as Alison's words suggest an innate ambiguity surrounding their 'friendship', fans reference these prototypical Emison moments, extracting them from the text to make a visual statement about their negotiation of the text. Hurt, surprise and implausibility are invoked in this image, as Alison has supposedly been dead for the past few years.

Fans have reacted to this scene, because Emily is the first of Ali's friends she has visited, going on to say that Emily is the only one that she can trust. While the above highlighted the trends evident in the repetition of Figure 7, the analysis comes from analysing this trend against the source text and what is commonly distributed within the fan community. In other words, the reader-guided approach here cannot rely on text when the fannish artefact is a digital GIF, as these can solely be moving images. However, this does not indicate that fans are not providing a critical interrogation of LGBT+ identity. To the contrary, the frequency with which this GIF and the many Emison GIFs that exist on these digital fan terrains highlight the importance of the unspoken as integral to LGBT+ identity and its mediated representation. Moreover, the homoeroticism that courses through this scene is what Emison fans have come to investigate; and this GIF emphasises that for them,

allowing this scene to be played on a loop infinitely. For Emison fans, this infinite loop, expressed through the GIFs formal properties (that it is a repeating, moving image, plucked from an important scene), signals 'endgame', indicating that, once the programme ceases to exist, Emison will be united in love eternally. Thus, 'Emison is endgame' expresses through this GIF that their love will overcome all obstacles and persevere through time. Moreover, the creation, distribution and redistribution of these Emison GIFs and GIF sets across *Tumblr* not only perpetuates that Emison is their OTP or is 'endgame', these GIFs and GIF sets further reify Emison narratives that these Emison shippers create and support.[120]

This standalone example highlights how love can be expressed through the visual frame independent of words. Yet, it still invokes that sentiment, particularly in the GIF's inclusion into a set of GIFs that portray tender Emison moments. It is also a moment commonly found in (fem)slash (see Chapter Five), when two characters come together for the first time. Though Alison is not dead, the hurt that envelops Emily when she learns of her death is tremendous, thus indicating that this instance replicates the '*hurt/comfort*' subgenre of (fem)slash. Ali and Emily come together and vie to be together in spite of the hurt that Alison has caused Emily. Fans are keen to illustrate this through examples linked to their relationship's foundation.
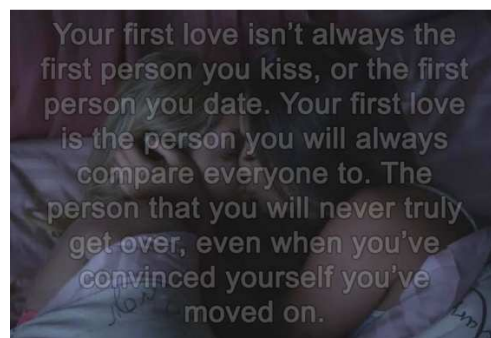
Figure 8 5.05 'Miss Me x100'

Figure 8 highlights one of the most frequently referenced Emison moments, where Ali and Emily share a bed and 'realise' their sexuality. Overlaid onto the image is the following text:

---

[120] Although Emison can be read as a canonical relationship (textually supported), these femslashers must also "fill in the gaps" to realise a more complete relationship. In other words, while textual evidence supports Emison's verity, there is not sufficient enough material to document their relationship from beginning to end in the same way as Pailey. However, this does not indicate that these shippers are reading Emison unrealistically, non-canonically or arbitrarily. They must use alternative digital methods to substantiate their readings that Emison is 'endgame'.

'Your first love isn't always the first person you kiss, or the first person you date. Your first love is the person you will always compare everyone to. The person that you will never truly get over, even when you've convinced yourself you've moved on.' Here, fans actually overlay their negotiation of Emison, and by extension lesbian identity, onto the programme itself. Through this dialogue, it not only points us to the most pivotal moment for Emison fans in the series that affirms their ship, it functions as an integral insight into the ways in which reader-guided can provide the researcher with tools to begin to approach interpretive reading strategies.

Further, this quote features on numerous MEMEs unrelated to *Pretty Little Liars*, however it has been 'poached' (Jenkins 1992) by Emison fans to reaffirm Emison's inevitability, that neither Ali nor Emily will ever be able to move beyond one another, that their kiss is solidified in time and space, not just proof that their relationship is real, but that their relationship is 'endgame'. This MEME not only invites the user to revel in Emison's reality, it also invites Emison fans to recall the themes of loss and anguish that have dominated Emily's narratives throughout the five seasons that precede this kiss. But it also provides Emison fans veritable textual moments that prove not only the existence of Emison, but the legitimacy of their reading strategies; that their readings of the homoerotically charged scenes that predate this kiss in the series' narrative were correct. Moreover, the MEME operates as a '*hurt/comfort*' narrative, tying together Emily and Alison's constant separation, Ali's hurtful actions towards Emily before Alison disappeared and their reunification in 4.24 'A Is for Answers'. Though the MEME directs Emison fans to recall or revisit Emily and Alison's romantic and sexual denial, it provides verification that Emison is real and that eventually the producers will 'permit' or 'allow' Emison to exist as an actual relationship in canon (textually supported) and not just teased.

Further to this point, the text is superimposed over Ali and Emily kissing passionately, which highlights the build-up Emison shippers argue begin with their first kiss in 1.09 'The Perfect Storm'. Contrary to Emison being teased throughout the series, for these Emison shippers, 5.05 'Miss Me x100' confirms their years of vying for Emison as innately canon. However, this scene is also referenced in '*hurt/comfort*' fiction, because Ali and Emily's relationship deteriorates swiftly in subsequent episodes. Thus, when the superimposed text states that Ali is the person Emily 'will never truly get over,' it refers not only to the notion that Emison is teased constantly with moments and scenes such as in

5.05, but also that Ali and Emily have had a turbulent relationship throughout the series and in spite of the ups and downs, Emison will overcome all obstacles, because no matter what 'your first love is the person you will always compare everyone to.' Therefore, the '*hurt/comfort*' convention invites Emison shippers not only to reject other partners for both Ali and Emily, but also to compare what might have been had Emison become realised sooner in the text and not "teased" throughout. Yet, for these shippers, this MEME represents not only a glimmer of hope for Emison's future, it reinforces the notion that Emison will be 'endgame' because no one will ever replace Emily and Ali's first true love (one another), all other romantic entanglements will not even begin to compare to Emison and Emily and Ali will never truly move on from one another.

Rejecting the Queer Bait: Emison Actualised through Fan Production

Many of these Emison digital fannish artefacts exist to combat the nay-sayers or opposing shipping groups, such as Pailey (Paige and Emily) or Emaya (Emily and Maya) shippers. Moreover, they also serve a function to combat the perceived 'queerbaiting' that is occurring on *PLL* and across numerous fandoms presently:

I'm sorry but this is important:

Sometimes we have to support other fandoms because unfortunately the Lesbian Death Trope is a problem and IS REAL. So far we're the lucky ones because Alison got back from the dead. But let's not forget that Maya and Shana also from our show suffered from this terrible destiny. And it's sad that LGBT characters are so poorly represented on TV. They give us hope and then they tear it down, something that our fandom is very used to, so you can bet that we understand. With this, please know you are not alone and that obviously Our Fight Is Not Over and will never be. Lexa Deserved Better. Sincerely, The Emison Army xx

Figure 9 Stop Queerbaiting Emison and Support Other Fandoms

Judith Fathallah describes 'queerbaiting' as a 'strategy by which writers and networks attempt to gain the attention of queer viewers via hints, jokes, gestures, and symbolism

suggesting a queer relationship between two characters, and then emphatically denying and laughing off the possibility,' (Fathallah 2014, 2). 'Queerbaiting', describes Joseph Brennan, 'is a fan-conceived term' laden with 'negative connotations' (Brennan 2016, 1); yet both of these definitions only seek to explore queer subtext and do not consider when that subtext is no longer a subtext, it is explicitly stated and then later denied by the producer(s).

Figure 9 addresses the dire consequences of queerbaiting, expressed here through what fans have labelled the 'Lesbian Death Trope'. The 'Lesbian Death Trope' is a fan-coined term that highlights how characters are teased to be lesbian or bisexual throughout a series, the character comes out as lesbian or bisexual and is then killed off soon thereafter. *PLL* has committed this narrative atrocity, to which Figure 9 highlights, leading many Emison shippers to join in alongside the Lexa shippers, spreading news, memes and GIFs surrounding the illustrious 'Lesbian Death Trope', a fan spearheaded campaign in reaction to the multiple LGBT+ deaths occurring across numerous fandoms. It was created to hold producers and broadcasting networks accountable for the 'LGBT characters [that] are so poorly represented on TV' (Figure 9), but also for fans to show solidarity with other fandoms that have suffered from these unfounded, fictional LGBT+ killings. Furthermore, Figure 9 originated as a tweet, but later became a MEME spread across both *Tumblr* and *Twitter PLL* fan pages and profiles.

Owing to the fact that Emison is teased both narratively and by the creative staff, fans view this teasing as a representation of queerbaiting. And although Brennan (2016) and Fathallah (2014) do not address relationships such as Emison, Figure 9 and the 'Lesbian Death Trope' do construct Emison as a form of queerbaiting, particularly in that Emily's sexuality is explicitly stated and Alison and Emily have kissed multiple times. To Emison shippers this signifies that the producers are not teasing them through homoerotic gestures, codes and symbols, but they are teasing a relationship that could be actualised. Owing to this, there has been a constant battle waged between I. Marlene King and her creative team and the ardent Emison fans, with many suggestive tweets from King and others that 'tease' or 'bait' Emison fans to view.

Marlene when the interviewers ask why Emison has kissed three times but hasn't become a couple yet

Figure 10 Marlene MEME

Fans often turn to wit or sarcasm to highlight what, to them, is glaringly obvious. Figure 10 is an example of that juxtaposition of seriousness with imbued comedy. The fannish commentary provides new context to a publicly released image of I. Marlene King. That commentary centralises the blurred nature of the image, where Marlene is in the centre, and in a circular pattern, the edges distort, which fans read as confusion or stunned silence. This type of MEME is used to 'call out' the lead producer who 'baits' Emison viewers with scenes such as the one featured in Figure 8. But it also highlights a major disconnect between fans and Marlene, creating a double signification for the blurred boundaries of the image and the confused expression adopted by Marlene (how fans refer to her). This is reiterated by the blurred figures that surround her and stand behind her, who represent the *PLL army*. Moreover, what is most discernible by these figures is that their backs are turned towards Marlene, mirroring how Marlene has turned her backs on Emison shippers. Although this MEME demonstrates the frustration these Emison fans share for Marlene's Emison queerbaiting, its deployment of sarcasm and wit to combat what has become a serious issue further hyperbolises the importance of Emison not only to Emison fans themselves, but also speaks to the lack of quality LGBT+ representations argued for in Figure 9.

Emison fans do not solely respond with sarcasm focused directly towards the production staff, they also recode narratives to combat 'queerbaiting':

Figure 11 'Emison Is Real'

The aim of Figure 11 is to 'correct' or '*episode fix*' narratives that do not provide fans with their ship wishes. In other words, they may alter dialogue, characterisation, narrative or costuming, for example, to 'fix' what they see as an untruth. Through this fan-constructed narrative, the trend of saying the unsaid is pertinent for the fan. The visual frames create a non-existent dialogue that points the researcher back to the source text, suturing to disparate scenes together that are both important to the fan author and important to Emison shippers.[121]

---

[121] Although in the previous chapter I returned to the source text, using description and screenshots to frame the fan's focal scene, the memes and GIFs provide an already established frame of reference that permits the researcher to analyse simultaneously the source text and the fannish artefact. Thus, reader-guided with visual

This MEME juxtaposes scenes from 6.05 'She's No Angel' (left side of the MEME) and 5.10 'A Dark Ali' (right side of the MEME). The MEME's creator counter-positions these particular episodes for two ostensible reasons: the first is a narrative correction and the second is the refutation of Marlene's queerbaiting. 'She's No Angel' is the episode where Lorenzo Calderon (Travis Winfrey) and Alison solidify their romantic relationship, and in this scene, Alison's father Kenneth Dilaurentis (Jim Abele) forces Lorenzo out of his house as he is unhappy with the prospect of Alison being romantically tied to him. The second reason is that the scene from 'A Dark Ali' physically positions Emily in Alison's sight-line, which permits her to 'stand in' or replace Alison's father. In other words, Alison looks directly at her father in the 6.05 scene and in the scene from 5.10 Alison looks directly at Emily; therefore, it is an easy graphic match for the creator to substitute Emily for Kenneth. Emily's substitution serves two further purposes, which are emphasised by the superimposed text: she is a stand-in for fan frustration that Marlene has continuously queerbaited fans over the prospect of Emison as has been teased throughout Season 5 (as evidenced by Figure 10); and the MEME creator corrects a romantic relationship that they reject through Emily's, or what is perceived to be, jealousy. Joseph Brennan justifies this type of reading as he argues 'any suggestiveness in mainstream texts often serves as fodder for queer, artistic works […] and in fact helps define a series as "slashable"' (2016, 4). As Emison fans perpetually note, there is not a subtext for Alison and Emily, their relationship is canon, just denied as a form of 'queerbaiting'.

GIF sets as Emison Femslash

In this final section of the chapter, I examine one GIF set that incorporates 'poached' Emison scenes that the fan GIF maker sutures together to create a mini visual story documenting Emison. This section of the chapter synthesises the first two sections to highlight how this digital fannish artefact can be read as femslash, not just through the fan remediation of both the scenes and the narratives extracted from the source text, but also how these moving images create new narratives that emphasise the reality of Emison and why. More importantly, by exploring the ways in which these images are structured, are commented

---

artefacts proposes a disparate set of challenges and rules to highlight the trends emanating from these fan products, but also presents the researcher with an easier set of visual focal points to critically engage with.

upon and are shared across the fandom highlight both the importance of Emison femslash creation through digital modes and the integral scenes the fans return to repeatedly to justify their reading that Emison exists. Further to this point is how they negotiate Emison as a lesbian relationship, which in turn is an interrogation into Ali and Emily's assumed non-normative identities. Here, I explore the stories that this 'GIFfic' creates, which relies on tropes regarding the endless nature of love or that love overcomes great obstacles, using these tropes in the same vein as trends are used in reader-guided.

Before turning to the analysis, it is important to illustrate how one reads a GIFfic, such as Figure 12. Although text guides the reader in Figure 12 (below), moving from left to right and then down, GIF sets and GIFfics emulate the reading patterns associated with comic books or graphic novels. In other words, this speaks not to the evaluative aspect of 'reading', invoking interpretation and meaning making strategies associated with 'reading' in the cultural and media studies disciplines. Rather, reading here means the physical act of consuming a media text, such as the Figure 12 GIFfic. Thus, a standardisation has occurred in the practice of GIF set creation and consumption that has become innate to the reading strategies (meaning the physical act of reading and not meaning making). That is to say, when fans become further integrated within their respective *Tumblr* communities, fans have a tacit awareness in regards to the ways in which a GIF set should be 'read'. This allows fans to navigate these GIF sets with or without superimposed text to guide them. Further to this point, the individual GIFs that comprise a GIF set or GIFfic are selected and structured therein to highlight a theme, narrative or theory, for example. Fans are therefore able to discern an overarching narrative threaded throughout the GIF set or GIFfic based on the location of each GIF within the set or fic. This means, then, that the constructed narrative is visually created as opposed to verbally created, but relies on associated and assumed fan knowledges surrounding the source text. For example, a non-fan or non-viewer of *PLL* may be cognisant of the fact that Emison is a ship, but upon viewing the GIF set in its entirety, the individual GIFs used might not infer the same meaning to these non-fans or non-viewers as they would to fans of *PLL* or Emison fans.

Figure 12 GIFfic Promoting Emison's True Love

Although Figure 12 appears to highlight Emison moments as evidenced from the source text, these GIFs are stitched together to narrate Emison's reality by combining two specific (fem)slash generic conventions such as '*hurt/comfort*' and '*curtain fic*'. By creating this story through the various (fem)slash conventions, it visualises not one narrative in synchronous time. Rather, the narrative constructed interweaves the evolution of their relationship

alongside the stereotyped trials these types of romantic relationships face. In other words, the GIFfic addresses the reality of relationships, such as 'friends don't treat me like you do', which speaks not only to the compassion, tenderness and intimacy expected from romance, but also the ways in which partners hurt one another. This is evidenced by the fan's return to episode 5.05 'Miss Me x100', wherein Ali and Emily engage in an intimate, sexual act and Emily later scorns Ali in subsequent episodes. But it is also expressed in the second GIF in the right-hand column, which features Emily's wrist with the beaded bracelet given to her by Ali the summer before Ali disappeared. The bracelets represent Ali's unpredictable attitude towards the Liars, as the bracelets function as a dichotomous symbol, charged with both kindness and malicious intent. That is to say, these bracelets highlight the way Ali treated the Liars as both her closest friends and her easily manipulated underlings. Further to this point, this fan reads Ali's manipulation of Emily and the moments Ali "toyed" with her through their tender kisses as Ali's inability to come to terms with her true feelings. Although this sentiment is not overtly expressed in this specific GIFfic, it is apparent through the other GIFs and MEMEs shared on this fan's *Tumblr* page and evidenced through the associative fannish artefacts available to Emison shippers on *Tumblr*, *Twitter* and *Instagram*.[122] Furthermore, this is a recurring trend in Emison femslash fiction as highlighted in Chapter 5, whereby the femslasher imbues the narrative gaps with internalised monologues, typically Ali's inner monologue, that function to address Ali's true feelings for Emily.

Read from this GIFfic is also the narrative that Emison is 'endgame'. Explored in the previous section through individual MEMEs, Emison is 'endgame' is a recurring theme that trends not only in the fanfiction created around Emison, but also in the overt shipping culture that surrounds Emison. Here, 'endgame' is expressed not only through an inevitability suggested by the overlaid text, but also through the return to 5.05 'Miss Me x100' in the final GIF in the GIF set. When comparing the first and last GIFs drawn from the same episode and the same scene, Emily appears to take the dominant role during their moment of intimacy. This is particularly evidenced by the fact that Ali is laying on her side in a feeble position, elicited by the way Ali pulls the blanket around her in similar fashion to

---

[122] Although fan vids are addressed in Chapter 7 in relation to fan theory-making, they can also function as (fem)slash. What this means is that, although this chapter does not address fan vids in its re-evaluation of fanfiction owing to space limitations and intent of the chapter, many Emison shippers utilise fan vids in the same manner as these GIFfics, MEMEs and GIF Sets.

the ways in which a child uses a security blanket. Emily contrasts this position as she seemingly pushes that security blanket away from her shoulders to gain better access to Ali, tilting her head in a manner that both obscures her face from view but may also imbue a sense of Emily's desire to protect Ali in this rare moment of intimacy. Protection and security are recurring themes in 5.05, as Ali has just recently returned to Rosewood, 'A' is still stalking each of the Liars and Ali, Ali is home alone as her father has gone away on business and Ali turns to Emily (evidenced through the golden-hued flashbacks highlighted in Chapter 4) for a sense of familiarity, trust and comfort these fans argue cannot be received from the other Liars.

