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Thesis Approval Form

Whovians and Directioners: Challenging the Fangirl Identity

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This project will analyze how fans and fangirls are discussed by taking notions from fan blogs and fan theory to reveal the inconsistencies that fangirls are placed in when participating in fandom. These inaccurate distortions lead to misconceptions about the wide spectrum of contemporary fandom. The term fangirl is defined to be an adolescent female who is only a fan of a specific type of entertainment because of looks or factors that are deemed superficial. In contemporary music and television fandom, females are often criticized and policed on where their place is in a fandom. Females who are in the *Doctor Who* and/or One Direction fandom, specifically when participating in fan labor are often put into the category of fangirls. This project will show that these inaccurate assumptions about what it is to be a fan and ultimately what counts as fan or fangirl behavior becomes convoluted.

Keywords: Fandom, *Doctor Who*, One Direction, Fangirl, Feminism, Cyberculture, Fan labor

Getting involved with a music or television fandom can mean a lot of things. It could mean that they religiously watch their favorite television show every week at the exact moment it comes on. It could mean that they spend all their money on concert tickets/merchandise that they will then place on their wall as a commemorative shrine. It could mean that whenever their favorite song comes on they get an intense emotional reaction that can only be described as hysterical crying/screaming or yelling. It could mean that they pick their favorite member of their favorite band/singer/actor(ess) and read erotic fanfiction about them before going to sleep. It also could mean just simply actively participating in chatting on fan forums, going to meet-ups/conventions, and posting on social media sites such as Twitter, Facebook, or Tumblr. Or it could mean that they casually listen or watch the show or music when they feel like it. Whatever the case, it is clear that being a fan of a music group or television show is diverse in how a person chooses to show how they participate within the fandom.

However, the vast amounts of ways that people, specifically adolescent females, chose to represent their passion in a fandom have been ridiculed and denounced as just being a fangirl. The term fangirl derives from common assumption that any female who is an adolescent is only in a fandom because of the hotness or other superficial and otherwise irrelevant reasons. Because the word fangirl has many pre-conceived negative assumptions that are sexist, anyone of any gender that is called a fangirl is then questioned about their actions and behavior in a fandom. These questions lead to negative connotations and that they are dismissed as acting like an unstable female. Pamela Wojcik in her article “The Cultural Lives of *Doctor Who*: Doctor Whose Fandom?” writes

The dismissal of fangirls is familiar to those of us who study pop culture as a stereotypical denigration of feminized mass culture in opposition to masculine “art.” It assumes that female fans are an add-on, derivative, and lesser than male fandom, which is assumed to be motivated by more serious interests (e.g., the vagaries of time travel vs. the appeal of TV stars).

These assumptions are found in popular media texts, blogs, and fan theory. In order to show that distorted assumptions can negatively portray fan culture this project will analyze two fandoms, one music and one television, that have a high fangirl portrayal within the fandom and outside the fandom. This project is focusing on television and music fandom because unlike sports fandom, where men are the principle audience noted for similar obsessive behavior, fangirls are dismissed and critiqued in a way that is far more dismissive than active sports fans.

The popular music group One Direction and television show *Doctor Who* are most known for the entertainment that is provided, as well as having a very dedicated fan base. The significance of these fandoms is that within each fandom, there is a place for fans and another separate space for fangirls. One Direction fans, otherwise known as Directioners, are almost always called fangirls outside fandom. *Doctor Who* fangirls, or, are accused by *Doctor Who* fans, whovians¹, as young girls who are only into the show because of the recent doctors’ attractiveness and the romantic plot lines. They are assumed to attach unnecessary in-depth analysis to episodes and subscribe to the notion that the Doctor is real and they might become a companion. What these two fandoms

¹ Not all *Doctor Who* fans call themselves Whovians. Some older, classic fans abhor the term. The first noted usage of the word Whovian was in 1980 when the *Doctor Who Fan Club of America* published the *Whovian Times* as its newsletter. (“Doctor Who Fandom”).

have in common is that they both hold misconceptions about the females in their fandom and these misconceptions are fuel to ostracize them. Another commonality is that fans police what is proper 'fan' behavior calling out one action as being a fangirl, but not another and so on. It then turns into a mess of who and what counts as being a fan and what counts as being a fangirl. These misconceptions ultimately give fandom a negative association. This project will analyze those misconceptions and ultimately argue that the contradicting notions of fangirls in contemporary fandom take away from the diversity that fandom can represent and show that being a fan or fangirl still represents being in a fandom. Under fandom it includes fans, fangirls, or whatever identification a person chooses to represent themselves as. This project will recognize that whatever words a person chooses to identify with, they are still at the core a fan.