Evoked through this idea that no other person can complete Ali the way Emily can, and vice versa, is one of the central uniting discourses surrounding 'endgame' fandoms.[123] An idea such as this is expressed through the first and final GIFs that sandwich the GIFfic, as argued above. But it is particularly evident in the shifting dominance seen in the final GIF in the GIFfic, as Ali and Emily switch roles. After Emily pulls a semi-resistant and meek Ali into a passionate kiss (first GIF, left hand column), Ali shirks her reluctance and exerts a passion for Emily by exuding dominance by rolling on top of her. Ali's physical movement from bottom position in the initial GIF to top position in the final GIF parallels the sexual roles submissive and dominant. Moreover, Ali pushes aside the blanket covering her the way a security blanket protects a child, indicating that Ali has embraced her true feelings for Emily. Thus, 'endgame' is enunciated by the shifting roles exhibited in the first and final GIFs.

Conclusion

This chapter put forth an argument that expanded on accepted definitions of fanfiction and (fem)slash fiction. By investigating the ways in which digital fannish artefacts can be viewed as (fem)slash, this not only invites new understandings of the ways in which digital 'textual productivity' (Fiske 1992) functions, but it also highlights the ways in which fan fiction studies has yet to assess these digital artefacts in relation to fanfiction creation and consumption. Furthermore, it expands upon the argument made in Chapter 5 that

---

[123] I use 'endgame' fandom here not to suggest that this is specific fan identity category, rather it indicates that ultimately a fan engaged in shipping culture as one of their primary factors motivating their fannish practices, 'endgame' is integral to their ship and thus the ways in which they view their fannish identity and they engage in fannish 'textual productivity' (Fiske 1992).

traditional modes of fanfiction creation and consumption is less of a focus for the *PLL* fan community, but that these (fem)slash practices occur in other formats within this community of fans. To evidence this, not only did I highlight the salient aspects of (fem)slash to demonstrate that these conventions are retained in this digital mode of engagement, but I also provided a case study examination of a GIFfic that espouses similar narrative constructions as evidenced in Chapter 5. Moreover, these digital forms of (fem)slash fiction not only re-evaluate the areas in which fan fiction studies scholars should explore in future research, but it also points to the ways in which LGBT+ identity is foregrounded therein. That is to say, where in Chapter 5 fans rely on written descriptions to both negotiate and represent these LGBT+ characters from *PLL*, digital (fem)slash uses visual elements taken from the text alongside superimposed commentary that provides a better understanding of the ways in which these fans negotiate these LGBT+ representations. Important to this reading is that the fans are drawing from identities constructed or supported by the text (canon) to visually represent their readings of these same-sex relationships.

In the final case study chapter, I investigate the ways in which fan theory-making addresses LGBT+ representation in *PLL*, namely the ways in which intersex and transgender identity constructs the villainy of 'A' and the motivations for being 'A'. Chapter 7 synthesises Chapters 4, 5 and 6 to highlight the ways in which the fannish artefacts explored in Chapters 5 and 6 have taken on new functions: to demonstrate or to substantiate a fan's theory in regards to 'A's' identity. The fan theorists in Chapter 7 employ similar strategies to construct their theories as highlighted in Chapters 5 and 6, but they also rely on differ methods of telling those investigative or explanatory methods, namely by adopting fanfiction style storytelling, academic or essay formats and documentary-like formats (vidding).

Chapter 7: "He, She, It, Bitch!": Transgendered Mystery Narratives, Fan Sleuthing and the Quest for Uncovering 'A'

As has been argued throughout the thesis, *PLL* fans have a preoccupation with LGBT+ representations, particularly evident through the ways in which they negotiate Emison and Pailey in their fan production. I evidenced this through an exploration of how certain genres invite fan-scholarly engagements that lead these fans to read texts queerly (Chapter 4) by creating (fem)slash fiction and by consuming it (Chapter 5), but also how this practice has taken on a virtual or visual form via digital (fem)slash fiction (MEMEs, GIFs, GIF sets) (Chapter 6). In this chapter, however, that link between the primary mystery ('A's' identity) and LGBT+ identity is at first glance seemingly absent. On the contrary, however, that link is further solidified by the major reveal in 6.10 'Game Over Charles' (11 August 2015), where it is revealed that Charles ('A' from 3.01 to 6.10) is the transgender (male-to-female) sister to Alison and Jason Dilaurentis.[124] This chapter addresses therefore the ways in which fans negotiate non-binary gender representations and identities in their fan production through exploring the relationship between the representation of transgender and intersex identities and fan theory-making. Integral to this investigation is the ways in which *PLL* has constructed transgender identity by positioning that character as the central villain 'A'. Moreover, figuring the sole transgender character as the antagonist is particularly concerning, especially when considering LGBT+ people have been historically constructed in popular culture as paedophiles, liars, and plagued by diseases (Russo 1987; Sedgwick 1990; Doty 1993; Auerbach 1995; Benshoff 1997; Suarez 1996; Sullivan 2003; Butler 2004; Halberstam 2005; Becker 2006). While this chapter does not trace the historical representation of LGBT+ identity in popular media, it nonetheless shapes the analysis and contextualises LGBT+ representation in contemporary media, and for the case of this thesis, in *Pretty Little Liars* (see Chapter 4 for the ways in which mystery, teen and queer are interlinked).

This chapter continues the thesis' focus on the exploration of fan meaning making, employing a reader-guided textual analysis (Ytre-Arne 2011) to situate fan interpretation into the context of the television programme *Pretty Little Liars*. The three sections explore a

---

[124] Charles assumes the name Charlotte as her female name, but is well known both to the viewers and the central protagonists as CeCe Drake.

different fan theory in detail, each drawn from three different social media or Web 2.0 platforms: *Tumblr*, *Facebook* and *YouTube*. The fan theories explored use different investigative methods to 'unmask' 'A' and all employ techniques explored in Chapters 5 and 6, particularly in that they use narrative to retell events or expand a story, much in the same way as fanfiction, and often times use GIFs/GIF sets or MEMEs to emphasise certain elements of the source text.[125] As this chapter deals with three specific fan theories, section one's theory will be referenced as T1 (or Theory 1), section two T2 and section three T3. Section One investigates the highly popular 'Wren is A' theory, that was published and referenced in numerous popular fan/entertainment publications, most notably by Bustle.com. This theory uses fanfiction-style storytelling to theorise 'A's' identity and then uses a large data set of textual and extra-textual material to support this theory. Section Two explores the 'Lucas is A' fan theory, a theory that employs a close textual analysis of names to insinuate that Lucas – a relatively peripheral character – is 'A'. Even though this theory centralises a male character as 'A', it is still peppered with language that engages with themes of transgender or intersex identity, particularly 'hermaphrodite'; it also references scenes and dialogue from the source text that suggest Lucas may be a non-normative character and therefore 'A' is a non-normative character. Finally, Section Three considers the 'CeCe is A' theory that explicitly states CeCe is both 'A' and transgender. This theory employs vidding to indicate CeCe's role as 'A' and as transgender, using stills and scenes interspersed with music and text to create a solid (and albeit correct) theory.

Before examining each of these theories in greater detail, a malleable definition of theory making must be established; in other words, a definition is needed that is flexible enough to account for fan practices outside of my own fandom and my own understanding of fandom. Even though theory making has been highly under theorised and is virtually non-existent in fan studies scholarship, it is a practice that has arguably existed since media fandom's foundations. It is important to distinguish what I mean by theory, here. Alan McKee (2007) investigates fans of theories and theorists, where these fans employ similar fan practices to live their lives through particular association to a theory or theorist (e.g. Karl Marx and Marxism). He points to how these fans collect items and books relevant to their

---

[125] Ostensibly there are links between the construction of fanfiction and fan theory making; however, they serve different purposes. Fanfiction serves a multiplicity of functions, whereas the primary function of fan theory-making is to postulate narrative outcomes or to consider the evolution of characters or narratives.

idolised theory/theorist and that they live their lives according to these theories/theorists (88-97). McKee's conception of fan theory making revolves around the notion that these fans are actually fans of a particular theory, as opposed to crafting theories that pertain to a fan's source text. As a fan practice, however, theory making is a way for fans to speculate about forthcoming narrative events, whether they be in the near future (in the next episode or by the end of the most current season) or 'endgame' predictions, particularly as they relate to couple formation (Emison) and revealing villain identities (Big 'A'). Jason Mittell (2013) on the other hand identifies this fan practice as arising out of what he calls 'forensic fandom', where these are 'drillable texts' investigated by 'forensic-minded fans'. As argued in Chapter 4, positioning these fans in relation to discourses of criminology and crime solving juxtaposed against queer readings has the potential to reify homophobic and transphobic discourses, thereby situating LGBT+ identities as contrary to law abiding society members. However, I do concur with Mittell's definitions of these problematic terms, but utilise the more general terms fan theory making and fan theorists instead.

These predictions often take on many forms and employ different techniques to justify a fan's theory. Fans spread these theories across social media (*Twitter*, *Tumblr*, *Facebook*, *YouTube*, *Instagram*, *Snapchat*), fan fora (*TelevisionWithoutPity*, wikias, *Reddit*) and fanfiction archives (*FF.net*, *AO3*, *Wattpad*). 'Fan talk' (Fiske 1992; Baym 1998 and 2000; Hills 2013) is one of the most common types of theory making fans engage in, particularly as fans come together in person and online to discuss narrative events (past, present and future). These discussions, similar to the way in which slash fiction is produced, rely on canon (or narrative truths) to legitimate their predictions or theorisations. Slash fiction may also function as a theory making practice, particularly as slash fiction relies on canon to speculate and postulate the existence of oftentimes non-canonical relationships. In essence, these fan theories may arise in any given situation, on any fan-centric platform and amongst any fan collective or fandom. Thus, defining fan theory making in a way that allows for the definition to be inclusive is important to the ways in which fans engage and interact with their source texts. However, defining fan theory making as such also parallels the inclusivity and diversity evoked by the term queer, a term that has seen greater usage amongst *PLL* fans, it features regularly in their fannish practices and has become a self-identifying category some of these fans adopt.

Much of the focus of fan studies has centred around fan communities, fan identities, and fan practices. Furthermore, the scholarship that engages with fan practices tends to privilege fanfiction over other forms of fannish activities.[126] Moreover, fan theory making extends to all types of media fandoms ranging from music fandom (One Direction Larry shippers; Dare-Edwards 2013 conference paper), literary fandom (*Harry Potter* franchise, *Twilight Saga*), film fandom (*Cloverfield*, *Toy Story* trilogy) and television fandom (*The Walking Dead*, *PLL*, *Teen Wolf*). Finally, fan theories have moved beyond the realm of fandom and into the mainstream, with major digital publications such as the *Huffington Post* documenting these theories in opinion and entertainment news pieces. For example, 'This 'Pretty Little Liars' Theory About Charles Has Fans Fuming' (*Huffpost Entertainment* Lily Karlin, 27 July 2015) is an article that uses digital 'fan talk' to expose a theory circulating *Tumblr* that suggested Charles would be a random actor and not someone the fans knew. The article plays on the fan/producer relationship to indicate that there is a huge contingent of fans that do not trust producer-spread information and they use this particular fan theory to highlight that divide.

Not only is fan theory-making a fannish engagement that should be viewed as a gender neutral fannish practice, it also employs similar strategies commonly associated with close textual analysis and, particularly, queer interpretative strategies. In other words, these fans who create theory read beyond the surface of the source text to uncover hidden elements that can only be revealed after certain narrative events have passed. Queer readings tend to privilege subtext, or what they deem to be 'clues', as a means to substantiate their queer interpretations. Especially for the *PLL* fandom, this programme centralises the mystery narrative as integral to its structure (Bingham 2014) and mystery/detective fiction 'is a very important and popular part of that [gay literature] genre,' (Jones 2012, 571). Mystery can evoke queerness (as is argued in Chapter 4), indicating that something lurks beneath the surface.[127] This is perhaps one of the reasons why gay detective novels have become such an important part of the gay literary canon (Markowitz 2004). Therefore, investigating fan theories and how fans discern their

---

[126] Fan theories have become an important part of fannish engagement, especially as fan theory making appears to be more of a gender neutral activity. Of course, it is always difficult to discern gender identity from usernames when considering the ostensible gendered-nature of fannish engagement; however, many of these fan theorists, especially on *YouTube*, feature prominently in their fan theory videos.

[127] Harry Benshoff (1997) proposes a similar argument in relation to the horror genre, arguing that homosexuality exists subtextually and through the figuration of the monster.

suppositions from the source text not only point to *how* fans theorise, but also provide insight into why. And although not all of these fans may self-identify as queer (non-normative identity category), the fannish practice may be read as a queer practice, owing to the tradition of gay detective novels (Markowitz 2004, Jones 2012). *PLL* may therefore be considered a lesbian detective/mystery programme (Bingham 2014), as LGBT+ identity is foregrounded not just onscreen, but also in the creative talent that produces, directs and scripts it.

'If one of these two theories does not come to pass…': Popular Theories, Big Name Fans and the Transphobic Backlash

In certain contexts, some fan theories have become so popular that they emerge as a dominant interpretation that pervades a fandom. What this means is that a theory can be seen to be incredibly researched, citing source text evidence and extra-textual evidence that fans take these theories as the proverbial fandom prophecy.[128] Central to these fan theories, however, is how Matt Hills (2002) locates a connection between discourses of religion and fan conversion, which he labels 'neoreligiosity' (117). However, discourses of conversion are not what is meant by use of the word prophecy, here. What I suggest through the use of prophecy is that there is a central prophet (here a Big Name Fan) who reads the source text to prophesy its outcomes; this is irrespective of religion even though prophecy and prophet have their founding in religious language and discourses. This is more in line with Matt Hills' (2006) notion that a 'Big Name Fan' suggests a hierarchy within fandom, where 'the fan-cultural or subcultural terms for fans who have attained a wide degree of recognition in the community […] are known to others via subcultural mediation without personally knowing all those other subcultural participants,' (104). The importance here is that 'neoreligiosity' points to a hierarchal structure of fandom, where certain fan theories are privileged over others, namely through allegiance to particular 'Big Name Fans'.

For this section, I investigate the most pervasive 'A' theory that was popularised by the *PLL* army (another way of saying the *PLL* fandom), explore its use of close textual analysis and its reliance on extra-textual material (primarily celebrity/producer information

---

[128] Furthermore, these theories are shared across social media platforms and are used to support one's own interpretations of narrative outcomes; but, these theories also become featurettes in entertainment publications, such as *Bustle.com*.

that is viewed as integral to solving the 'A' mystery). Additionally, I explore its construction as a narrative that fills in gaps from the source text, similar to how 'genfic' is constructed (see Chapter 5). Finally, I investigate the transphobic backlash that appeared on the 'Big Name Fan's' *Facebook* page post-'A' reveal. This section's primary function is to establish the importance of fan theory making and the process by which it occurs; but it also elucidates how certain interpretations become central interpretations in a fandom. Because this section relies heavily on a written fan theory, the reader-guided analysis first investigates the theory critically, highlighting key trends, words, phrasing and sentences to point to critical moments within the source text that the BNF deems integral to their theory. Furthermore, the subsection that investigates the transphobic discourses coursing throughout the BNF's fan page after CeCe's reveal underscores the visual media this BNF uses to perpetuate a transphobic environment, but also to illustrate that the text permits this transphobia to some extent.

This theory posits two potential candidates as 'A': Wren Kingston (Julian Morris) and Ezra Fitz (Ian Harding). It is organised into several sections that are tied together through a constructed narrative that relies heavily on canon for its structuring. The introductory section provides a back story that uses canonical narratives learned throughout the series' five seasons.[129] Notably, this background story uses interpretative language to paint the matriarch Jessica Dilaurentis (Andrea Parker) as conniving, untrustworthy and manipulative, which is reiterated throughout the theory's narrative: 'Jessica's treachery', 'to get away from Peter and to keep Kenneth from becoming suspicious', 'Jessica convinced' (T1). Contrastedly, and in spite of positioning one of these male characters as the arch villain, the BNF ('Big Name Fan') apportions a gentler, more sympathetic array of descriptors to Charles: 'well-adjusted', 'articulate', 'charismatic' (T1). Positioning the 'A' figure in a positive light and reading that figure as male is largely indicative of the BNF interpreting femaleness as 'suspicious' (T1) and at fault for creating 'A'; whereas a male 'A', it is suggested, is a product of his environment and is merely reacting to the horrible situation that his parents put him in. While the theory creator implicates Kenneth Dilaurentis (Jim Abele) in taking the 'easy way out' by 'putting him (Charles) into Radley' (T1), the BNF's language suggests that Jessica, the matriarch, was the primary instigator to lock away their son Charles.

---

[129] This theory was published nearly a month after Season 5 concluded and two months before Season 6 premiered.

The misogynistic language that courses through the theory indicates a privileging of male identity in a largely female oriented programme. Additionally, a large majority of *PLL*'s themes centre on female and feminist issues, particularly read through the trope of the 'evil man', a recurring theme that surfaces particularly in the cheating husband and father (Byron Montgomery – Chad Lowe; Peter Hastings – Nolan North; Tom Marin – Roark Critchlow; Zack – Steve Talley) and the domineering male character (Noel Kahn – Brant Daugherty; Wren Kingston – Julian Morris; Darren Wilden – Bryce Johnson; Andrew Campbell – Brandon W. Jones; Gabriel Holbrook – Sean Faris). By employing this sexist language, the BNF subverts the role of the strong female character, thereby recoding this female centric narrative into a narrative of misandry and relinquishing the blame from 'A' onto the female protagonists and their mothers: 'It is clear that Charles is someone who is trying to live the life he feels was stolen from him' (T1). In other words, it is not 'A's' fault that he was abandoned, had been 'thrown […] aside for their precious daughter' (T1) and learned socialisation in the 'nuthouse' (T1).

While the BNF's theory suggests both Wren and Ezra could be 'A', they signal throughout the theory's narrative through authorial interjection ('I also think', 'cough, Wren, cough', 'due to the timeline I unraveled' (T1)) that their primary suspect is Wren. For this fan theorist, Wren is held in an almost reverential manner, with constant references to his status as a doctor, his ability to co-opt characters to do his bidding and his alleged omnipresence as obvious. Furthermore, the fan theorist employs authoritarian language to suggest that their interpretation is the *only* interpretation: 'If one of these two theories does not come to pass, then the writers have totally boggled the entire storyline,' (T1). This is not only perpetuated across their fan page, echoed in the BNF's own fans' comments on their timeline and attached to this theory, but this BNF receives further recognition through *Bustle.com*'s (a popular digital entertainment publication) article ''Pretty Little Liars' Theory Reveals Charles' Identity – & It's Not Jason's Twin' (Kaitlin Reilly, 20 April 2015) that centralises this BNF's Wren theory.