Doctor Who and One Direction

Doctor Who is a show about a man from a fictional planet called Gallifrey. The doctor is a time lord, essentially, a time traveler. The doctor travels through time in a spaceship called the Tardis, which is disguised as a blue police box. The Tardis always brings the doctor to a point in time where humans or planet Earth is in danger and saves the world from its demise. Along the way they encounter many different species that have different cultures that integrate and eventually learn from each other to help save the current problem/s in that particular episode. The doctor also runs in to multiple companions (usually female) who come along with him in the Tardis to save the world.

The series provides viewers with messages of historical past, love, science fiction, and to never give up on a difficult challenge. Each time the doctor regenerates (thus making him immortal); he is a new person with each new doctor. The reasoning for

regeneration is to bring in new doctors (and from the producers standpoint, to bring in a new actor). So far, there have been a total of twelve different doctors, all of which have been white males. Fans often represent their love of *Doctor Who* by adding the classic blue Tardis icon on various social media websites or other familiar references to the show, writing fanfiction about canon characters, creating web series, and other popular forms of media to represent their involvement in the fandom. While *Doctor Who* is a show created for a wider audience, music group One Direction was created more specifically with a female audience in mind.

In 2010, Zayne Malik, Harry Styles, Louis Tomlinson, Liam Payne, and Niall Horman, auditioned as solo candidates for the seventh series of the British televised singing competition *The X Factor*. After failing to move to the "Boys" category they were put together to form a five-piece boy band in London, England, in July 2010 and eventually qualified to the "Groups" category. They signed with Simon Cowell's record label after finishing third in *The X Factor* in 2010. Their first three albums broke several records, topping the charts of most major markets, and generating hit singles. The group sings songs about love and heartbreak and inner beauty. The band quickly picked up their boy band career and are now one of the most popular boy band group in the world, taking after past boy bands such as Backstreet boys, N'sync, and The Beatles. One Direction fans broadcast their fandom in many ways from calling one another Directioners, running popular blogs dedicated to certain members, the creation of fanfiction to the popular ship² 'Larry', concerts meet ups, forum discussion, and so on.

² A ship is when two (usually heterosexual) actors or musicians are placed in a fictional relationship that fans believe or want to believe exist.

Unlike *Doctor Who*, fans of One Direction are not typically split as either One Direction fans or One Direction fangirls. Popular media, and people who are not One Direction fans, assume that the majority of the fan base are a wild obsessed pre-teen females, known to cry, scream and pass out at any event in which they make an appearance. This leaves little to no room to be known simply as a fan but rather only as being an annoying fangirl.

Defining Fan and Fangirl

The question itself, “What is a fan and what is a fangirl?” does not have a clearly defined answer when asked from person to person, fan-to-fan or scholar-to-scholar. So what is the actual difference between a fangirl and just a fan and why girls are particular singled out for being a fangirl? This project will take the word fangirl, and analyze the complexities surrounding its multiple meanings. How the word fangirl is twisted around and be shown in a positive light is a point the project will explain to show the multiplicity that fangirl can be morphed into. Ironically enough it is almost unanimous that the definitions of a fan and fangirl have different answers.

The word fan is the shortened form of fanatic. Fanatic comes from the word fanaticism, which is a belief or behavior involving uncritical zeal or with an obsessive enthusiasm for a pastime or hobby (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fanaticism>). The definition of fanatic was rumored as being coined by Winston Churchill: "A fanatic is one who can't change his mind and won't change the subject". With either description, a fanatic displays very strict standards and ideas and opinions about their fandom. Later in

history, fanatic would be shorted to the word fan, having similar meaning and intent when used. It is then, that the origin of fandom makes an appearance in society.