Primary evidence provided by the BNF to support their theory supports the narrative crafted by this fan theorist. This evidence originates from the source text ('In 3x19, Spencer mentioned to Wren that she was hoping for some "shock therapy".', 'Wren […] resembles the young boy […] in the vault video', 'a piece framed artwork […] features three figures […] similarly, the dollhouse features a more simplistic piece' (T1)) and from celebrity news

('Julian Morris' new series […] wrapped a few days ago', 'Marlene tweeted that she told Big A that they were A [and Julian Morris was] seen leaving, likely from a meeting with IMK', 'Holly Marie Combs tweets', 'A recent quote by Norbuck', 'This could be where IMK got "Charles" from' (T1)). While these types of source text and celebrity/producer evidence are employed to substantiate the BNF's theory, their analysis of source text material functions similarly to academic analysis. It is this level of analysis that positions this BNF as a primary authority for the fan community, using close textual analysis to infer meaning from the source text to predict narrative events. For example, one of the pieces of evidence provided by this BNF breaks down a particular song choice from episode 5.25 'Welcome to the Dollhouse': 'While the song "Unwritten" seems to be tied to Ezra in meaning, the name of the song actually contains our main suspect. Check this out: unWRittEN' (T1). The BNF attributes song choice and lyrical meaning as key evidence to unmask 'A's' identity, but the construction of the song title is actually more symbolic of 'A's' true identity for this BNF. They look to this scene not just for the visual clues that would identify 'A', but to the aural ones as well. The overlay of the song onto a faux high school prom that is being falsely recreated illustrates the loss discussed earlier in the fan theory, where 'Charles is […] trying to live the life he feels was stolen from him' (T1). Furthermore, the fan theorist alludes to Wren's Britishness in the evidence ('Nosey Bitches Die', where in the American context nosey would be spelled nosy); this has particular implications for the song chosen, as the artist Natasha Bedingfield is British as well. Moreover, in the main body of the fan theory, the BNF points to the inauthenticity surrounding 'A's' background, postulating that, if 'A' is Wren, then he 'adopted a fake name, accent and background to very calculatingly attracted the beautiful Melissa Hastings' (T1).

Inauthenticity is a recurring theme that this BNF uses to disempower the strong female figures represented by the plethora of female characters; to highlight the lack of truth emanating from the producers, actors/actresses and writers, but in particular from I Marlene King;[130] and finally to derail the legitimacy of a transgender character/villain, whether that representation be positive or problematic. What this means is that, for this BNF, they highlight moments of inauthenticity (or the lack of the authentic – read true or real) through their approach to interpretative strategies, their negotiation of the

---

[130] For more on this antagonistic producer/fan relationship, see Chapter 6.

fan/producer dynamic and their reception of/to non-normative and non hetero- or homonormatised representations. Likewise, what links these things further is that, through their fan theory and the way they function within the BNF's self-created community, there is a rejection of feminism and femaleness in favour of patriarchy and the authentic male self. By authentic male self, the male characters are viewed by this BNF as a beacon of positivity, in spite of the fact that male characters may be figured to be the central antagonist, which would represent a clear departure from *PLL*'s overt feminist themes; furthermore, when that ostensible male villain rejects his former male self to transition into their rightful gender identity, it is a rejection of the 'authentic' male self that the BNF takes the greatest issue with. In other words, the BNF rejects the overtly positive female, lesbian and feminist representations in favour of a positive representation of maleness, heterosexuality and cisgender/patriarchal identity. Further, it is the discourses of inauthenticity that surround transgender identity that further infuriate this BNF, when considering that the BNF favours positive male representation, the male villain, in the BNF's opinions, rejects maleness and patriarchy, which is an 'inauthentic' approach to masculinity and male identity. Also at play is the fact that transgender identity transgresses not just heteronormativity, but also homonormativity.

'CeCe has a dick': Transphobic Discourse as Fan Backlash

With this anti-female/anti-feminist and authoritarian fan theory framed in such a manner, it fostered a perfect environment to permit anti-transgender language and rhetoric to surface on the BNF's *Facebook* page after it was revealed Charles Dilaurentis had transitioned to CeCe Drake. Furthermore, this particular BNF has gained a significant number of followers owing to their unyielding bluntness, their episode recaps and their ability to provide spoilers as they become available.[131] Therefore, when this BNF's theory proved to be not only inaccurate, but highly wrong, both the BNF and their fans responded with disdain and ire directed at the producer, the creative team and the transgender community. While much of this can be attributed to the overall nature of the page and the BNF, much of this ire

---

[131] An episode recap reviews episodes of television programmes and are shared with a particular readership. For the case of *PLL*, many of these recaps are imbued with comedy, snide commentary and crude in-the-moment (or as it happens) analysis. Heather Hogan's *PLL* recaps on Autostraddle.com are often shared across *Twitter* and *Tumblr* for her hilarious commentary, but also for her feminist and queer critical commentary.

towards the transgender reveal can be directly related to the BNF's theory and their assurance that their theory is the most definitive and highly researched one. And while there was an anti-CeCe-as-'A' movement occurring across various fan spaces, the most perceivably transphobic responses occurred on this particular *Facebook* page. Moreover, much of the disdain towards CeCe being revealed as 'A' is attributed to the fact that fans were disgusted that 'A's' formation was based on lies and a further besmirching of the trans community. While this discussion broached the potential negative consequences this reveal could have on the transgender community, little attention was paid to the notion that Vanessa Ray is a cisgender actress portraying a male-to-female transgender character. Furthermore, this understated fact appeared in very little entertainment press and did not factor at all in the fan products examined. Consequently, this feeds into the larger debates surrounding the portrayal of LGBT+ characters by hetero and cisgendered actors/actresses.

In response to their theory being invalidated, the BNF posted the following MEME to reject *PLL* canon:
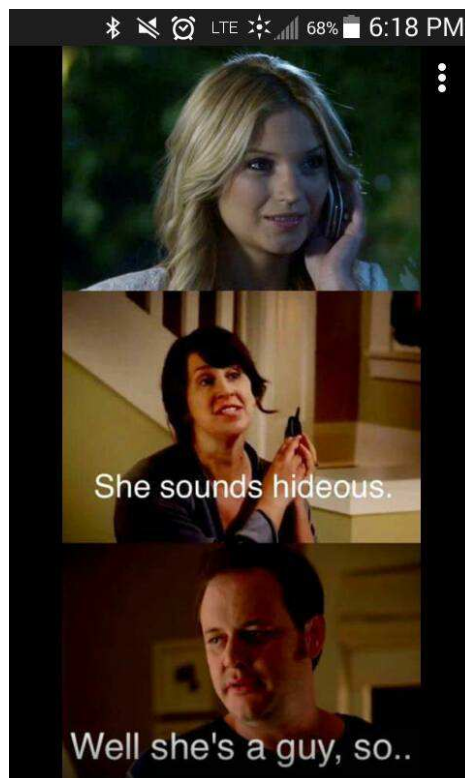

Figure 13 CeCe from 'State Farm' Transphobic MEME

This MEME employs the same techniques investigated in Chapter 6, employing humour as a means to renegotiate and 'episode fix' *PLL* canon. The first frame of the MEME is an image of CeCe Drake (Vanessa Ray) speaking to another *PLL* character. The second frame is a still

of a woman from the widely mimicked 'Jake from State Farm' commercial, who appears to be in conversation with CeCe; 'she sounds hideous' captions the second frame to lead into the final frame of the MEME. This final frame drives home the transphobic message with a man stating 'well she's a guy, so..'. While the message is easily transmitted that transgender identity is inauthentic and that a cisgender male will never be accepted or acceptable as a transitioned female, it evokes a landmark pop culture moment when Bruce Jenner came out publicly as Caitlyn Jenner:

Figure 14 Vanity Fair "Call me Caitlyn"

Vanity Fair featured Caitlyn Jenner on the cover of their popular magazine 1 June 2015, mere months before CeCe would be revealed to be both transgender and 'A'. Particularly important is the quote 'Call me Caitlyn' overlain across Caitlyn's revealing photo, as the conversation in the MEME takes on new agency that suggests not only a rejection of CeCe as 'A', but also a rejection of transgender identity in general. It does this through the phrasing 'Call me Caitlyn' as CeCe and Caitlyn are both names beginning with the letter C; it further suggests a parallel between Caitlyn Jenner and CeCe Drake "hiding" in plain sight as something they are not. This further emphasises the construction of transgender identity as twofaced, untrustworthy and, for some, unnatural.

It is this link (represented through the literal phone conversation) that highlights the profound aversion to transgenderedness surfacing on this BNF's *Facebook* page, their fans'

comments supporting this MEME and the minute amount of abhorrence from their fans to this anti-transgender rhetoric. Furthermore, this CeCe MEME originates from the following MEME that specifically addresses Caitlyn Jenner's coming out:

Figure 15 "Call me Caitlyn" from "State Farm" Transphobic MEME

The same properties apply to this MEME slating Caitlyn Jenner's transgender identity as inauthentic lies. This particular advertisement uses humour to subvert assumptions about marriage fidelity as the 30 second commercial begins with a man, speaking into a phone in his darkened living room, stating plainly that he is 'married' and poses the question 'you'd do that for me? Does it matter?'. Immediately after, his wife walks down, adopting an accusatory position, perturbed by the presence of her husband speaking on the phone at '3am' in the dark. For the audience and the wife, framing this conversation in this manner is a clear indication that infidelity is occurring, therefore, lack of trust has been established by both the wife and the spectator (as in the 'intended' viewer), and that distrust foregrounds the rest of the advertisement. Unaware and certain she will hear a woman's voice, the wife asks Jake 'from State Farm' what he is wearing, to which his male voice warily replies 'khakis'. Thus, the final two frames emphasise the 'hideousness' of the prospect of a male 'masquerading' as a female, inverting the comedy proposed by the advertisement to make

it become a sinister, transphobic slant against Caitlyn Jenner, CeCe Drake and the transgender community.

While much of this transphobic rhetoric evident on the BNF's *Facebook* page stems from the perceived inauthenticity of transgender identity, identifiable through their popular fan theory and their *Facebook* posts, the catalyst that propelled that language to the fore was the inaccuracy of that theory. Further, as aforementioned, the BNF indicates a privileging of patriarchal structures, figurations and characters coded through discourses of authority and intelligence. These surface in the reverence held for Wren as a doctor, particularly as this medical profession suggests intelligence, authority and stature; but it also is a profession that has historically been constructed as masculine, connotes affluence (a predominantly masculine terrain) and as a patriarchal figure in the upper echelons of their society. Further, situating Wren as 'A' and as an inanely authoritarian character reinforces hetero- and homonormativity, whereby wealth, status and power are goals that enable one to succeed in neoliberal societies (Duggan 2002). This BNF perpetuates these ideals through their fan theory, the quotidian interactions with their fans and their 'blunt' (T1) style.

'The Results Were Shocking': De-Coding 'A' at Name Value

This section explores a specific fan theory by a different fan theorist who argues that Lucas Gottesman (Brendan Robinson) is 'A'. While the first section investigated how primacy of male identity and authority are used to reject and marginalise transgender identity, thus resulting in a transphobic backlash immediately after the 'Big A' reveal, this section investigates a fan theory that considers how non-binary gender identification may play a role in 'A's' construction. In other words, this theory openly references dialogue exchanged between Alison Dilaurentis and Lucas Gottesman (Brendan Robinson), whereby Alison insinuates Lucas is a hermaphrodite; it is this non-binary gender identity that the fan theorist references as one of the motivations for Lucas becoming 'A'. Hermaphrodite and transgender are not similar identity categories, as transgender indicates that gender is an unstable category signalling that the transgender person identifies as the opposite gender (Amato 2016). In other words, a male may identify as female or a female may identify as male early or later in life and subsequently transition to that gender identification. On the other hand, hermaphrodite is the colloquial term for intersex, which has been defined by

166

The Organization Intersex International as people who 'are born with physical, hormonal or genetic features that are neither wholly female nor wholly male; or a combination of female and male; or neither female nor male,' (OII Australia 2013).[132] This fan theorist links non-binary gender identity to German heritage through name and references, which suggests a link to the medical discourses surrounding LGBT+ identity arising in late 19th century Germany and Austria (Sullivan 2003). Non-normative identity categories were constructed as inverted psyches, but this primarily referred to homosexual men and women (4-6). While these medical discourses refer to sexuality, these types of non-binary gender categories factor into this inverted psyche paradigm as well. Viola Amato (2016) traces a similar medical discourse regarding intersex in late 19th and 20th century that echoes Nikki Sullivan's (2003) examination of late 19th century medical discourses surrounding homosexuality. While these links may at first glance seem tenuous to a fan's rumination on non-normative gender categories and the construction of *PLL*'s central antagonist, Nikki Sullivan argues that these discourses 'continue to circulate and to be given credence in contemporary Western cultures' (2003, 10).

In section one, the BNF theorist employed a narrative structure akin to fan fiction to narrate their fan theory. This fan theorist uses an essay format to structure their theory. It is divided into multiple sections, citing episodic, canonical and producorial examples to validate their theory. Throughout, they juxtapose episode dialogue with analysis and provide pictorial evidence to reinforce their interpretations. Bold words are employed to signal significant moments within the series' canon, but also to point to concepts, themes, props and references (both textual and extra-textual ones). Additionally, italicised text indicates dialogue has been provided, but it also is used to distinguish between their interpretation and quoting other sources, such as Wikipedia when exploring the etymology of the surname 'Gottesman'. In terms of the theory's structure, the fan theorist provides evidence to elucidate their interrogation into 'A's' construction (how they came to this theory) through rehashing backstory and I Marlene King evidence, similar to the way the fan theorist did in the first section. Referencing King's interviews and social media communication is a trend that occurs across fan theory making for *PLL* and is also employed

---

[132] For this chapter, I will refrain from using the word hermaphrodite as it is a negatively charged word and will instead employ intersex from this point. However, when citing examples from the fan theory, I will not alter their phrasing and use hermaphrodite in quotations.

in fan theory construction across fandoms. As noted in the introduction to this chapter, multiple fandoms engage in a variety of ways to explicate their fan theories, but they also engage with extra-textual material to substantiate their claims further. While the BNF's theory employed narrative language (story-telling language), this fan theorist uses formal or 'academic' language. This, I argue, is a methodical choice to illustrate the fan theorist's intellect and thus the validity of their engagement with the text, their ability to navigate the series' meganarrative (the programme's overarching narrative as opposed to the self-contained episode narratives or 'micronarratives') and their expertise in reading or predicting narrative events.

The fan theorist initiates their theory by pointing to I. Marlene King's overstatement of clues: 'Marlene may have said **too much**' (T2). This follows with an image from 4.13 'Grave New World':

Figure 16 4.13 'Grave New World' World War II Costume

For this fan theorist, this image provided them with an entry point to engage critically with the series' canon, but also its canon via European symbolism and culture. What this means is that the fan theorist attributed this costume as symbolic of an underlying European theme inflecting the series' narrative construction: '*Two* German references about 'A'' (T2). Using German identity as integral to their understanding of canon and the construction of 'A', this fan theorist investigates character surnames to highlight how heritage factors into identity construction. They identify one character with a German surname out of 23 available surnames: Lucas Gottesman. After this identification, the fan theorist explores the name's etymology, which in German means 'Man of God' (T2). 'Man of God' (T2) stands in for what they claim is a primary characteristic of 'A', namely in that they 'enjoy playing God'

(T2). Furthermore, the theorist goes on to proclaim that these are not arbitrarily selected, that they were 'picked for a reason' and that 'maybe they're both **German** for a reason,' (T2).

While the link between German heritage and non-binary gender category is not maintained throughout the fan's theory, the German heritage that links to medical discourses surrounding non-binary gender identification categories and non-normative sexuality are maintained through popular cultural discourses that continue to pervade public discourses regarding queerness. In other words, as stated previously, although the fan theorist may or may not knowingly link intersex identity as anomalous or an aberration in human development to the pervasive medical discourses that have shaped our understandings of intersex (Amato 2016), these discourses continue to shape understandings of these non-binary gender categories and non-normative sexuality (Sullivan 2003). Therefore, when the fan theorist describes Lucas as both a 'hermaphrodite' and as 'someone who just *grows up slower* than his peers' (T2), they are perpetuating assumptions regarding queer individuals' ability to integrate into the mainstream populace. This position is reiterated through what the fan theorist describes as '**childhood themes**': 'clowns, candy, piggy banks, barns, horses, toys, "I am 8" (T2). Furthermore, the fan theorist suggests that it is this non-normative identity that prevents Lucas from 'thinking about sex' so he instead opts to continue 'playing with toy boats' (T2).

Where the initial theory investigated in section one created a transphobic backlash through male primacy and the fan theorist's Big Name Fan status, this theory does not necessarily signal that they are anti-intersex or anti-LGBT+. Rather, this theory positions gender non-conformity as something acceptable in childhood, or a time when it can be fixed/corrected by medical professionals. This is evidenced through the '**childhood themes**', calling Lucas an 'overgrown child' and locating normative sexuality as an indicator that that person is on the cusp of adulthood ('as a teenager when everyone else is thinking about sex'). Additionally, this information is headed with a still taken from 1.08 'Please Do Talk about Me When I'm Gone'. The fan theorist selected this still as it reinforces their readings into Lucas and his prepubescent state (read still intersex and still childish):

Figure 17 1.08 'Please Do Talk about Me When I'm Gone' Ali calls Lucas Hermie

Here, Lucas stands in centre frame as a desexualised object, the camera's focal point in a shot-reverse shot sequence between Alison and Lucas. This is emphasised in the dialogue exchanged between Alison and Lucas, where Alison refers to Lucas as 'Hermie', to which Lucas does not respond, then he proclaims his 'rudder got stuck' and to which Alison replies 'I bet it did' (1.08). At first glance, this scene's golden hue indicates it is a flashback is used to highlight Alison's cruelty and how Aria, Hannah, Emily and Spencer do not challenge that cruelty. While it does elucidate Alison's joy of bullying, the dialogue and the shot-reverse shot sequence operate to reinforce power structures as they pertain to heteronormativity, its predominance (visualised through the idealised and sexualised female form) and the rejection of non-normative identity formations. These are substantiated by Lucas ignoring the interphobic joke pointed towards him through Alison's euphemistic retort 'I bet it is'. Here, Lucas' 'rudder' comment is a stand in for male genitalia and by Alison referring to him as 'Hermie', it is a clear indication that she is reflecting on the rumour that Lucas is 'half guy, half girl' (T2). Moreover, this is also reflected in the boat's positioning within the frame, as the rudder is hidden at the back of the boat, obscured from the viewer's sight, but also in that the boat is strategically positioned to block his pelvis.