The broad definition of a fan is a person who is enthusiastic and devoted to an object of interest, which includes and is not limited to, bands, television shows, sports teams, comedians, etc. Cornel Sandvoss, in his work “The Death of A Reader? Literary Theory and the Study of Texts in Popular Culture,” describes fandom as “...the regular, emotionally involved consumption of a given popular narrative or text” (22). In contemporary fandom, fan will devote a significant amount of time to a fandom in online and offline activities.

Online activities can include writing blog posts, watching interviews, reading and writing fan-fiction, participating in group chats and forums, as well as talking about their fandom through various social media sites like Twitter, Facebook, and Tumblr. Offline activities are an extension of online activities. The majority of contemporary fandom activity happens online through social media, meet ups, fan forums and fan pages worldwide. These meet ups include going to multi-fandom conventions (like Comic-Con), fandom specific conventions, concerts, and any activity that allows the chance to show off their fandom or their level of fanship. Fans often have a desire for these external involvements and are motivated to demonstrate their extensive knowledge. Kris Markman and John Overholt quote Lawrence Grossberg in “Becoming ‘The Right People’: Fan-generated Knowledge Building that fan” stating that fans “make an affective investment into the objects of their taste and they construct, from those tastes, a consistent but necessarily temporary affective identity”(67). This identity becomes an

important marker in a fans life and begins a time, no matter the age or gender, that they have this place of belonging and that they can build and “incorporate the cultural texts as part of their self-identity [...] often going on to build social networks”(quoted in Overhold and Markman 68). This incorporation as part of a fans identity, and the passion in which a fan can take their view as a participant in a fandom, is where the separation of fan and fangirls becomes distinctive when noticing the subtle differences.

Like fans, fangirls have similar characteristics in what it means to be in a fandom. Fangirls are stereotyped to be adolescent females (ages 12-18), hence why “girl” is in the name. The popular website Urban Dictionary, which is a website that users can submit definitions of words that are not always in the dictionary and/or are popular slang words used in popular media, provides a colorful definition of a fangirl: “A rabid breed of human female who is obsessed with either a fictional character or an actor” and “have been known to glomp, grope, and tackle when encountering said obsessions.”

What separates fans from fangirls is the obsession in which they take their object of interest and that often “...cannot step outside the object of investment, because it is lived as the totality of existence” (Markman and Overholt 68). These definitions provide some, but not all the assumptions about what it means to be an actual fangirl. A fangirl is known to take whichever fandom or fandoms they are a part of and express their dedication and bring it to an extent that is viewed as ‘extreme’. This intensity can include following all social networks associated within the fandom interests, creating specific blogs about an actor or musicians hair or a specific body part (such as legs, arms, etc.), cataloguing and collection photos online and off, going to wide lengths to find coveted information, acquire material objects related to the fandom (popular and rare

merchandise), going to great lengths defending their person or object of fandom, and take part in flaming. The purpose of flaming is to shut unwanted voices online. It's another way of spamming however; it involves public shaming, rather than clogging up chats or dashboards for the sake for spam.

The meaning of fan and fangirl is not just a clean answer. Putting someone into the category of fan or fangirl becomes complicated due to the fact that there is not one action done that places someone as a fan or fangirl. Though there are striking differences to the passion and the obsession that fangirls will take in fandom, these differences are just another way in which people decide to involve themselves within fandom.

Fanatic → Fan → Fangirl

Fandom is not a new concept. Fandom emerged as an important part of American social life in the 1800s. When it came time for young adults then to go out and enjoy entertainment, the opera was frequently attended. Going to the opera and gaining deep interpersonal connections with the music is something twenty four year old Lucy Lowell documented in her diary in 1884. She wrote "I suppose it can't be good for a person to go to things that excite her so that she can't fix her mind on anything for days afterwards" (Cavicchi 235). These documentations of emotions expressed while listening to music is the beginning in American history of the music fan and how the reactions and commentary about music fans, specifically fangirls, were perceived and marketed. Young music lovers like Lucy Lowell, "constituted a group that, for the first time in American history was able to shape its musical experiences entirely around commercial entertainments like concerts, theater, and public exhibitions" (Cavicchi 236). These groups of young adults paved the way for music corporations to take a closer look about

what exactly the listeners were in fact listening to, and how they were listening. “ ‘Fan’ is a term that only came into widespread use in the early twentieth century, when mass consumerism, based on new systems of marketing and communications, was transforming the industrial West” (Cavicchi 247). This would lead the way into the Culture Industry planting a firmer stamp onto music.

Popular music in its early use was primarily listened to after a long working day. As Theodor Adorno states in “On Popular Music” it was for “the masses a perpetual busman’s holiday” (71). It was a distraction. Popular music began to grow more as a commodity in the 1900’s. The commodification of listeners [fans] as a form of leisure time was changing. Under capitalist rule, it is no surprise that the music industry would become one of the top commodities in the Culture Industry. As Adorno noted, “listening to popular music is manipulated not only by its promoters but, as it were, by the inherent nature of this music itself, into a system of response mechanism wholly antagonistic to the ideal of individuality in a free, liberal society” (66). This popular, heavily advertised music was planting the notions of freedom, a sense of identity and new distraction from reality. It was “endowing cultural mass production with the halo of free choice or open market ...” (69) Popular music was seen as a manipulation and the fans were being manipulated. Fans were led to believe that this music was giving them their own sense of identity and a personal attachment with the music artists themselves. It was no longer just a distraction for workers.

Donna Alvermann and Margaret Hagood in “Fandom and critical media literacy” write about fandom and the “popular consensus that fandom is a stigma – a label to be attached to adoring audiences that are passive and manipulated by the mass media” (Qtd

in Alvermann, Hagood). Fans listening to this mass-produced music, specifically amongst the younger female generation, latched on to these groups. When the British boy band The Beatles was at the height of their fame, the fans that became obsessed, took their level of fandom in ways history had not seen before: Beatlemania.

Beatlemania, a phrase Andi Lothian, a former Scottish music promoter, claimed to have coined while speaking to a reporter at the Caird Hall Beatles concert, when the Beatles were at their peak of fame³. Teenyboppers, a term coined in the 1960's for "an early adolescent girl" were documented for their animalistic like behavior before, during, and after concerts, and the group members themselves. In the article "15 years of Beatlemania! Has it really been that long?" written in the fanzine *Beatlefan*, author William P. King writes about what it meant to be a fan in the Beatlemania era. "Being a beatlemaniac at that time meant buying anything with The Beatles on it [...] and there was plenty to chose from, especially for the female Beatle Fan" (3). Fans who enjoyed the Beatles often found identification with the music that they had shown affection towards. It was a time in which "romantic ideas of a core individual self were taking hold and, in romantic relationships, [...] the act of loving music often idealized identification with performers, similar to the communion nineteenth-century romance readers often felt with the characters and with authors" (Cavicchi 238).

³ "The girls were beginning to overwhelm us. I saw one of them almost getting to Ringo's drum kit.... It was absolute pandemonium. Girls fainting, screaming wet seats. The whole hall went into some kind of state, almost like collective hypnotism. I'd never seen anything like it." After a bewildered Radio Scotland journalist reportedly asked, "For God's sake, Andi, what's happening?" Lothian confidently responded that "it's only Beatlemania." (50 years of Beatles: Ladies and Gentlemen, Beatlemania!)

King also interviewed a 27 year old about her first experience of listening to the Beatles. When she was 12, she and her friends discovered The Beatles and when they bought a vinyl of their music, she quoted saying, “We’d never even heard of them till then, [...] and yet we started screaming and squealing and jumping around. It was like you KNEW you were suppose to scream. It was like something significant was happening in our lives and we knew it” (3). This identity would come in by going to multiple concerts to the same artist. “Music lovers often began to feel a strong and uniquely charged connection to that performer’s unchanging ‘inner’ self” (Cavicchi 239). Part of the charm of the Beatles was that they were this unchanging self. The Beatles were always an object of desirability. These men were untouchable and unreachable, and desirable. They had a charm unlike any music group at that time. Beatlemanics viewed these artists as unchanging because even if their physical being has changed in any way, the first image or song they had/heard of them when discovering their music was there forever.

Music producers after Beatlemania aimed to reproduce what would now be called boy bands. Transcending from the Beatles, popular groups in the 70’s and 80’s such as The Jackson 5 and New Kids on the block, had similar fame and attributes of Beatlemania but the phenomenon was not to the level that The Beatles achieved. While these groups were boy bands, they were not at the height that The Beatles were because they were not something new in the American music industry. These new boy bands were of different genres and styles, bringing in a more widely diverse fan base that the Beatles would not develop until later in their career.