What is more, the fan theorist reflects on how Lucas breaks adult and adolescent gendered stereotypes, suggesting that Lucas perhaps 'liked to play with **dolls**' or that 'he

cross dressed' (T2). These two suppositions abound in *PLL*, as dolls feature heavily throughout the series, but also in reference to the four protagonists themselves, with 'A' referring to them as dolls. Furthermore, the fan theorist considers that '**blonde wigs**' frequently feature in 'A' scenes, referencing 5.12 'Taking This One to the Grave' as a key moment that links 'A' and these '**blonde wigs**'. 'Shim' (T2) is a phrase that the fan theorist links to both 'A' and Lucas, highlighting how 'the Liars' (the four protagonists) have referred to both Lucas and 'A' as this derogatory pronoun. Moreover, the fan theorist cites the film and television genre thriller (and implied in this are notions of mystery – see Chapter 4) as one that 'has been known to pop up' as a way to 'throw the audience off by letting us assume we know the killer's gender' (T2). Gender, then, operates as a stable category for this fan theorist, disavowing non-normative identity as 'authentic' functions as a filmic or televisual device to enable the director or producer to 'surprise' their viewers (T2). In other words, non-normative gender identity is something bound up in childhood, is villainous and linked to subverting expectations for thrills. This is evident in the fan theorist's explicit reference to Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), but also to thrillers such as *Dressed to Kill* (1980) and *Silence of the Lambs* (1991). Each of these films subverts audience expectation in some manner and are explicitly linked to a cross-dressing antagonist/killer.

Lucas becomes 'A' for this fan theorist in a specific narrative moment originating in 2.15 'A Hot Piece of A'. Preceding this section of their theory is a still from this episode that centres on Lucas and Hannah in the middle of a lake on a boat at night:

Figure 18 2.15 'A Hot Piece of A' Lucas with Hanna on Boat

By selecting this image, the fan theorist points to Lucas renegotiating power structures, particularly as he begins to embody a patriarchal figure. Lucas, once again, is centrally framed in this still and once again the shot-reverse-shot structure is employed. However, where the still from 1.08 was used to illustrate Lucas' gender non-conformity and his prepubescent adolescence, this still conveys Lucas' new found power and control. This is evidenced through his position within the frame, the white sleeves on his jacket and the control he has over the oars. Framing Lucas in the centre makes him a focal point for the viewer; but the difference between this still and the one from 1.08 is that here they use a medium body shot (portraying the torso and above) as opposed to the almost full body shot in the still from 1.08. In that still, the fan theorist questioned Lucas' perceived maleness and reiterated that through selecting a still that displays Lucas' whole body. The white sleeves on his jacket provide another focal point for the viewer and this fan theorist, primarily in that they stand out against the darkness. This also emphasises the oars against his sleeves, indicating that he is in control of both the boat and Hannah, which also reinforces his regained maleness and masculinity. Having reestablished his maleness and masculinity, he may now be perceived as a patriarchal figure.

Again, there is a link made between Lucas and boats. Where in the 1.08 still he was unable to control the toy boat (read, his male genitalia), here he is able to yield control over

a real boat that once again functions as a symbol for his newly found masculinity and male genitalia. Further, because the fan theorist conjectures that Lucas is 'A' on account of being intersex ('Hermie the hermaphrodite'), the fan theorist apportions symbolic power to childhood props/toys/themes as associative to intersex identity, their adult complements are then associative to normative gender identities. In other words, by Lucas rejecting toys for the real thing, he has adopted a normative gender identity, thus rejecting his form 'half boy, half girl' intersex status and thereby becomes a sexually functioning, gender conforming 'teenager' or adult (T2).

Although the text may charge boats with this symbolism, the fan theorist toys with language that suggests a 'coming out' as both 'A' and intersex: 'inner dilemma', '**come clean**', 'sense of **power**', 'critical decision he needs to make', 'hurt someone he cares about', 'was truly alone in the world', 'there was no turning back'. These are common phrases associated with 'coming out' and are broad enough to go beyond 'coming out' as gay or lesbian. They speak to what the fan theorist reads in Lucas' covert conversation with a 'crisis hotline', pointing to specific words and phrases that they argue implicates Lucas with both the A-team and as 'A': '**gone**', '**shut it down**', '**dead**', '**too deep**', '**sucked in**', and '**power**' (T2). The fan theorist points to this conversation as a form of Lucas' remorse, but also a loss of control over himself as he has ceded any self-contained power to a group of individuals, rather than maintaining his agency.

Seeking agency or self-power is one of the principal reasons for many to come out, so they can reject the status quo's power and be an individual in a radical collective that seeks for justice and equality for sexual and non-binary minorities (Sullivan 2003, 31-32). While current queer politics are situated on the border between liberationist and assimilationist politics (see Literature Review), Lucas' character read as intersex also exists on the fringe of gender identity, appearing male, but not being perceived to be fully male. Therefore, coming out to Hanna, or as the fan theorist claims, 'he can **come clean** and tell Hanna everything about Mona and 'A,' but give up the sense of **power** he'd attained in the A-team,' (T2). The fan theorist associates coming out ('**come clean**') as a loss of '**power**', primarily because he would no longer be a part of that radical collective, ostensibly fighting hetero- and homonormativity, which are figured through the "popular crowd" to which the four main protagonists belong. This is a recurring trope throughout the series' and while the

fans' and viewers' loyalties lie with the four Liars, the A-team is being read in this theory as a combative against that status quo.

For this fan theorist, however, sympathy is not given to Lucas as he '**comes clean**' to Hanna, with the fan theorist describing him as 'undecided and shaky and so *creepy*' (T2).[133] As Lucas begins to '**come clean**' to Hanna, he stands up in the boat, frightening Hanna, who then hits him with one of the oars, knocking him into the water. The fan theorist describes this moment as the key moment when Lucas becomes what they call '*Uber A*' (T2). Further, the fan theorist revisits language that suggests a disconnect between his intersex identity, his perceived 'A' status and normative society, claiming that 'in that cold water, Lucas realized he was truly alone in the world,' (T2). This is a pivotal moment not only for the fan theory, but also those links between Lucas' intersex identity and his role as '*Uber A*'. In other words, where Lucas sought control over his intersex identity to be fully male (read through his progression of playing with toy boats to controlling real boats), he was flung out of that control by hetero- and homonormativity. The loss of that control suggests both in the text and in the fan theory that his non-normative identity cannot exist on solid ground, thus landing him in 'cold water'.

The fan theory continues to figure Lucas as 'A', posing rhetorical questions to theory consumers that operate not to suggest alternative 'A' figures; rather, the rhetorical questions function to solidify the fan theorist's assumptions and readings to confirm Lucas' 'A' identity. While this fan theory points to intersex as a motivation for Lucas to be read as 'A', his perceived intersex identity is one (large) factor that was considered by the fan theorist. And although the fan theorist does not underplay the constant anti-intersex bullying Lucas was subjected to from Alison, his role as 'A' is evaluated in tandem with other motivations that revolve around patriarchy, masculinity and power struggles. Therefore, the next section examines a fan video theory that blends both formats from section one and two, but uses embedded video to emphasise more explicitly those crucial scenes pertinent to uncovering 'A's' identity. However, where the first theory excluded the possibility of a non-binary gender identity and the second theory situates this identity category as one of many motivations to 'A's' construction, this final section and the final theory states that CeCe is 'A' and is 'A' because she is transgender.

---

[133] There are only three instances where the fan theorist uses italics to provide emphasis on certain words/phrases, which is a departure from its main utilisation to indicate quotes or dialogue.

'Kenneth knew his son wanted to be a female': Queering CeCe Drake

In the last section, this final theory proved to be almost entirely true in regards to 'A's' identity: CeCe Drake, nee Charles DiLaurentis, was revealed to be 'A' 11 August 2015 in episode 6.10 'Game Over Charles' and proved to be a transgender villainess cyberstalking and cyberbullying the four main protagonists and their consort.[134] While this fan theorist treats the subject delicately and uses language that is sensitive to transgender issues, presenting 'A' as a transgender villainess poses a potential representational dilemma that the LGBT+ community and queer theorists have been combatting and critiquing since queer theory entered into media studies (see Chapter 2: Literature Review). Furthermore, the same dilemma was presented in the second section in regards to Lucas being 'A' and being intersex. In essence, constructing the antagonist as such precisely because they are transgender perpetuates a narrative that transgendered individuals are not to be trusted, are deceitful and spiteful and are only able to exist safely in a mental institution. This is the foundation of 'A's' identity as detailed as such in 6.10 'Game Over, Charles'. Conversely, Harry Benshoff (1997) inverts the monstrous figure's negative charge, claiming that monsters act as a stand in figure for LGBT+ identity and act as a force that fights against heteronormativity (see Chapter 4 for the ways in which 'A' can be read as a monster queer). Moreover, because popular discourse constructs queerness as a disease to the nuclear family and society, these monstrous figures allow the non-normative viewer the chance to fight symbolically against the patriarchy and heteronormativity. Framing the monstrous in this way allows LGBT+ viewers to reinterpret heterocentric narratives queerly and provides these viewers with an alternative narrative that aligns with their own life experiences, where heteronormativity is the villain and the villain is the hero fighting to exist.

To read a text queerly does not indicate that one is queer (non-normative/non-binary); rather, queering a text operates to uncover codes and signs contained within a text that point to non-normativity. In other words, the viewer, or in this case the fan theorist, interprets those signs and codes that exist at the subtextual level to read a narrative that

---

[134] While this section centralises the fan theorist's analyses and interpretations of 'A's' identity, issues around transgender representation must be addressed. This will occur throughout the final section, but notions of mediated representations of LGBT+ identity is also contained within the Literature Review.

may not be explicitly stated to other viewers (Sedgwick 1990). Just because the viewer/reader reads a text queerly does not always indicate that it is a transgression of the text, which is proved by the CeCe reveal; rather, that viewer/reader is able to bring forward queerness that may or may not be subtextual. This is what the fan theorist does in their 'CeCe is A' fan theory video.[135] Tracing CeCe's canonical history, this fan theorist uses the practice of vidding to narrate their interpretation as to how CeCe became 'A'. Central to this theory is the notion that CeCe is transgender and it is the neglect from her parents and society in regards to her transgender identity category that lead to her becoming 'A'. The fan theory video operates similarly to the fan theory explored in section two, but tells a narrative somewhat akin to the fan theory explored in section one. It intersperses text with images and video and is accentuated with songs that originate from the *PLL* soundtrack. Further, as with both fan theories in sections one and two, this other fan theorist cites textual and extra-textual examples to substantiate their claims that CeCe is 'A', that she is transgender and that she is 'A' because she is transgender; the video lasts 17 minutes and 50 seconds.

Each song selected to accompany this fan theory video reiterates a central theme that is relevant to both 'A' and transgender identity: deceit. While deceit is not negative per se, it is a theme that recurs throughout *PLL* (hence, *Pretty Little **Liars***), the fan theory and the construction of transgender identity. In terms of transgender identity, deceit functions not necessarily as a negative, rather the body has betrayed emotional and gender recognition, thereby deceiving both the self and society into believing that that individual is a normative one. What this means is that the body betrays the gender and that betrayal deceives the person's physical and mental state. The video begins with the song 'Dead to Me' (2014) by Melanie Martinez whose lyrics emphasise the release of a significant other. While this song may point to a jilted lover or the rejection of the singer's partner, for this fan theorist, the lyrics point to the rejection of a former self: CeCe rejecting her former male self as Charles. 'I'll be at the wake dressed in all black' is sung as the fan theorist argues 'that Charles is transgender,' (T3). This is largely significant to the fan theorist's claims as the lyrics allude not to a death of a person, rather the death of a relationship with another

---

[135] Traditionally, queer readings have been done to subvert a text to illustrate that normativity is in fact an unstable category (Halberstam 1995 and 2005) or to highlight the homoerotic nature of the text (Sedgwick 1985 and 1990; Doty 1993; Benshoff 1997).

person; and as transgender identity formation occurs as a process of transition, the wake in these lyrics signifies a viewing of the body and a coming to terms with a reality that cannot be changed. It represents for this fan theorist that this transition from male to female is a permanent one and, in this case, CeCe must mourn her former male identity as Charles. Moreover, the lyrics 'I'll call out your name but you won't call back' appear simultaneously with the fan theorist's statement that 'Charles could have been born a male and later turned into CeCe,' (T3). Again, the juxtaposition of the lyrics with the fan theorist's words point to a rejection of the former self and where the first set of lyrics signals a loss of one's physical self, allowing her to transition into a female form, this second set of lyrics highlights the mental transition represented through the adoption of the female name. Both of these instances are examples as to how the fan theorist selected this song to commence their video in order to emphasise the rejection of male identity to illustrate that CeCe transitioned from male to female.

Reiterating this transition further, the fan theorist segues into a clip from 5.25 'Welcome to the Dollhouse' that, in the fan theorist's words, '[goes] back to the beginning,' (T3). The lyrics fade away as the video transitions to a pivotal scene for this fan theorist. Spencer Hastings (Troian Bellisario) stands centre frame behind a reel-to-reel player that begins to play. Two young boys play as the film begins to roll, one running towards the camera with a green apple in his hand. As the camera pulls back, Mrs. DiLaurentis (Andrea Parker) appears in the centre of the frame holding a baby as the two boys crowd around her. The fan theorist claims that this is a link between Jason and CeCe, questioning whether CeCe is Jason's twin or former older brother/now older sister. While the word twin literally suggests sibling, it is also representative of the twinning of the self, indicating an intersex position that was explored in the previous fan theory. However, the use of the word intersex in this context is not to suggest that Charles was literally intersex, rather transgender identity indicates a mental and physical transition from one gender to the other. Therefore, although CeCe's physical state was initially male, her mental gender is female, and thus at odds with her physical form. This is further reiterated in the next clip used by the fan theorist, taken from 5.23 'The Melody Lingers On'. In this scene, Spencer is shown again, but this time half her face appears in a hand mirror. It can be argued that the fan theorist highlights this scene as a signification of Charles being her half sibling, claiming that 'seeing half of her face right before we get the Charles anagram makes me think

Charles is also her HALF sibling,' (T3). Although the fan theorist links this scene to familial relations, it is a further implication for the fan theorist that only half of a female form is depicted. In other words, the mirror, which is a reflection of the self, only portrays one half of a female face, opening the interpretation to notions around gender non-conformity and non-binary gender identification. What this means is that the fan theorist links gender to family and thus the biological formation of the physical self through Jason and Spencer being half siblings.

The prerogative of the fan theorist from this point is to highlight the textual and extra-textual evidence that proves CeCe is 'A'. They cite a tweet from Marlene King in the form of a screen shot that states fans have seen 'A' wearing the black hoodie (@imarleneking 18 February 2015, 4:16pm). Black hoodies are a signature costume donned by 'A' throughout most of the programme and the fan theorist provides a clip from 4.11 'Bring Down the Hoe' that depicts CeCe wearing a black hoodie. As the music fads and the clip begins, the camera focuses on a pair of black high heeled boots and begins to tilt up to show a clearly female form. CeCe is clearly shown, but the tilt emphasises the fact that she is female, which invites further interrogation into the fan theorist's notion that CeCe is transgender. Clearly, CeCe's has fully transitioned from male to female, and the upward tilt of the camera reiterates that both to the viewer and to the fan theorist who wants to demonstrate that CeCe is 'A' and that if she is 'A', her motivations for becoming 'A' revolve around the rejection of her transgender identity and her assault on heteronormative society for that rejection. This is evidenced by CeCe listening in on a conversation taking place between Aria Montgomery and Ezra Fitz; but it is also evidenced in the framing of the scene. She is physically located outside the home, standing in a darkened hallway, wearing black clothing that blends in to the darkened locale. Further, she is literally obscured from the scene by her costume and the lighting, with the only recognisable feature besides her shoes is her face. That her face stands out against such an obfuscated framing points to the notion that her gender identity is under question; this is evidenced not just through the camera language, but espoused through the fan theorist's questioning of her gender identity and her status as 'A'. Although the primary purpose of this example is to provide further proof that CeCe is 'A', the fan theorist points to CeCe's transgender identity as integral to the construction of that identity and therefore, the interpretative strategies used by this fan theorist references her non-normative gender identification.

Most crucial to this fan theory, however, is a scene referenced from 5.13 'How the 'A' Stole Christmas'. The fan theorist states 'I believe she bought the second yellow dress in 5x13 for Charles/CeCe,' (T3). Immediately after claiming this, the video transitions from the song 'Carousel' (Melanie Martinez 2015) to a scene with present day Alison, Mona Vanderwaal (Janel Parrish), Jessica DiLaurentis and a young Alison (Isabella Rice). In this scene, young Ali tells her mother Jessica that she discovered two hidden presents both containing an identical yellow dress. The key dialogue for the fan theorist is that if young Alison were to tell her father about the second dress, Jessica states that Kenneth would leave them. Responding to this dialogue, the fan theorist posits 'I think Kenneth knew his son wanted to be a female so he sent him away,' (T3). Whereas in the initial fan theory in section one the BNF apportions the blame onto Jessica for creating 'A', here the fan theorist locates blame onto the father. Further, while the first theorist privileged male identity and the patriarchy, it is the patriarchy that denies non-normative identity as it is tied into heteronormativity and heterocentric, male dominated society. What this means is that, implied through the fan theorist's reading of Kenneth rejecting his transitioning daughter, patriarchal society hides non-conformity by '[sending] him (CeCe/Charles) away' (T3). In fact, it is precisely this notion that fosters the environment for Charles/CeCe to morph into the villain. Thus, recalling Harry Benshoff's (1997) monster queer, CeCe is in fact using her 'A' identity as a means to assault heteronormative culture and force her way into mainstream society through the only means necessary: deceit.

Tied into her deceit is also her innate violent nature. The fan theorist references CeCe's aggressive behaviour in 3.07 'Crazy', providing a clip of CeCe verbally harassing Jenna Marshall (Tammin Sursok) over the phone. CeCe exerts her strength over Jenna by telling her she will scratch her eyes out if she dares to speak to her boyfriend Nate. 'Crazy' is the episode's title, which suggests a link to CeCe, but it is also indicative of the societal perceptions in regards to gender identity (Sullivan 2003; Amato 2016). Because transgender identity has been historically situated as a mental health condition (Stryker 2006, 2), it is only fitting that the producers introduce CeCe Drake for the first time in this episode. This provides further evidence for the fan theorist to link innate violence with lunacy and thus link that back to CeCe and transgender identity. While I do not believe that this fan theorist is making such a link between transgender identity and mental health issues, it is hard not to see that society (subconsciously) continues to conflate transgender identity with mental

disorders. Moreover, this scene is further indication for the fan theorist that CeCe has a history of violence, citing an example from 5.24 'I'm A Good Girl, I Am'. This example is used as evidence of this violence, because Alison provides the detail that her arm was broken when she was three. Thus the fan theorist deduces that CeCe broke Alison's arm when Alison was three.