In the late 1990's a new stream of industry produced boy bands were popping up left and right. Producers in music industry markets were trying to re-create the fangirl frenzy The Beatles had created in the sixties. The Backstreet boys were one of these music industry produced boy bands that had a heavy female fan base. Gayle Wald notes in her article "I Want It That Way: Teenybopper Music and the Girling of Boy Bands" that the Backstreet boys were similar to the Beatles performing " 'girlish' masculinity that [...] (female) fans use, singly and collectively, to negotiate their own fluid gender and sexual desires." This notion of 'girlish' masculinity is the idea that these performers were "playing with the codes of masculinity [...] and playing specifically to and for girls' pleasure" (Wald). This is not to say that these groups were acting effeminately, but rather they were writing songs and performing with the straight female fan in mind. With songs such as "I want it that way," the Backstreet Boys were a 'feminized' group that straight female fans could form these fictional relationships with and fuel their desire to continue to listen to them. A 'feminized' group is a term Wald used to describe artists whose public image and music were catered to straight female fans.

One Direction produces songs with the same intent, having the same 'feminized' masculinity, marketing to their straight female fans. The song "Little Things" by One Direction is about all the flaws a girl might hold about herself and that it does not matter because "all these things you hate about yourself, are things that I love about you." Says co-writer Fiona Bevan. "Every girl in the room feels like this song is literally written for them" (in Mad About The Boy). These songs play on a young girls desire and sexuality, fooling them to believe that these singers know them and are someone they want to be with. However, music goes beyond being 'fooled' and also applies to the girls' knowing

projection of their romantic desires onto the band members, as the band members help them realize what they want in a partner and how they want a partner to view them and talk to them. These girls are not just being fooled, they are using boy bands as a tool for a very specific purpose.

Music holds a lot of social power. Taking the idea of music being a “largely social cement” (Adorno 72) this project rethinks Adorno’s original views and inserts instead that music situates itself within fans and creates a fandom surrounding the music, rather than music being a manipulation built by the culture industry. The meaning that is put to the material from the listeners/fans “attribute to a material, the inherent logic of which is inaccessible to them, is above all a means by which they achieve some physical adjustment to mechanisms of present day-life” (72). With upgrades in technology and the ability to listen to music through electronic devices, fans and fangirls have the ability to take fandom that would only happen at concerts, and have a chance to hold these connections and relationships almost anywhere.

Cult television shows, like music, create a sense of community and identity of between fans. In the sixties, shows like *Doctor Who* and *Star Trek* were the beginnings of cult television. In May of 1976, the ‘The Doctor Who Appreciation Society’ (DWAS) was started in the UK. It is the longest running Doctor Who fan club in the world. (“Home” <http://www.dwasonline.co.uk/>) The fan club offers members a monthly magazine, *Celestial Toyroom*, which itself is the longest running Doctor Who magazine currently in existence. They “regularly offer members access to discounted and signed items of merchandise and there is a discount available at DWAS-organized conventions and social events” (“Home” <http://www.dwasonline.co.uk/>). Television studies scholar

Sharon Ross in her book, *Beyond The Box: Television and Internet*, notes: “Cult television shows historically have been the primary sites around which viewers have participated with the TV text” (12). Cult television shows are shows that have a massive fan following and a culture within the show. A show gets its cult status with a large fan following and continues spreading outside of the fandom. Before the Internet, cult TV had to depend heavily on other fans to come together and start groups and fan clubs, by means of letters and fanzines sent world wide, for information to be distributed. *Star Trek* was a show with a huge fan following that was created before the Internet became a space where fandoms could coordinate and congregate. When the Internet became more accessible worldwide, fandoms of cult TV had a chance to “...demonstrate the incredible range of experiences in tele-participation that can occur when TV and the Internet meet” (Ross 3). When television and Internet met, it was literally a whole new world opening up for fandom. Now other emerging television shows like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Xena: Warrior Princess*, *The X-Files*, and *Lost*, could gain this cult TV status and a wider fan base that could extend worldwide. The Internet is a space to share and explore other realms of fandom that were not just within the show. Fans and fangirls were a collective group of people actively participating in watching, analyzing, and critiquing the show.

Music and television fandom are quite different by how fans are connecting and what exactly a fan or fangirl does in a specific fandom. Music fandom is more a response to the main singers and songs since that is what is presented right away instead of a general plot line that is developed throughout many seasons of a show. Television generally starts as a community that enjoys the plot and premise of the show and the actors come later. However, the connection with music and television fandom, and any

fandom is that both of these fandoms have a group of people or person that they attach themselves too in some form. This attachment then forms a community and this community, whether formed from a music group or television show brings a connection to the people who are in a fandom.

Fangirl is not a dirty word

Females who are fans of *Doctor who* and/or One Direction are usually put into the category of fangirl. The word fangirl has many sexist assumptions. However, how fangirl is used and described can come from a positive or negative standpoint depending on who is using the word. Writings from self identified fangirls, fans, fandom journalists, and actors who played in *Doctor Who* will be analyzed to show how fangirls are often talked about as ‘fans’ of any sort of entertainment and how the complexity of the word fangirl is can change within meaning, but is still acting under fandom.

Wojick writes about *Doctor Who* fandom, mentioning a blog post by L.B Gale titled “In Defense of Doctor Who’s Fangirls” which asks questions surrounding the conversations about *Doctor Who* and who is considered a ‘true fan’. In this case a ‘true fan’ would be geeky men who are deeply invested in the shows elements (time travel, historical information, story developments), while fangirls are just “little girls who were just pornographically enjoying the series because of how good looking Smith and Tennant are.” These assumptions that are made within the *Doctor Who* fandom have increased since the Matt Smith Era, which is the moment when the Doctor suddenly became a young attractive male. Former companion Ace, played by Sophie Aldred, mentioned in the documentary *Who’s Changing – An Adventure In Time With Fans* that having these new attractive doctors would “... certainly explain the sudden influx of

female fans who were excited about the show.” Another former companion Leela, played by Louise Jameson mentions this influx of females saying: “There’s lots more female fans now attending conventions. You know that’s probably to do with just how sexy [the Doctors] have been...” The assumption is that because these doctors are now attractive young men, females are flocking in, which in turn aids the assumptions that all female fans of *Doctor Who* are fangirls who only like the show because of attractive men.

When the new doctor, Peter Capaldi was announced, waves of fans (of all genders but a majority male) were happy because he did not fit the mold of an attractive young doctor. This would presumably remove the fangirls because there would be no room to fit a romantic storyline with the companion. Deborah Stanish notes in her article “Fangirl isn’t a dirty word” the reaction that social media had within this announcement and that fans were “filled with gleeful declarations of how an “old” Doctor will finally drive away the fangirls, and how they couldn’t wait to see the fangirl diaspora because Capaldi wasn’t young and/or hot.”

With the One Direction fandom, the dismissal of fangirls comes with the same assumption: that they are only interested in the boys because of their hair, clothing, bodies, accents, etc. A criticism that is said from outside the fandom is that being a fangirl of One Direction invalidates the intelligence of all fans. Since most One Direction fangirls are assumed to be adolescent females, the level of maturity and acknowledgement of their actions are denounced in demeaning and sexist ways. These ways include belittling, patronizing, and out right bullying these fans and lumping them all together as this one particular type of person that behaves in a way that is

unacceptable. In defense of that popular assumption, Tumblr user Pegginwithstyles made a post titled “A list of things that liking One Direction does not do”:

Liking One Direction does not:

1. Invalidate my intelligence
2. Invalidate my love for other genres of music
3. Invalidate my ability to think critically
4. Invalidate my opinions or my knowledge of facts
5. Make anyone who doesn't like One Direction better or smarter than me in any way

So shut the fuck up about how liking this band makes someone's opinions or knowledge of facts invalid.