Conclusion

Transgender identity operates in the final fan theory examined as the primary motivation for CeCe becoming 'A'. It sets itself apart from the other two theories in that it explicitly states transgender as that motivation. While the theory investigated in section two explored intersex as a factor that fed into Lucas being read as 'A', explicitly stating transgender identity as *the* motivating factor invites scrutiny onto the ways in which transgender individuals have historically been represented in popular media. Moreover, as this theory arises out of fan practices, it provides insight into the ways in which fans, and by extension viewers, negotiate non-normative identity. As I stated in the first section, non-normative gender identity was rejected by the BNF and their followers (T1) as they privileged the patriarchal figure, masculinity and maleness; but also because it was an affront to the assumed *PLL* expertise expressed by the BNF. In other words, it was not just that the BNF and their followers took issue with the fact that the patriarchy was subverted by figuring 'A' to be transgender, it was the loss of authority over a text, the destabilising of interpretation that created the biggest backlash from the BNF and their followers, a backlash they directed onto the transgender community. And while the Lucas theory (T2) used intersex problematically to identify 'A' and their motivations, it permitted a recognition of non-normative identity as part of the *PLL* pool of characters. This shows that this fan theorist is aware of non-normative identities and that they form a part of the general populace. And although they continue to use the colloquial and derogatory term 'hermaphrodite' as opposed to intersex, the recognition of that identity category, whether fictional or not, highlights that, for some fans, non-normativity is part of the everyday social make up. Finally, transgender identity proved to be the correct motivating factor in the construction of 'A', as evidenced in the 6.10 'Game Over, Charles' reveal.

While this chapter did not investigate specifically the representation of non-normative identity as depicted in the programme itself, investigating fan theories through reader-guided textual analysis highlighted some of the ways fans negotiate these media represented non-normative identities. In so doing, better insights into that negotiation process; the reading and interpretative strategies deployed by fans; and the rejection, acceptance and consideration of non-normative identity as part of the process can be better made sense of. What this means is that reader-guided textual analysis functions as a bridge between the audience and the text (see Methodology), which permits greater understanding of how audiences and fans make meaning out of texts, but also how they negotiate social issues and how both of these things come to the fore during viewing. Where this analysis departs from traditional audience or fan studies research is that it returns to the text to examine exactly *what* comes to the fore during that meaning making process. Moreover, it also demonstrates that fans make meaning beyond simply accepting or rejecting representations. It means that fans scrutinise a text for varying reasons, and in the case for this chapter and this series, they do so to determine undisclosed identities, undisclosed narratives and, by extension, the undisclosed suggests a queer motivation.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

Fan meaning making strategies and practices can occur in any number of formats and may be evaluated in any number of ways. However, this thesis explored those meaning making practices through the lens of a reader-guided textual analysis (Ytre-Arne 2011). *Pretty Little Liars* is a rich text that could be explored from any number of angles and/or themes, particularly through the lens of surveillance culture, representations of the female body and cyberbullying. Yet, fans and their intense scrutiny of the ways in which Emison should actualise in the final episode of the television programme suggested that these areas of inquiry were secondary to the ways in which non-normative sexuality and non-binary gender representations were the primary focal points for the programme's fandom. While it is not to say that an interrogation of a programme's fanbase should solely dictate what and how the researcher or 'scholar-fan' (Hills 2002) should investigate, taking into consideration the prominence of certain audience led critical engagement should be influential. In other words, while fans are not the only viewers of a programme, they are certainly some of the most vocal segments of that audience makeup. It is precisely this vocal aspect of fandom that makes fans, their communities and their fannish practices such an important area of inquiry. More importantly, fannish meaning making strategies point to the textual moments fans identify as important and thus an entry point into an interrogation of a text.

Although there will always be a level of dissonance between audiences as to what makes the text important for them, reader-guided textual analysis (Ytre-Arne 2011) privileges the trends arising out of viewer or fan responses to texts. Thus, focusing attention particularly on these trends reduces the likelihood that a reading will be subjective and this may also open up new research avenues for scholars. While this is not to vilify traditional and important modes of textual analysis, nor is it valuable to suggest that the researcher's critical engagement and reading of a text has no practical bearing, employing a reader-guided textual analysis provides the researcher with a reading shaped by a collective as opposed to an individual.

This chapter, then, in the first section synthesises the case study chapters and their findings to demonstrate the importance of a reader-guided textual analysis (Ytre-Arne 2011) to this thesis, but also to illustrate its utility as a method for humanities and social science

researchers. Furthermore, this concluding chapter highlights how reader-guided textual analysis is integral to queer theory in particular, as the thesis seeks to re-evaluate the 'evaluative paradigm' (Davis & Needham 2009) by moving beyond models of positive or negative representation that have become ubiquitous to queer readings of (non) queer texts. The second section of this conclusion provides a mutable guide to reader-guided analysis that incorporates my own alterations of Brita Ytre-Arne's (2011) methodology. While I provide an outline as to how a reader-guided textual analysis methodology could be conducted, this is in no way meant to be the only manner in which a reader-guided textual analysis should be employed. Instead, this section exists to function as a rough guide that may be altered to reflect one's own research material and methodological position. In the third section, I outline the limitations of this thesis, the methodology and the included research data. Finally, in the fourth section, I explore how future research may be conducted based off the findings of this thesis, suggesting possible avenues and areas of inquiry.

Summary of Findings

Although Chapter 4 sought to contextualise fannish 'textual productivity' (Fiske 1992), it also highlighted the ways in which fannish modes of engagement were dependent upon the generic category(ies) of the text. In other words, fannish practices such as theory-making (see Chapter 7) were textual possibilities encouraged by the generic conventions characteristic of *Pretty Little Liars*. Particularly, the generic categories mystery and teen promoted specific modes of engagement, namely that the text invited fans to engage in a manner similar to 'fan-scholar' (Hills 2002). This chapter extended Matt Hills' (2002) definition of 'fan-scholar' beyond an adoptive identity category that academically minded fans employ or are given by 'scholar-fans' (Hills 2002, 19). Instead, Chapter 4 argued that the text encouraged fans to 'dig deeper' (Mittell 2013) or explore beyond the surface of the text to arrive at specific conclusions through its generic constructions. Here, fans were encouraged to uncover 'A's' identity using "clues" scattered throughout the varying episodes. These "clues" would invite fans to investigate the text beyond the narrative and dialoguing, but also to question the use of specific cinematographic tropes, such as

chiaroscuro. While Chapter 4 relied on queer theory, specifically the role of the 'monster queer' (Benshoff 1997), supplemented by my own textual analysis, it did this not to promote my own reading of the text, but to demonstrate the ways in which the text invites viewers to engage in 'fan-scholarly' activities, such as theory-making, which is explored in Chapter 7. Thus, this contextualisation operated not just to privilege specific modes of 'textual productivity' (Fiske 1992) over others, it also contextualised the necessity for a reader-guided textual analysis (Ytre-Arne 2011) to highlight the focus of fans on the non-normative and non-binary characters in the text. Therefore my own interpretation of the text in Chapter 4 functioned to demonstrate the similarities between 'scholar-fan' and 'fan-scholar' readings of a text, here framed through an exploration of the ways in which 'A' is a current figuration of the 'monster queer' (see Benshoff 1997; but also see Miller 2011 for his valuation that the 'monster queer' has disappeared from post 9/11 horror cinema) and that the dual role of the bunker/dollhouse functioned to highlight 'A's' transgender identity. By examining these queer elements of the text, this textual interrogation via a queer theory framed textual analysis would permit an investigation into the fan theories in Chapter 7 that specifically predict 'A's' identity based on (monstrous) gender assumptions.[136]

Because *Pretty Little Liars* is a text that relies on multiple generic categories to unveil its narrative(s) and its ability to invite fans to engage in the text through 'fan-scholar' type engagements, the subsequent chapters explored a balance of fannish products that privileged either teen conventions or mystery ones as these were argued to be the dominant generic categories.[137] Chapter 5's exploration of (fem)slash consumption and production then demonstrated that a negotiation of same-sex relationships would arguably position these fan producers as reading teen conventions over other ones.[138] However, Chapter 5 and 7 also suggested that (fem)slash in the case of *PLL* and fanfiction more broadly could be generated to form theories around narrative outcomes.

---

[136] I use the term monstrous here not to refer to the monstrosity of gender non-conformity. Rather, these identity constructions have been framed as such by the fan theorists in their fan theories explored in Chapter 7.

[137] As argued in Chapter 4, this is not to preclude other generic categories from *PLL*, as Davis and Dickinson (2004) argue, teen is a category that relies on generic hybridity (6-8).

[138] This argument is further explicated in Chapter 4, specifically when discussing the multiplicity of generic conventions employed in the Season 2 mid-summer season finale 2.12 'Over My Dead Body', permitting fans to privilege either the mystery of Alison's disappearance (read as privileging the mystery genre) or the truth of Emison (read as privileging the teen genre).

Intrinsic to Chapters 5, 6 and 7 however is the negotiation of LGBT+ representations within fannish artefacts. What was discovered, and what would also be reiterated in Chapters 6 and 7, was the fact that negotiation of LGBT+ representation in *PLL* depended upon the fan's textual reading strategies. In other words, male fans of *PLL* who write and read slash fiction scrutinise the apparent homoeroticism emanating from the male characters and their relationships with the other male characters. I argued that this evolved out of the lack of gay male representation in *Pretty Little Liars* specifically, but also that the traditional spaces available to them to contribute slash fiction and consume that slash fiction were predominately female ones; thus, they turned to the gay male oriented *Nifty.org* to read and distribute slash fiction. This has particular implications for the theorisation of slash fiction practices by fan fiction studies scholars, as a predominate focus of this research has centred on female consumption and creation practices (Davies 2005; Coppa 2006; Hellekson & Busse 2006 and 2014; Lothian et al 2007; Dhaenens et al 2008). Moreover, these slashers interpreted the text through homoerotic codes, symbols and associations that have been employed by queer theorists such as Eve Sedgwick (1985 and 1990) and Alexander Doty (1993 and 2000), who also use these similar codes, symbols and associations to re-evaluate heterocentrist texts to cite the existence of the 'queer' within texts.[139]

Chapter 5 also questioned whether (fem)slash remained (fem)slash if one or both of the characters featured in the same-sex ship were explicitly lesbian, gay or bisexual. By posing this question to explore the stability of (fem)slash by interrogating both Pailey (Paige and Emily) and Emison (Emily and Alison) femslash fiction, I determined that, although both Pailey and Emison fiction rely on femslash conventions to structure their narratives, I reasoned that central to (fem)slash was its transgressive properties, and thus, Pailey fiction was less likely to be femslash than Emison fiction. Pailey fanfiction, I argued, was charged with homonormativity (Duggan 2002), whereas Emison femslash was more transgressive, in spite of the fact that Emison is provisionally deemed a canonical (semi-textually supported) relationship in *PLL*'s canon. The homonormative versus transgressive positioning speaks largely to the ways in which fans negotiate, here, representations of lesbian identity in popular media texts. Furthermore, the larger number of Emison femslash versus the lower

---

[139] Sedgwick (1985) explores homoeroticism and homosociality in Victorian literature, whereas Doty investigates Hollywood cinema for the existence of queerness.

availability of Pailey femslash pointed to the notion that fans desired more transgressive LGBT+ representations, but also that the Pailey femslash pointed to acceptance of LGB identity.[140]

Conversely, Chapter 6 questioned the ways in which fanfiction has been traditionally defined by pointing to the dearth of available *PLL* fanfiction and also highlighting the abundance of MEMEs, GIFs and GIF sets as a substitute for this lack of large quantities of available fanfiction (see Chapters 5 and 6). Moreover, a significant proportion of these *PLL* digital fanfictions revolved around Emison and uncovering 'A's' identity, both of which have implications for the negotiation of LGBT+ representations, particularly in that these fannish artefacts focus on specific same-sex relationships (Emison, Pailey or Emaya), the construction of those relationships and also the ways in which non-binary gender identifications have been positioned as monstrous (see Chapter 4 and 7). Furthermore, these digital fanfics indicate the specific episodes, scenes and moments that are of particular importance for these fans. Thus, Chapters 5 and 6 operate in tandem to illustrate the importance of Emison and non-normative sexual orientations to these fans. And finally, Chapter 7 explored the creation of fan theories, or what I referred to as fan theory-making. This practice was framed through Chapter 4, particularly in that mystery generic conventions invite a 'fan-scholar' engagement that encourages fans to theorise 'A's' identity. Fan theory-making, it was argued, synthesised these aforementioned fannish practices, modes of engagement and fannish products to prophesy or predict narrative outcomes. Furthermore, this chapter determined that LGBT+ representation figured not only in fanfiction production, but also in fan theory-making practices, as a large proportion of these fan theories revolved around non-binary gender identities.

The Merits of a Reader-Guided Textual Analysis

Reader-guided textual analysis (Ytre-Arne 2011) permitted a deeper interrogation of those dominant trends evident in the fannish products. Employing this methodology in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 highlighted the similarities regarding fannish engagement with *Pretty Little Liars*, but it also pointed to the significance of non-normative sexual orientation and non-binary

---

[140] By acceptance, I do not intend to suggest that LGB individuals are wholly accepted by society, rather Pailey femslash suggests that there is a heightened level of support for LGB individuals.

gender identity representations for these fans. Where (fem)slash creators and consumers privileged transgressive LGB representations and their relationships, fan theory-makers tended to view non-binary gender identifications as villainous.[141] Therefore, the three case study chapters that employed reader-guided textual analysis highlighted this division, whereby, to use a colloquialism, 'it's okay to be gay' rather than expressing one's true gender.[142] Further to this point, returning to the text and conducting my own reading of 5.25 'Welcome to the Dollhouse', this textual analysis demonstrated that, through the similarities between a 'scholar-fan' and 'fan-scholar' readings, this 'scholar-fan' reading further encouraged an interrogation into the ways in which fans made meaning out of *PLL* by returning to the text through that analysis. Thus, my reading further substantiated the claims made by the fan theorists in Chapter 7 that read non-binary gender identifications as pertinent to unlocking 'A's' identity.

Furthermore, the conclusions drawn from these chapters relied on fan analysis examined in the case study chapters to understand how LGBT+ representation is welcomed, denied or scrutinised by *PLL* fans. In other words, reader-guided permitted a re-evaluation of the 'evaluative paradigm' (Davis & Needham 2009), suggesting that fans may accept or deny LGBT+ representations regardless of whether or not scholars may find these representations highly problematic or charged with homonormativity (see Elliott-Smith 2012 and 2014 and the Literature Review). Although fans were less receptive to representations of transgender and intersex identities, understanding the ways in which these fans negotiated these LGBT+ character types might permit the industry to re-examine how non-binary gender identity representations may be better incorporated into texts. In other words, reader-guided textual analysis illuminated what fans found lacking in these representations, but also what they valued from seeing these non-normative sexual orientation and non-binary gender identities represented on screen.

While this section explored the case study chapters in order to demonstrate their interconnectivity, to highlight the findings that arose out of an interrogation into the *PLL* fandom and their fannish practices and to exhibit the effectiveness of reader-guided textual analysis (Ytre-Arne 2011) to determine how fans negotiate LGBT+ representations, the next

---

[141] Although the three theories investigated were a representative sample, they were the most widely distributed and supported theories. For more on this, see Chapter 3 for the selection and analysis of data.
[142] I will discuss the limitations of surveying one fandom to come to this conclusion in section three of this chapter.

section provides a model to conduct a reader-guided textual analysis. This includes the steps that one could take to begin a research project shaped by this methodology and the ways in which one can return to the text through the lens of audience or fan analysis. Interwoven throughout this section are the ways in which I arrived to reader-guided textual analysis as my principal methodology, drawing on the trends in queer theory, fan studies and fan fiction studies, but also as these trends were interrogated in both the literature review (Chapter 2) and methodology (Chapter 3) chapters.

Guiding Reader-Guided Textual Analyses

Audience-led research utilises internet-based or digital methods to record data (Kozinets 2010), observe communities (Hine 2000; Hills 2002 and 2004) and explore convergence cultures (Jenkins 2006b). Central to many of these audience studies are the ways in which audiences make meaning out of texts. Reader-guided textual analysis (Ytre-Arne 2011) also highlights the ways in which audiences make meaning, but it privileges audience meaning over academic readings by employing a textual analysis that focuses on dominant trends arising out of the data collection process. In other words, the audience-led research points the scholar towards what the audience signals as significant to the text. Brita Ytre-Arne (2011) locates the dominant trends arising out of qualitative audience research and returns to the text to interrogate it through the lens of these trends. While this has informed my own interpretation of reader-guided textual analysis, I have expanded the methodology to incorporate what I refer to as fan analysis located within fannish 'textual productivities' (Fiske 1992). In other words, I allow the fans to "speak for themselves" instead of interpreting their words and then using that reading to re-read the text.

Although this guide is designed to demonstrate one of the ways in which this methodology may be implemented, I do not explicate upon the research process in detail, as I have already done so in the methodology chapter (Chapter 3). Rather, here I detail the ways in which one may return to the text through audience responses. More specifically, I highlight how I explicitly used fannish artefacts to guide my own reading of the text. This falls under the data analysis phase of the research design process. What this thesis has shown, more importantly, is that in this process of data analysis, there are three primary

ways fans critically engage with a text: producing new narratives, responding to narratives and interrogating narrative truths. Furthermore, these three primary modes of fannish engagement with *Pretty Little Liars* also correspond to the types of fannish artefacts that arise out of these fan responses: fanfiction, MEMEs and GIFs/GIF sets and fan theory-making. While there exist other forms of fannish 'textual productivity' (Fiske 1992), I have argued throughout the thesis that these are the primary fannish artefacts created and consumed within the *PLL* fandom; but more importantly, many of these artefacts crossover with one another in their uses: for example, fanfictions can also be fan theories, such as the 'Wren is A' theory investigated in Chapter 7. Therefore, I illustrate the ways I conducted the analysis phase by examining these specific fan products.

The production of new narratives was a valuable arena for analysis, as I argued in Chapter 5, as these fans were actively producing narratives that reflected their readings of the text. Thus, when Emison fans constantly returned to three specific episodes, those episodes became a trend, meaning I pointed my attentions towards those episodes because the fans consistently referred to the Emison moments arising out of these specific episodes. Further, these fans did not reference the episode in its entirety, rather they returned to those scenes where Alison and Emily were intimate with one another. One commonality amongst Emison femslash fiction was that these fans would insert a fictional version of Alison's thought process, whereby the fans would reinterpret the text to fill in the narrative gaps that deny the realisation of Emison. These internalised thoughts were exhibited in the form of narration, available to the reader but not the other characters. I focused my attention specifically on these thoughts and returned to those scenes the fans were deeming integral to validate Emily and Alison's relationship as legitimate. Instead of privileging my own voice in the analysis, I used the visual and narrative clues arising out of these femslash pieces, but use their written words in quote form as my main analysis. What this means is that, when a femslash author would describe Alison's emotions towards Emily, I would use the author's written word in place of my own analysis in the thesis. This means that, in spite of the fact that I am conducting my own textual analysis based on the trends I examined from sampling the fanfiction, instead of me saying explicitly that a shot/reverse-shot structure highlighted homoerotic undertones, I would instead rely on the author's words to convey this.

I adopted a similar approach when examining fan theory-making practices, as all of the representative examples interrogated in Chapter 7 used fan textual analysis in either essay format or by adopting fanfiction modes of storytelling.[143] For example, two of the theories in Chapter 7 create a fan essay, whereby they introduce a problem and a "research question" and proceed to answer said research question by providing textual examples with analysis. The other fan theory re-envisioned Wren's childhood and adolescence by producing a new narrative, which was not explicitly canon (or supported by the text). Since these fan theories were constructed through words, I was able to let the fans "speak" for themselves. In other words, I examined the fan theories for key scenes and used direct quoting to allow their analysis of the text to be privileged. Producing new narratives and interrogating narratives may be seen to be two opposing sides of the same coin. This means, then, that when fans produce or interrogate narratives, 'textual productivity' (Fiske 1992) occurs; albeit, that 'textual productivity' may take a variety of forms and be used in a variety of ways, it is a rich area of inquiry to interrogate as these modes are forms of fannish critical engagement with the text.

Fans respond to narratives in myriad ways; however, these responses to narratives, as evidenced in Chapter 6, often appear through the selection and distribution of MEMEs or GIFs/GIF sets. When analysing materials such as MEMEs or GIFs/GIF sets via reader-guided textual analysis, trends remain integral to locating the textual moments fans deem most important, but these digital fannish artefacts also capture sequences from the text. In other words, GIFs remediate key moments from the text by digitally capturing those moments sans sound, but they retain their moving image nature. This means, then, that fans are 'poaching' (Jenkins 1992) and reifying those narratives they ascertain to be central to their interpretative strategies when negotiating the text. Thus, these digital artefacts provide the researcher not only with the key textual moments to return to when examining the text, but they also indicate that these fans are responding or reacting to the text by 'spreading' (Jenkins 2013) the GIFs/GIF sets or MEMEs.

In summation, a reader-guided textual analysis has the potential to bridge the gap between audience-led research and textual analysis. By utilising fannish artefacts to guide

---

[143] Although the final fan theory investigated in Chapter 7 is a fan vid, it still adopted the same essay format; clips, stills and text interspersed the vid, permitting me to transcribe the text and interrogate their reading more closely.

one's own research, but also by guiding readings of a given text through these fannish artefacts, this opens up the opportunity to impact the ways in which academics approach audiences without decentring the text. Furthermore, it has the potential to equalise interpretations of a text. By this, I highlight how the academic reading of a text has historically been privileged over the audience's reading, but also how the academic has assumed audience interpretations by positioning audiences not as actual viewers but as theoretical spectators.

Thesis and Methodology Limitations

The previous two sections focused on the thesis' findings and how reader-guided textual analysis (Ytre-Arne 2011) functioned in the thesis, but also how it could be utilised by researchers. This section addresses the limitations of this thesis and its adopted methodology. Central to these limitations are the power dynamics reader-guided seeks to diminish, namely in that it privileges fan interpretations over my own readings of a text. Furthermore, by shifting my focus away from a general audience onto a specific fandom, different findings may have arisen had I focused primarily on that general audience. Finally, the data collection phase of the thesis also presents limitations in that my focus on particular sites at the exclusion of others could have yielded different results had I opted to immerse myself elsewhere. Again, these calculated decisions reflect the power dynamics between audience and researcher and 'fan-scholars' and 'scholar-fans' (Hills 2002).

Although I intentionally adopted a methodology that would privilege fan voices over my own, power dynamics are still at play here. Nominally, the fannish artefacts selected for examination and interrogation served as representative samples of fannish engagement and 'textual productivity' (Fiske 1992). My own personal biases and judgments, it could be argued, influenced my decision to select these specific fantexts over others. In other words, by self-identifying as a white, middle-class, gay male, I bring my own subjectivities into the way I research and the types of products I consume, which arguably shapes the ways in which I (sub)consciously make meaning. For example, owing to the fact that I self-identify as gay, and as stated in Chapter 1, this has shaped my viewing practices, whereby I privilege texts that explicitly represent LGBT+ identities. Thus, my gay male subjectivity that I bring

with me as a researcher could arguably centralise LGBT+ issues over other types of polemics portrayed in *PLL*. Furthermore, scrutinising homoerotic language over the ways in which fanfic writers construct narratives could have illuminated differing trends and thus could have altered the way I read the text through these fantexts. What this means, then, is that, regardless of intent, the researcher will always maintain a semblance of power over their research material and subjects.

This power dynamic also speaks to the decision made to highlight fan voices over a more generalised audience. By focusing on fan voices over the wider *PLL* viewership, the ways in which audiences negotiate LGBT+ representations may differ from the ways in which fans negotiate these representations. Fans represent a smaller portion of the wider viewership (Duffett 2013) and therefore, fan interpretations present an ostensibly narrower range of interpretations. However, this does not devalue a focus predominantly on fannish consumption over wider consumption. Moreover, even when focusing on a generalised audience, qualitative audience research is still required to make calculated decisions, particularly in regards to which research subjects will be interviewed further; decisions can also be based around narrowing research around a particular demographic of the wider viewing audience (Hills 2002, 5). What this means, then, is that each decision made by the researcher, whether that be selecting one faction of an audience over another or selecting a specific text over another reinforces the power dynamics between the researcher and the researched.

While this thesis aimed to select optimal fan-oriented sites for data collection, influenced by the fans rather than by random selection, there were further fan centred sites and mobile applications utilised by these fans. As this thesis sought to examine the interactions on widely accessible social media platforms, mobile-based social media platforms such as *Snapchat*, *Vine* and *Instagram* were excluded from the data collection phase. In spite of this, *Snapchat*, for example, is a social media network that requires the researcher to know users' screennames; it does not promote an accessible community formation in the way that *Twitter*, *Facebook* or *Tumblr* do, as the user posts photos and videos of their own experiences and there is no straightforward way to discover new users with the same fan interests. Albeit, these social media platforms and the potential data that exists thereon could provide a different avenue to interrogate the ways fans negotiate LGBT+ representation.

Further Research

Three specific areas of inquiry for further research arise out of this thesis: 1) an exploration of the ways fans negotiate LGBT+ representations in other texts, 2) a further interrogation into how 'fan-scholar' is invited by other genre texts and 3) an inquiry into male (fem)slash fiction producers and consumers. Even though this thesis highlighted how *PLL* fans negotiate LGBT+ representations, LGBT+ identity has become an increasingly visible representational category in popular culture, and therefore further exploration is needed to understand how audiences make sense of these non-normative sexual and non-binary gender identities. This area of research could lead to better representational models that would have application in the industry, but it would also invite queer theorists to engage with audience-based research over simply inferring queerness from a text or relying solely on the 'evaluative paradigm' (Davis & Needham 2009) to indicate positive or negative representations. Furthermore, as presented throughout this thesis, based on the limitations of the 'evaluative paradigm', future research should move beyond this restrictive model, where the associate labels positive or negative are applied to LGBT+ representations in popular media texts.

While fan studies scholars such as Matt Hills (2002) and Paul Booth (2015) have sought to theorise the 'fan-scholar' (Hills 2002) as an identity category, it could prove fruitful to explore other types of genres and texts that fans consume that invite this type of engagement. Moreover, by interrogating the generic conventions that invite fans to engage critically this could potentially bridge the gap between underrepresented genres and fan studies, particularly teen, mystery and melodrama for example. Furthermore, focusing on these undertheorised genres in fan studies could bridge gender and sexuality divides that have appeared in fan studies research that positions genres such as science fiction and horror as male-oriented (Hills 2002 and 2005) and thus their fans as such. Subsequently, the activities associated with fannish consumption and engagement could be challenged through an exploration of 'fan-scholar' as a theoretical positioning, namely in the ways in which fannish practices have been gendered. In other words, an exploration of male fans of

female-oriented texts and their fannish engagements with such a text could potentially lead fan studies scholars to interrogate male authored fanfiction, for example.

Male authored fanfiction is the final area of further research that arises out of this thesis. Although some scholarship exists (see Davies 2005 or Brennan 2013, for example), there is a considerable dearth of research in this area. Consequently, fan studies scholars (see Hellekson & Busse 2006) have labelled fanfiction as a female mode of fannish engagement and have thus written off male participation in this fan activity (Coppa 2006). It is precisely owing to this lack of male slashers or fanfic authors that research should be conducted in this area. Specifically, an exploration of gay male slash fiction consumption and creation practices should be explored as slash fiction privileges male-male homosexual relationships. Questioning why a significant portion of (gay) male fans do not author these types of stories when they so heavily centralise same-sex sexuality is germane to gaining a fuller understanding of how fans negotiate LGBT+ identities.

Conclusion

This concluding chapter synthesised the key aspects of this thesis to demonstrate the importance of reader-guided textual analysis in determining the ways in which fans negotiate LGBT+ representations. It provided a critical summary of the case study chapters to illustrate the usefulness of this methodology not just for fan studies but also queer theory. Furthermore, this chapter provided an alterable guide for scholars to conduct their own versions of this methodology, focusing explicitly on the analytical elements to indicate the ways in which I adapted this methodology from Ytre-Arne's (2011) original conception. And although this methodology is ideally suited to fan studies and audience-based research projects, I also brought forward the limitations of a reader-guided textual analysis by examining the limitations of the thesis itself. Here, I particularly centralised notions of power and the control researchers have over their subjects and materials. Finally, I suggested areas of future research based off the findings in the thesis through the application of this type of methodology.

Bibliography

999 Gaming, *The Walking Dead: WHO NEGAN KILLED REVEALED!!! MUST WATCH!!*, Youtube.com video, 06:30 running time, 4 April 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZMdFrhHOYdY.

Abbott, Stacey (Editor). 2010. *The Cult TV Book*. London and New York: IB Tauris.

Abercrombie, Nicholas, and Brian Longhurst. 1998. *Audiences: A Sociological Theory of Performance and Imagination*. London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Allen, Dennis W. 1995. "Homosexuality and Narrative." *Modern Fiction Studies* 41 (3-4): 609-634. https://muse.jhu.edu/article/21010.

Amato, Viola. 2016. *Intersex Narratives: Shifts in the Representation of Intersex Lives in North American Literature and Popular Culture*. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag.

Ashford, Chris. 2009. "Queer Theory, Cyber-Ethnographies and Researching Online Sex Environments." *Information & Communications Technology Law* 18 (3): 297-314. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13600830903424734.

Aslinger, Ben S. 2008. "Rocking Prime Time: Music, the WB, and Teen Culture." In *Teen television: Essays on programming and fandom* edited by Sharon Marie Ross and Louisa Ellen Stein, 78-92. Jefferson: McFarland.

Auerbach, Nina. 1995. *Our Vampires, Ourselves*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Bacon-Smith, Camille. 1992. *Enterprising women: Television fandom and the creation of popular myth*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Baym, Nancy. 1998. "Talking about Soaps: Communication Practices in a Computer-Mediated Culture." In *Theorizing fandom: Fans, subculture, and identity* edited by Cheryl Harris and Alison Alexander. Cresskill, Hampton Press.

Baym, Nancy. 2000. *Tune In, Log On: Soaps, Fandom, and Online Community*. London: Sage Publications.

Becker, Ron. 2006. *Gay TV and straight America*. New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press.

Beckman, Suzanne C., and Roy Langer. 2005. "Netnography: Rich Insights from Online Research." *Insights@CBS* 14 (6). Accessible at:

https://stosowana.files.wordpress.com/2010/10/670005_beckmann_langer_full_version.pdf.

Bell, Lenore. 2013. "Trigger Warnings: Sex, Lies and Social Justice Utopia on Tumblr." *Networking Knowledge: Journal of the MeCCSA Postgraduate Network* 6 (1): 31-47. Accessed 13 July 2015: http://ojs.meccsa.org.uk/index.php/netknow/article/view/296.

Bennett, Lucy. 2013. "Researching Online Fandom." *Cinema Journal* 52 (4): 129-134. Accessed 8 August 2016: http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/cj.2013.0033.

Bennett, Lucy. 2014. "Tracing *Textual Poachers*: Reflections on the Development of Fan Studies and Digital Fandom." *Journal of Fandom Studies* 2 (1): 5-20.

Benshoff, Harry M. 1997. *Monsters in the closet: Homosexuality and the horror film*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.

Benshoff, Harry M. 1998. "Secrets, Closets, and Corridors Through Time: Negotiating Sexuality and Gender Through Dark Shadows." In *Theorizing fandom: Fans, subculture, and identity* edited by Cheryl Harris and Alison Alexander. Cresskill, Hampton Press.

Berenstein, Rhona J. 1996. *Attack of the Leading Ladies: Gender, Sexuality, and Spectatorship in Classic Horror Cinema*. New York: Columbia UP.

Berridge, Susan. 2012. "Raised Voices." In *The Handbook of Gender, Sex, and Media* edited by Karen Ross, 313-325. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell.

Bingham, Patrick. 2012. "*Jeepers Queerpers*: Exploring Queer Identity in *Jeepers Creepers 2*." *JUMP CUT: A Review of Contemporary Media* 54: http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc54.2012/BinghamQueerHorror/text.html.

Bingham, Patrick. 2014. "*Pretty Little Liars*: Teen Mystery or Revealing Drama?" *Networking Knowledge: Journal of the MeCCSA Postgraduate Network* 6 (4): 95-106. http://www.ojs.meccsa.org.uk/index.php/netknow/article/view/320.

Bingham, W. Patrick. 2015. "Unveiling 'A': Critical Fan Responses to a Transgender Villainess." *CSTonline.tv*. Accessed: 24 June 2016. http://cstonline.tv/unveiling-a.

Bingham, William Patrick. 2016. "Chapter 4: The Dead Are Rising: Gender and Technology in the Landscape of Crisis." In *Generation Z: Zombies, Popular Culture and Educating Youth* edited by Victoria Carrington, Jennifer Rowsell, Esther Priyadharshini and Rebecca Westrup, 37-51. Heidelberg: Springer.

Birkett, Michelle, Dorothy L. Espelage, and Brian Koenig. 2009. "LGB and Questioning Students in Schools: The Moderating Effects of Homophobic Bullying and School Climate on Negative Outcomes." *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 38 (7): 989-1000.

Bolter, J. David, and Richard Grudin. 1999. *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. London and Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Booth, Paul J. 2015. "Fandom: The Classroom of the Future." *Transformative Works and Cultures* 19 (2015). Accessed 18 August 2016: http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/650/516.

Bordwell, David, and Kristin Thompson. 2008. *Film Art: An Introduction, Eighth Edition*. London: McGraw-Hill.

Botting, Fred. 1996. Gothic. London: Routledge.

Bowler, Gary M. "Netnography: A Method Specifically Designed to Study Cultures and Communities Online." *The Qualitative Report* 15 (5): 1270-1275. http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR15-5/Kozinets.pdf.

Bradley, Peri. 2013. "3. Romancing the Soap: Representations of Gay Love and Relationships in *EastEnders*." In *Queer Love in Film and Television: Critical Essays* edited by Pamela Demory and Christopher Pullen, 33-45. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Brennan, Joseph. 2013. "Slash Manips: Remixing Popular Media with Gay Pornography." *M/C Journal*, 16(4). Accessed 7 July 2015: http://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/view/677.

Brennan, Joseph. 2014a. 'Fandom is Full of Pearl Clutching Old Ladies': Nonnies in the Online Slash Closet." *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 17(4), 363-380. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1367877913496200

Brennan, Joseph. 2014b. "The Fannish Parergon: Aca-Fandom and the Decentred Canon." *The Australasian Journal of Popular Culture*, 3(2), 217-232. http://dx.doi.org/10.1386/ajpc.3.2.217_1

Brennan, Joseph. 2016. "Queerbaiting: The 'Playful' Possibilities of Homoeroticism." *International Journal of Cultural Studies*: 1-18. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1367877916631050.

Britt, Brett Remkus. 2014. "Pinkwashed: Gay Rights, Colonial Cartographies and Racial Categories in the Pornographic Film *Men of Israel*." *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 17 (3): 1-18. http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/citedby/10.1080/14616742.2014.929370.

Brooker, Will. 2001. "Living on *Dawson's Creek*: Teen Viewers, Cultural Convergence, and Television Overflow." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 4 (4): 456-472.

Brooker, Will. 2002. *Using the force: Creativity, community and Star Wars fans*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Brooker, Will. 2005. ""It Is Love" The Lewis Carroll Society as a Fan Community." *American Behavioral Scientist* 48 (7): 859-880.

Brown, Kathleen A. and Brett Westbrook. 2013. "4. Love's Narrative Lost: Romance Interrupted in *The L Word*." In *Queer Love in Film and Television: Critical Essays* edited by Pamela Demory and Christopher Pullen, 47-58. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bruckman, Amy. 2002. *Ethical Guidelines for Research Online*. Available at: http://www.cc.gatech.edu/~asb/ethics/. Accessed: 2 July 2015.

Bruns, Axel, and Stefan Stieglitz. 2012. "Quantitative Approaches to Comparing Communication Patterns on Twitter." *Journal of Technology in Human Services* 30 (3-4): 160-185. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15228835.2012.744249.

Burr, Vivien. 2005. "Scholar/Shippers and Spikeaholics: Academic and Fan Identities at the Slayage Conference on Buffy the Vampire Slayer." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 8 (3): 375-383. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1367549405054868

Bury, Rhiannon, Ruth Deller, Adam Greenwood, and Bethan Jones. 2013. "From Usenet to Tumblr: The changing role of social media." *Participations* 10 (1): 299-318.

Busse, Kristina. 2002. "Crossing the Final Taboo: Family, Sexuality, and Incest in the Buffyverse." In *Fighting the Forces: What's at Stake in "Buffy the Vampire Slayer"?*, edited by Rhonda V. Wilcox and David Lavery, 207-217. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Busse, Kristina. 2006. "My Life Is a WIP on My LJ: Slashing the Slasher and the Reality of Celebrity and Internet Performances." In *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet: New Essays*, edited by Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse, 207-224. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York and London: Routledge.

Butler, Judith. 2004. *Undoing Gender*. New York and London: Routledge.

Cawelti, John. G. 2004. *Mystery, Violence, and Popular Culture*. Wisconsin: Wisconsin Press.

CentrumLumina. *AO3 Census: Masterpost*. October 15, 2013 (22:31). http://centrumlumina.tumblr.com/post/63208278796/ao3-census-masterpost.

Chan, Kenneth. 2013. "2. Bad Boys Need Love, Too: the Cinematic Negativity of Gay Romance in *I Love You Phillip Morris*." In *Queer Love in Film and Television: Critical Essays* edited by Pamela Demory and Christopher Pullen, 23-31. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Cherry, Brigid SG. 1999. "The female horror film audience: viewing pleasures and fan practices." PhD Thesis, University of Stirling.

Cherry, Brigid. 1999. "Refusing to refuse to look: female viewers of the horror film." In *Identifying Hollywood's Audiences: Cultural Identity and the Movies* edited by Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby, 187-203. London: BFI.

Cherry, Brigid. 2002. "Chapter 4: Screaming for Release: Femininity and Horror Film Fandom in Britain." In *British Horror Cinema* edited by Steve Chibnall and Julian Petley, 42-57. London: Routledge.

Chin, Bertha. 2010. "From Textual Poachers to Textual Gifters: Exploring Fan Community and Celebrity in the Field of Fan Cultural Production." PhD Thesis, Cardiff University.

Clover, Carol. 1992. *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Cochran, Tanya R. 2009. "Toward a Rhetoric of Scholar-Fandom." PhD Thesis, Georgia State University.

Convery, Ian, and Diane Cox. 2012. "A Review of Research Ethics in Internet-Based Research." *Practitioner Research in Higher Education* 6 (1): 50-57. http://194.81.189.19/ojs/index.php/prhe/article/viewFile/100/192.

Coppa, Francesca. 2006. "A Brief History of Media Fandom." In *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet: New Essays* edited by Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse, 41-59. Jefferson: McFarland.

Creed, Barbara. 1993. *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. London and New York: Routledge.

Creekmur, Corey K., and Alexander Doty (Eds). 1995. *Out in Culture: Gay, Lesbian, and Queer Essays on Popular Culture*. Durham, NC: Duke UP.

Dare-Edwards, Helena, and W. Patrick Bingham. 2013. "In Conversation with Two *Pretty Little Liars* Scholars/Fans." *CSTonline.tv*. Accessed: 24 June 2016. http://cstonline.tv/in-conversation-with-two-pretty-little-liars-scholars-fans.

Dare-Edwards, Helena Louise. 2013. "Boy Band with a Secret? The Larry Stylinson Fandom and Real Person Slash in the Age of Social Media." Conference Paper, Fan Studies Network Symposium.

Dare-Edwards, Helena Louise. 2015. "*Interrogating tweendom online: 'Fangirl as Pathology', gender/age, and iCarly fandom*." Doctoral thesis, University of East Anglia.

Dare-Edwards, Helena Louise. 2016. "Book Review: *Millennial Fandom: Television Audiences in the Transmedia Age*, by Louisa Ellen Stein." *Transformative Works and Culture* 22 (2016). Accessed 16 September 2016:
http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/941/684.

Davis, Glyn. 2004. "9. 'Saying It Out Loud': Revealing Television's Queer Teens." In *Teen TV: Genre, Consumption and Identity* edited by Glyn Davis and Kay Dickinson, 127-140. London: BFI.

Davis, Glyn, and Kay Dickinson. 2004. "Introduction." In *Teen TV: Genre, Consumption and Identity* edited by Glyn Davis and Kay Dickinson, 1-13. London: BFI.

Davis, Glyn, and Gary Needham. 2009. *Queer TV: Theories, Histories, Politics*. London and New York: Routledge.

Davies, Raven. 2005. "The Slash Fanfiction Connection to Bi Men." *Journal of Bisexuality* 5 (2/3): 195-202.

Demory, Pamela, and Christopher Pullen. 2013. "Introduction." In *Queer Love in Film and Television: Critical Essays* edited by Pamela Demory and Christopher Pullen, 1-9. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Demory, Pamela. 2013. "6. True Love Queered: Sex, Melodrama, and Romance in *Queer as Folk*." In *Queer Love in Film and Television: Critical Essays* edited by Pamela Demory and Christopher Pullen, 69-79. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Dennis, Jeffery P. 2006. *Queering Teen Culture: All-American Boys and Same-Sex Desire in Film and Television*. New York, London and Oxford: Harrington Park Press.

Derecho, Abigail. 2006. "Archontic Literature: A Definition, a History, and Several Theories of Fan Fiction." In *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet: New Essays* edited by Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse, 61-78. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Dhaenens, Frederik, Sofie Van Bauwel, and Daniel Biltereyst. 2008. "Slashing the fiction of queer theory: Slash fiction, queer reading, and transgressing the boundaries of screen studies, representations, and audiences." *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 32 (4): 335-347.

Dhaenens, Frederik. 2014. "Articulations of Queer Resistance on the Small Screen." *Continuum* 28 (4): 520-531.
http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10304312.2014.907869.

Dhoest, Alexander. 2015. "Revisiting Reception Research: Case Study on Diasporic LGBTQs." *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies* 12 (2): 78-97.
http://www.participations.org/Volume%2012/Issue%202/5.pdf.

Doty, Alexander. 2000. *Flaming classics: Queering the film canon*. London: Routledge.

Doty, Alexander. 1993. *Making things perfectly queer: Interpreting mass culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Driscoll, Catherine. 2006. "One True Pairing: The Romance of Pornography and the Pornography of Romance." In *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet: New Essays* edited by Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse, 79-96. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Driver, Susan. 2007. *Queer Girls and Popular Culture: Reading, Resisting, and Creating Media*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Duffett, Mark. 2013. *Understanding fandom: An introduction to the study of media fan culture*. London and New York: Bloomsbury.

Duggan, Lisa. 2002. "The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism." In *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics* edited by Russ Castronovo and Dana D. Nelson, 175-94. Durham and London: Duke UP.

Elliott-Smith, Darren. 2012. "The Homosexual Vampire as a Metaphor for… the Homosexual Vampire?': True Blood, Homonormativity and Assimilation." In *True Blood: Investigating Vampires and Southern Gothic* edited by Brigid Cherry, 139-156. London and New York: IB Tauris.

Elliott-Smith, Darren. 2014. "'Blood, Sugar, Sex, Magik': Unearthing Gay Male Anxieties in Queer Gothic Soaps *Dante's Cove* (2005-2007) and The Lair (2007-2009)." In *Melodrama in Contemporary Film and Television* edited by Michael Stewart, 96-113. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Ellison, Hannah. 2012. "The Book Burning That Wasn't." *Huffingtonpost.co.uk*, August 13. http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/hannah-ellison/fanfiction-the-book-burning-that-was_b_1592689.html.

Espelage, Dorothy L., and Susan M. Swearer. 2008. "Addressing Research Gaps in the Intersection Between Homophobia and Bullying." *School Psychology Review* 37 (2): 155-159.

Evans, Adrienne, and Mafalda Stasi. 2014. "Desperately Seeking Methodology: New Directions in Fan Studies Research." *Participations: Journal of Audience & Reception Studies* 11 (2): 4-23. Accessed 25 June 2015: http://www.participations.org/Volume%2011/Issue%202/2.pdf.

Eysenbach, Gunther, and James E. Till. 2001. "Ethical Issues in Qualitative Research on Internet Communities." *BMJ* 323: 1103-1105.

Fathallah, Judith. 2014. "Moriarty's Ghost: Or the Queer Disruption of the BBC's *Sherlock*." *Television & New Media*: 1-11. http:dx.doi.org/10.1177/1527476414543528.

Feasey, Rebecca. 2006. "Charmed: Why Teen Television Appeals to Women." *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 34 (1): 2-9. http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.3200/JPFT.34.1.2-9.

Fejes, Fred. 2002. "Bent Passions: Heterosexual Masculinity, Pornography and Gay Male Identity." *Sexuality & Culture* 6 (3): 95–113.

Fink, Marty and Quinn Miller. 2014. "Trans Media Moments: Tumblr, 2011-2013." *Television & New Media* 15 (7): 611-626. DOI: 10.1177/1527476413505002.

Fiske, John. 1992. "The Cultural Economy of Fandom." In *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media* edited by Lisa A. Lewis, 30-49. London: Routledge.

Foster, Guy Mark. 2015. "What to Do If Your Inner Tomboy Is a Homo: Straight Women, Bisexuality, and Pleasure in M/M Gay Romance Fictions." *Journal of Bisexuality* 15 (4): 509-531.

Geraghty, Christine. 1991. *Women and Soap Opera: A Study of Prime Time Soaps*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

GLAAD. 2010. *2009-2010 Network Responsibility Index*. Last modified 2010. http://www.glaad.org/nri2010

GLAAD. 2011. *2011 Network Responsibility Index*. Last modified 2011. http://www.glaad.org/nri2011

GLAAD. 2012. *2012 Network Responsibility Index*. Last modified 2012. http://www.glaad.org/nri2012

GLAAD. 2013. *2013 Network Responsibility Index*. Last modified 2013. http://www.glaad.org/nri2013

GLAAD. 2014. *2014 Network Responsibility Index*. Last modified 2014. http://www.glaad.org/nri2014

GLAAD. 2015. *2015 Network Responsibility Index*. Last modified 2015. http://www.glaad.org/nri2015

Glennon, Morgan. 2012. "The Feminism of *Pretty Little Liars*," *Huffingtonpost.co.uk*, May 19. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/morgan-glennon/the-feminism-of-pretty-li_b_1351026.html.

Glick, Ira O., and Sidney J. Levy. 1962. *Living with Television*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.

Green, Shoshanna, Cynthia Jenkins, and Henry Jenkins. 1998. "'Normal Female Interest in Men Bonking': Selections from the *Terra Nostra Underground* and *Strange Bedfellows*." In *Theorizing fandom: Fans, subculture, and identity* edited by Cheryl Harris and Alison Alexander. Cresskill, Hampton Press.

Gross, Larry. 1991. "Out of the Mainstream: Sexual Minorities and the Mass Media." In *Gay People, Sex, and the Media* edited by Michelle Andrea Wolf and Alfred P. Kielwasser, 19-46. New York: The Haworth Press.

Gudelunas, David. 2012. "There's an App for that: The Uses and Gratifications of Online Social Networks for Gay Men." *Sexuality and Culture* 16: 347-365.

Hakim, Catherine. 2010. "Erotic Capital." *European Sociological Review* 26 (5): 499-518.

Halberstam, Judith. 1995. *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Halberstam, Judith. 2005. *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. New York and London: NYU Press.

Hale, Laura, *A History of Fan fic* (Fanzine, 2005), 55, quoted in Francesca Coppa, "A Brief History of Media Fandom." In *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet: New Essays*, edited by Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse, 41-59. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Hale Laura. 2007. "A History of Male Involvement in the Fan Fiction Community Or: Challenging Assumptions: Fandom isn't a bastion of femaleness." *Trickster.org*. Accessed March 15, 2016. http://www.webcitation.org/6Mwhzwss8.

Hall, Stuart. 1980[1973]. 'Encoding, decoding.' In *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-1979* edited by Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 128-138. London: Routledge.

Hammersley, Martyn, and Paul Atkinson. 1993. *Ethnography: Principles in Practice, 2nd Edition*. London and New York: Routledge.

Harris, Cheryl. 1998. "1: Introduction: Theorizing Fandom: Fans, Subculture and Identity." In *Theorizing Fandom: Fans, Subculture, and Identity* edited by Cheryl Harris and Alison Alexander, 3-8. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Harris, Cheryl, and Alison Alexander. 1998. *Theorizing Fandom: Fans, Subculture, and Identity*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Harris, W. C. 2005. "Queer Eye on the Prize: The Stereotypical Sodomites of Summer." In *The New Queer Aesthetic on Television: Essays on Recent Programming* edited by James R. Keller and Leslie Stratyner, 20-42. Jefferson and London: McFarland.

Hellekson, Karen, and Kristina Busse (Editors). 2006. *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet: New Essays*. Jefferson and London: McFarland.

Hellekson, Karen, and Kristina Busse (Editors). 2014. *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press.

Hekanaho, Pia Livia. 2016. "Chapter 4: A Stranger in a Silent City: Gothic Motifs Embracing Queer Textuality in Alan Hollinghurst's *The Folding Star*." In *Gothic Topographies: Language, Nation Building and 'Race'* edited by P. M. Mehtonen and Matti Savolainen, 57-70. London and New York: Routledge.

Hermann-Wilmarth, Jill M., and Caitlin L. Ryan. 2014. "Queering Chapter Books with LGBT Characters for Young Readers: Recognizing and Complicating Representations of Homonormativity." *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*: 1-23. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2014.940234.

Hermes, Joke. 2005. *Re-Reading Popular Culture*. Oxford, Carlton and Malden: Blackwell Publishing.

Hillman, Serena, Jason Procyk, and Carman Neustaedter. 2014. "'alksjdf;lksfd': Tumblr and the Fandom User Experience." In *Proceedings of the 2014 Conference on Designing Interactive Systems*, 775-784. http://dx.doi.org/10.1145/2598510.2600887.

Hills, Matt. 2002. *Fan cultures*. London and New York: Routledge.

Hills, Matt. 2004. "*Dawson's Creek*: 'Quality Teen TV' and 'Mainstream Cult'?." In *Teen TV: Genre, Consumption and Identity* edited by Glyn Davis and Kay Dickinson, 54-67. London: BFI.

Hills, Matt. 2005a. *The Pleasures of Horror*. London and New York: Continuum.

Hills, Matt. 2005b. "Patterns of Surprise: The "Aleatory Object" in Psychoanalytic Ethnography and Cyclical Fandom." *American Behavioral Scientist* 48 (7): 801-821.

Hills, Matt. 2006. "Not Just Another Powerless Elite?: When Media Fans Become Subcultural Celebrities." In *Framing Celebrity: New Directions in Celebrity Culture* edited by Su Holmes and Sean Redmond, 101-118. London and New York: Routledge.

Hills, Matt. 2009. "From BBC Radio Personality to Online Audience Personae: The Relevance of Fan Studies to Terry Wogan and the TOGs." *Radio Journal: International Studies in Broadcast & Audio Media* 7 (1): 67-88. http://dx.doi.org/10.1386/rajo.7.1.67/1.

Hills, Matt. 2013. "Fiske's 'Textual Productivity' and Digital Fandom: Web 2.0 Democratization Versus Fan Distinction?" *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies* 10 (1): 130-153. http://www.participations.org/Volume%2010/Issue%201/9%20Hills%2010.1.pdf.

Hine, Christine. 2000. *Virtual Ethnography*. London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Hollows, Joanne. 2003. "3. The Masculinity of Cult." In *Defining Cult Movies: The Cultural Politics of Oppositional Tastes* edited by Mark Jancovich, Antonio Lazaro Reboll, Julian Stringer and Andy Willis, 35-53. Manchester: Manchester UP.

Hunt, Caroline. 1996. "Young Adult Literature Evades the Theorists." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 21 (1): 4-11. https://muse.jhu.edu/article/249569/summary.

Jancovich, Mark, Antonio Lazaro Reboll, Julian Stringer, and Andy Willis (Editors). 2003. *Defining Cult Movies: The Cultural Politics of Oppositional Taste*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.

Jenkins, Christine. 1998. "From Queer to Gay and Back Again: Young Adult Novels with Gay / Lesbian / Queer Content, 1969-1997." *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy* 68 (3): 298-334. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4309229.

Jenkins, Henry. 1992. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. London and New York: Routledge.

Jenkins, Henry. 2006. *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture*. New York and London: New York University Press.

Jenkins, Henry, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green. 2013. *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*. New York and London: New York University Press.

Jones, James W. 2012. "Gay Detectives and Victims in German Mystery Novels." *Monatshefte* 104 (4): 570-592. http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/mon.2012.0102.

Jones, Sara Gwenllian. 2002. "The Sex Lives of Cult Television Characters." *Screen* 43 (1): 79-90.

Jowett, Lorna, and Stacey Abbott. 2013. *TV Horror: Investigating the Dark Side of the Small Screen*. London and New York: IB Tauris.

Jung, Susanne. 2004. "Queering Popular Culture: Female Spectators and the Appeal of Writing Slash Fan Fiction." *Gender Forum Gender Queeries* 8. http://www.genderforum.org/fileadmin/archiv/genderforum/queer/jung.html.

Kahn, Madeline. 1991. *Narrative Transvestism: Rhetoric and Gender in the Eighteenth-Century English Novel*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP.

Karlin, Lily. 2015. "This 'Pretty Little Liars' Theory About Charles Has Fans Fuming." *The Huffington Post*. July 27. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/pretty-little-liars-charles-theory_us_55b293a4e4b0074ba5a48c56.

Karpovich, Angelina I. 2006. "7. The Audience as Editor: The Role of Beta Readers in Online Fan Fiction Communities." In *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet: New Essays* edited by Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse, 171-188. Jefferson: McFarland.

Kearney, Mary Celeste. 2007. "1. The Changing Face of Teen Television, or Why We All Love *Buffy*." In *Undead TV: Essays on Buffy the Vampire Slayer* edited by Elana Levine, and Lisa Ann Parks, 17-41. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

King, I. Marlene. Twitter Post. 2 October 2012, 2:24pm. https://twitter.com/imarleneking/status/253244047676829696.

Kirby-Diaz, Mary (Editor). 2009. *Buffy and Angel Conquer the Internet: Essays on Online Fandom*. Jefferson and London: McFarland.

Klinger, Barbara. 1994. *Melodrama and Meaning: History, Culture, and the Films of Douglas Sirk*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP.

Kohnen, Melanie E. S. 2008. "The Adventures of a Repressed Farm Boy and the Billionaire Who Loves Him: Queer Spectatorship in *Smallville* Fandom." In *Teen Televsision: Essays on Programming and Fandom* edited by Sharon Marie Ross and Louisa Ellen Stein, 207-223. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Kozinets, Robert V. "'I Want to Believe': A Netnography of the X-Philes' Subculture of Consumption." *Advances in Consumer Research* 24: 470-475.

Kozinets, Robert V. *Netnography: Doing Ethnographic Research Online*. London: Sage.

Lackner, Eden, Barbara Lynn Lucas, and Robin Anne Reid. 2006. "8. Cunning Linguists: The Bisexual Erotics of *Words/Silence/Flesh*." In *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet: New Essays* edited by Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse, 189-206. Jefferson: McFarland.

Lamb, Patricia Frazier, and Diane L. Veith. 1986. "Romantic Myth, Transcendence and *Star Trek* Zines." In *Erotic Universe: Sexuality and Fantastic Literature* edited by Donald Palumbo. New York: Greenwood Press.

Livingstone, Sonia. 2004. "The Challenge of Changing Audiences: Or, What Is the Researcher to Do in the Age of the Internet?" *LSE Research Online* 19 (1): 75-86. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0267323104040695.

Lothian, Alexis, Kristina Busse, and Robin Anne Reid. 2007. "``Yearning Void and Infinite Potential'': Online Slash Fandom as Queer Female Space." *English Language Notes* 45 (2): 103-111.

Madison, D. Soyini. 2012. *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance, 2nd Edition*. London: Sage.

Marcus, George E. 1998. *Ethnography Through Thick & Thin*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Markley, A. A. 2001. "E. M. Forster's Reconfigured Gaze and the Creation of a Homoerotic Subjectivity." *Twentieth Century Literature* 47 (2): 268-292.

Markowitz, Judith A. *The Gay Detective Novel: Lesbian and Gay Main Characters and Themes in Mystery Fiction*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

McCracken, Allison. 2007. "6. At Stake: Angel's Body, Fantasy Masculinity, and Queer Desire in Teen Television." In *Undead TV: Essays on Buffy the Vampire Slayer* edited by Elana Levine, and Lisa Ann Parks, 116-144. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

McKee, Alan. 2007. "6: The Fans of Cultural Theory." In *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World* edited by Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington, 88-97.

McLean, Kirsten. 2007. "Hiding in the Closet?: Bisexuals, Coming Out and the Disclosure Imperative." *The Australian Sociological Association* 43 (2): 151-166. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1440783307076893.

Miller, Sam J. 2011. "Chapter 11: Assimilation and the Queer Monster." In *Horror after 9/11: World of Fear, Cinema of Terror* edited by Aviva Briefel and Sam J. Miller, 220-234. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Mittell, Jason. 2004. *Genre and Television: From Cop Shows to Cartoons in American Culture*. London: Routledge.

Mittell, Jason. 2013. "Forensic Fandom and the Drillable Text." *Spreadable Media*, http://spreadablemedia.org/essays/Mittell.

Monaco, Jeanette. 2010. "Memory Work, Autoethnography and the Construction of a Fan-Ethnography." *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies* 7 (1): 102-142. http://www.participations.org/Volume%207/Issue%201/monaco.pdf.

Moores, Shaun. 2000. *Interpreting Audiences: The Ethnography of Media Consumption*. London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Mulick, Patrick S., and Lester W. Wright, Jr. 2002. "Examining the Existence of Biphobia in the Heterosexual and Homosexual Populations." *Journal of Bisexuality* 2 (4): 45-64. http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J159v02n04_03.

Munoz, Jose Esteban. 1999. *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press.

Murphy, Bernice M. 2009. *The Suburban Gothic in American Popular Culture*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Murray, Susan. 2007. "2. I Know What You Did Last Summer: Sarah Michelle Gellar and Crossover Teen Stardom." In *Undead TV: Essays on Buffy the Vampire Slayer* edited by Elana Levine, and Lisa Ann Parks, 42-55. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Ng, Eve. 2013. "A "Post-Gay" Era? Media Gaystreaming, Homonormativity, and the Politics of LGBT Integration." *Communication, Culture & Critique* 6 (2): 258-283. http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/cccr.12013/full.

O'Riordan, Kate, and David J. Phillips (Editors). 2007. *Queer Online: Media, Technology and Sexuality*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Organisation Intersex International Australia Limited. 2013. "What is Intersex? Defining Intersex." *OII Australia*. Accessed 7 July 2016. https://oii.org.au/18106/what-is-intersex/.

Osgerby, Bill. 2004a. *Youth media*. London and New York: Routledge.

Osgerby, Bill. 2004b. "5. 'So Who's got Time for Adults!': Femininity, Consumption and the Development of Teen TV – from *Gidget* to *Buffy*." In *Teen TV: Genre, Consumption and Identity* edited by Glyn Davis and Kay Dickinson, 71-86. London: BFI.

Owen, Mary. 2003. "Developing a Love of Reading: Why Young Adult Literature Is Important." *Orana* 39 (1): 11-17. http://search.informit.com.au/documentSummary;dn=200305405;res=IELAPA.

Pearson, Roberta. 2003. "Kings of Infinite Space: Cult Television Characters and Narrative Possibilities." *Scope* (August).

Pearson, Roberta. 2010. "Chapter 1: Observations on Cult Television." In *The Cult TV Book* edited by Stacey Abbott, 7-18. London and New York: IB Tauris.

Pearson, R.E. and Messenger-Davies, M. 2002. "A Brave New World a Week: Star Trek, Cult Television, Master Narratives and Postmodernism." In *Les Cultes Mediatiques: Culture Fan*

et Oeuveres Cultes edited by Philippe Le Guern, 263-280. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes.

Pearson, R.E. and Messenger-Davies, M. 2003. "You're Not Going to See That on TV: *Star Trek: The Next Generation* in Film and Television." In Quality Popular Television: Cult TV, the Industry and Fans edited by Mark Jancovich and James Lyons, 103-117. London: British Film Institute.

Phillips, Tom. 2013. "Fandom and Beyond: Online Community, Culture, and Kevin Smith Fandom." PhD Thesis, University of East Anglia.

Phillips, Tom. 2014. "Embracing the 'Overly Confessional': Scholar-Fandom and Approaches to Personal Research." *Flow Journal* 13 (5). http://www.flowjournal.org/2010/12/embracing-the-overly-confessional/.

Phoenix, Ann, Stephen Frosh, and Rob Pattman. 2003. "Producing Contradictory Masculine Subject Positions: Narratives of Threat, Homophobia and Bullying in 11-14 Year Old Boys." *Journal of Social Issues* 59 (1): 179-195.

porluciernagas. "Why Is There So Much Slash Fic?: Some Analysis of the AO3 Census," *Lady Geek Girl and Friends* (Blog), 12 November 2013, https://ladygeekgirl.wordpress.com/2013/11/12/why-is-there-so-much-slash-fic-some-analysis-of-the-ao3-census/.

Penley, Constance. 1997. *NASA/Trek: Popular Science and Sex in America*. New York: Verso.

Pugh, Sheenagh. 2005. *The Democratic Genre: Fan Fiction in a Literary Context*. Bridgend: Seren.

Pullen, Christopher. "Introduction." In *LGBT Identity and Online New Media* edited by Christopher Pullen and Margaret Cooper, 1-13. London and New York: Routledge.

Punter, David. 2013. *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day: Volume 2: The Modern Gothic*. London and New York: Routledge.

Radway, Janice. 1983. "Women Read the Romance: The Interaction of Text and Context." *Feminist Studies* 9 (1): 53-78. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3177683.

Radway, Janice. 1984. *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Read, Jacinda. 2003. "The Cult of Masculinity: from Fan-Boys to Academic Bad-Boys." In *Defining Cult Movies: The Cultural Politics of Oppositional Tastes* edited by Mark Jancovich, Antonio Lazaro Reboll, Julian Stringer and Andy Willis, 54-70. Manchester: Manchester UP.

Reilly, Kaitlin. 2015. "'Pretty Little Liars' Theory Reveals Charles' Identity —— & It's Not Jason's Twin." *Bustle.com*. April 20. http://www.bustle.com/articles/77625-pretty-little-liars-theory-reveals-charles-identity-its-not-jasons-twin.

Reynolds, Chelsea. 2015. "'I Am Super Straight and I Prefer You Be Too': Constructions of Heterosexual Masculinity in Online Personal Ads for 'Straight' Men Seeking Sex with Men." *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 39 (3): 213-231.

Ross, Sharon. 2004. "10. Dormant Dormitory Friendships: Race and Gender in *Felicity*." In *Teen TV: Genre, Consumption and Identity* edited by Glyn Davis and Kay Dickinson, 141-150. London: BFI.

Ross, Sharon Marie, and Louisa Ellen Stein. 2008. "Introduction." In *Teen television: Essays on programming and fandom* edited by Sharon Marie Ross and Louisa Ellen Stein, 3-26. Jefferson: McFarland.

Russ, Joanna. 1985/2014. "Pornography by Women, for Women, with Love." In *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader* edited by Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse, 82-96. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press.

Russo, Vito. 1981/1987. *The Celluloid Closet. Homosexuality in the Closet*. New York: Harper and Row.

Salmon, Catherine, and Don Symons. 2004. "Slash Fiction and Human Mating Psychology." *The Journal of Sex Research* 41 (1): 94-100.

Sandvoss, Cornel. 2005. *Fans: The mirror of consumption*. Cambridge: Polity.

Scales, Adam. 2014. "'Something is Trying to Get Inside My body': A Gay Reception and Narrative Analysis of *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge*." *Networking Knowledge* 6 (4): 29-43. http://ojs.meccsa.org.uk/index.php/netknow/article/view/315/148.

Scales, Adam. 2015. *Logging into Horror's Closet: Gay Fans, the Horror Film and Online Culture.* Doctoral thesis, University of East Anglia.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. 1985. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. New York: Columbia UP.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky.1990. *Epistemology of the closet*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Shewe, Elizabeth. 2009. "Serious Play: Drag, Transgender, and the Relationship Between Performance and Identity in the Life Writing of Rupaul and Kate Bornstein." *Biography* 32 (4): 670-695. https://muse.jhu.edu/article/374205/summary.

Stasi, Mafalda. 2006. "The Toy Soldiers from Leeds: The Slash Palimpsest." In *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet: New Essays*, edited by Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse, 115-133. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Stein, Louisa Ellen. 2005. "They Cavort, You Decide': Transgenericism, Queerness, and Fan Interpretation in Teen TV." *Spectator* 25 (1): 11-22. http://cinema.usc.edu/assets/097/15728.pdf.

Stein, Louisa Ellen. 2015. *Millennial Fandom: Television Audiences in the Transmedia Age*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press.

Stephens, Jonathan. 2007. "Young Adult: A Book by Any Other Name…Defining the Genre." *The Alan Review* 35 (1). https://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/ALAN/v35n1/stephens.html.

Stryker, Susan. 2006. "(De)Subjugated Knowledges: An Introduction to Transgender Studies." In *The Transgender Studies Reader* edited by Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle, 1-18. London and New York: Routledge.

Suarez, Juan Antonio. 1996. *Bike Boys, Drag Queens & Superstars: Avant-Garde, Mass Culture, and Gay Identities in the 1960s underground Cinema*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Sullivan, Nikki. 2003. *A critical introduction to queer theory*. New York: NYU Press.

Thomas, Lyn. 2002. *Fans, Feminisms and 'Quality' Media*. London and New York: Routledge.

Thomas, Angela. 2007. "Chapter 7: Blurring and Breaking through the Boundaries of Narrative, Literacy, and Identity in Adolescent Fan Fiction." In *A New Literacies Sampler* edited by Michele Knobel and Colin Lankshear, 137-165. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Thornton, Sarah. 1995. *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Tulloch, John, and Henry Jenkins. 1995. *Science Fiction Audiences: Watching "Doctor Who" and "Star Trek"*. New York: Routledge.

Walton, Gerald. 2004. "Bullying and Homophobia in Canadian Schools." *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Issues in Education* 1 (4): 23-36.

Wajcman, Judy. 1991. *Feminism Confronts Technology*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Wajcman, Judy. 2006. *TechnoFeminism*. Cambridge: Polity.

Wee, Valerie. 2004. "6. Selling Teen Culture: How American Multimedia Conglomeration Reshaped teen Television in the 1990s." In *Teen TV: Genre, Consumption and Identity* edited by Glyn Davis and Kay Dickinson, 87-98. London: BFI.

Wee, Valerie. 2008. "2. Teen Television and the WB Television Network." In *Teen television: Essays on programming and fandom* edited by Sharon Marie Ross and Louisa Ellen Stein, 43-60. Jefferson: McFarland.

Williamson, Milly. 2005. *The Lure of the Vampire: Gender, Fiction and Fandom from Bram Stoker to Buffy*. London and New York: Wallflower Press.

Willis, Ika. 2006. "Keeping Promises to Queer Children: Making Space (for Mary Sue) at Hogwarts." In *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet: New Essays*, edited by Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse, 153-170. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Wheatley, Helen. 2006. *Gothic Television*. Manchester: Manchester UP.

Whiteman, Natasha. 2007. "The Establishment, Maintenance and Destabilisation of Fandom: A Study of Two Online Communities and an Exploration of Issues Pertaining to Internet Research." PhD Thesis, University of London.

Whiteman, Natasha, and Joanne Metivier. 2013. "From Post-Object to 'Zombie' Fandoms: The 'Deaths' of Online Fan Communities and What They Say About Us." *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies* 10 (1): 270-298.

Woledge, Elizabeth. 2006. "Intimatopia: Genre Intersections Between Slash and the Mainstream." In *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet: New Essays*, edited by Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse, 97-114. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Ytre-Arne, Brita. 2011. "Women's Magazines and Their Readers: The Relationship Between Textual Features and Practices of Reading." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 14 (2): 213-228.

Zappavigna, Michele. 2012. *Discourse of Twitter and Social Media: How We Use Language to Create Affiliation on the Web*. London, New Delhi, New York and Sydney: Bloomsbury.

Zubernis, Lynn, and Katherine Larsen. 2012. *Fandom at the Crossroads: Celebration, Shame and Fan/Producer Relationships*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Filmography and Teleography

Television

The 100. Jason Rothenberg. The CW. 2014-present.

American Horror Story: Asylum. Brad Falchuk and Ryan Murphy. FX. 17 October 2012-23 January 2013.

American Horror Story: Freak Show. Brad Falchuk and Ryan Murphy. FX. 8 October 2014-21 January 2015.

Beverly Hills, 90210. Darren Star, Charles Rosin and Aaron Spelling. FOX. 1990-2000.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Joss Whedon. The WB. 1997-2001. UPN. 2001-2003.

Dawson's Creek. Kevin Williamson. The WB. 1998-2003.

Faking It! Carter Covington. MTV. 2014-2016.

The Fosters. Peter Paige and Bradley Bredeweg. ABC Family/Freeform. 2013-present.

Glee. Ryan Murphy, Brad Falchuk and Ian Brennan. FOX. 2009-2015.

The Man from U.N.C.L.E. Sam Rolfe and Norman Felton. NBC. 1964-1968.

My So-Called Life. Winnie Holzman. ABC. 1994-1995.

The O.C. Josh Schwartz. FOX. 2003-2007.

Orange Is the New Black. Jenji Kohan. Netflix. 2013-present.

Pretty Little Liars. I. Marlene King. ABC Family/Freeform. 2010-2017.

Scream. Jill Blotevogel, Dan Dworkin and Jay Beattie. MTV. 2015-present.

Skins. Bryan Elsley and Jamie Brittain. E4. 2007-2013.

Smallville. Alfred Gough and Miles Millar. The WB. 2001-2006. The CW. 2006-2011.

Star Trek: The Original Series. Gene Roddenberry. NBC. 1966-1969.

Supernatural. Eric Kripke and Robert Singer. The CW. 2005-present.

Teen Wolf. Jeff Davis. MTV. 2011-present.

True Blood. Alan Ball. HBO. 2008-2014.

The Vampire Diaries. Kevin Williamson and Julie Plec. The CW. 2009-present.

The Walking Dead. Frank Darabont. AMC. 2010-present.

Xena: Warrior Princess. John Schulian and Robert Tapert. SyFy. 1995-2001.

Pretty Little Liars Episode List

1.01 "Pilot." Dir: Lesli Linka Glatter. 8 June 2010.

1.02 "The Jenna Thing." Dir: Liz Friedlander. 15 June 2010.

1.03 "To Kill a Mocking Girl." Dir: Elodie Keene. 22 June 2010.

1.08 "Please Do Talk about Me When I'm Gone." Dir: Arlene Sanford. 27 July 2010.

1.09 "The Perfect Storm." Dir: Jamie Babbit. 3 August 2010.

1.13 "Know Your Frenemies." Dir: Ron Lagomarsino. 10 August 2010.

2.03 "My Name Is Trouble." Dir: Elodie Keene. 28 June 2011.

2.12 "Over My Dead Body." Dir: Norman Buckley. 30 August 2011.

2.15 "A Hot Piece of A." Dir: Michael Grossman. 9 January 2012.

3.01 "It Happened 'That Night.'" Dir: Ron Lagomarsino. 5 June 2012.

3.07 "Crazy." Dir: Patrick Norris. 24 July 2012.

3.13 "This Is a Dark Ride." Dir: Tim Hunter. 23 October 2012.

4.02 "Turn of the Shoe." Dir: Joanna Kerns. 18 June 2013.

4.11 "Bring Down the Hoe." Dir: Melanie Mayron. 20 August 2013.

4.13 "Grave New World." Dir: Ron Lagomarsino. 22 October 2013.

4.16 "Close Encounters." Dir: Arthur Anderson. 21 January 2014.

4.24 "A Is for Answers." Dir: I. Marlene King. 18 March 2014.

5.05 "Miss Me x100." Dir: Norman Buckley. 8 July 2014.

5.08 "Scream for Me." Dir: Bethany Rooney. 29 July 2014.

5.10 "A Dark Ali." Dir: Arlene Sanford. 12 August 2014.

5.12 "Taking This One to the Grave." Dir: Ron Lagomarsino. 26 August 2014.

5.13 "How the 'A' Stole Christmas." Dir: I. Marlene King. 9 December 2014.

5.23 "The Melody Lings On." Dir: Roger Kumble. 10 March 2015.

5.24 "I'm A Good Girl, I Am." Dir: Oliver Goldstick. 17 March 2015.

5.25 "Welcome to the Dollhouse." Dir: Ron Lagomarsino. 24 March 2015.

6.01 "Game On, Charles." Dir: Chad Lowe. 2 June 2015.

6.05 "She's No Angel." Dir: Michael Grossman. 30 June 2015.

6.10 "Game Over, Charles." Dir: I. Marlene King. 11 August 2015.

Film and Other Media

Cloverfield. Dir: Matt Reeves. Prod: JJ Abrams and Bryan Burk. Paramount. 2008. Film.

Dressed to Kill. Dir: Brian De Palma. Filmways Pictures. 1980. Film.

Harry Potter Franchise. JK Rowling; Chris Columbus, Alfonso Cuaron, Mike Newell and David Yates. Scholastic; Warner Bros. Pictures. 1998-2011. Novel and Film Franchise.

Melanie Martinez. 2014. "Dead to Me." *Dollhouse*. Atlantic. Song.

Natasha Bedingfield. 2004. "Unwritten." Phonogenic and Epic. Song.

Psycho. Dir: Alfred Hitchcock. Paramount. 1960. Film.

Toy Story. Dir: John Lasseter. Pixar. 1995. Film.

Silence of the Lambs. Dir: Jonathan Demme. Orion Pictures. 1991. Film.

The Twilight Saga. Catherine Hardwicke, Chris Weitz, David Slade and Bill Condon. Temple Hill Entertainment. 2008-2012. Film Franchise.