The intelligence of an individual based on their fandom is something that fangirls are criticized for by regular ‘fans’ and people outside fandom. Calling them fangirls is used as an attack, only seeing their actions as obsessive. Writer Kade Holloway in her blog post “Fan Girls: What Does It Mean To Be A Fan Girl?” presented her argument in an attempt to sympathize with fangirls saying that “most fan girls are underage, but it's just not right to say that everyone in an age group that is a fan of something is a fan girl [...] who says the description of a fan girl only fits girls?” Throughout her post, she attempted to dismantle the generalizations that female fans are put up against, writing that they should not be treated as underage girls, that not all fangirls behave in a certain manner and that men can obsess over things just as much as any female. Holloway, unfortunately, ends her argument contradicting everything she tried to defend in the beginning of her post. She writes that she once was a fangirl herself at the age of ten and

questions if being a fangirl is just not knowing any better and that “fans don't accept fan girls because fan girls don't accept other fans. It's as simple as that. If you claim to be superior to all the other fans, then you shouldn't expect to be welcomed with open arms by everyone else. This factor makes fan girls a little bit more annoying.” Holloway brings another assumption, which is the idea of a hierarchy on the Internet. Fangirls are dismissed as females who think that they are on the top of an invisible hierarchy of fandom. This invisible hierarchy is where fangirls make themselves the other. Fangirl in that context is used then as a “pejorative term used to Other a whole section of fandom” (Stanish).

Ashley Chervinski, in her ruthless post on *The NewSchool Free Press* titled “Fangirls, Stay Away From Tumblr” mentions this othering claiming that “Tumblr fangirls don't need to stop loving the things they fangirl over. But they need to change how they fangirl over it.” Fangirls are criticized for having otherwise irrelevant reasons for fangirling which takes away from being an actual fan and that “these fangirls aren't fans anymore; it's a race to be the most obsessive, and it isn't genuine or fair to actual fans on the website” (Chervinski). What she means is that the level in which they take this obsession with whatever prime object of fandom (specific actor, band member, ‘ship’) it turns into a manifestation that has nothing to do with the fandom itself, but more with the obsession of one particular object. Chervinski has very specific notions on what it means to properly be in a fandom and act like a fan. She goes on to explain how ‘true’ fans act and that “their obsession is based on what we should be obsessing about — how genuinely good something is, and for them, it's meaningful.”

Writings from people like Holloway and Chervinski feed into the assumptions of how negative being a fangirl can be. What Chervinski and Holloway have the biggest issue with is not simply what fangirls *do*, but rather they have issues with *where* they decide to fangirl and how fandom is therefore represented because of what fangirls are doing in social media.

The word fangirl can be used in a positive way about community and strength. Bianca Reyes, a self-identified fangirl says that a fangirl is “a female who has overstepped the line between healthy fandom and near obsession for a celebrity (most commonly a musician) they hardly know.” In her blog post appropriately titled “The 6 things that you should know about being a fangirl”, she writes about the positive side of being a fangirl and how wonderful it is to be called a fangirl such and how there should be a sense of pride. Her view of being called a fangirl is that it’s an acknowledgement that you participate in communal acts that go toward the fandom community. “Together we [fangirls] make a nationwide community consisting of a massive support group” It can be a time in a person’s life to finally have that sense of belonging with a group of people, to share something that is a huge part of their life. The word fangirl is a term that is often used unapologetically. Wojcik mentions the importance of having fangirls in *Doctor Who* and that the negative assumptions are “a misplaced fantasy about the girl’s proper place in the Whovian universe.”

Radio Presenter Ruth Barnes and author Allison Pearson in their BBC Radio 4 broadcast “Mad About A Boy” discuss past and current teen girl fan culture about musicians. Barnes defends fangirl behavior saying, “I think a lot of this extreme fandom is about finding somewhere to put these unmanaged adolescent feelings.” These

unmanaged feelings are the beginning of puberty, the peak of young girls sexuality. When becoming “mad” about a pop star, the artist is seen as unthreatening, they are seen as someone who will always love you. Pearson says, “even though the boys on the playground don’t want you, you’ll always have [him].” Having these feelings of love, romance, and sexuality is something that is not openly expressed in society. Loving these singers is a way for young girls to publicly express their feelings and their budding sexuality with the love for these men. Finding a connection with these singers (or actors) for the first time these girls’ life, they are finding someone that they could be with for the rest of their life, romantically or otherwise. Fangirls’ interest in the looks and romantic prospects of the objects of their affection is not the superficial endeavor it appears to be, but rather there are merits to fantasy—it is a rite of passage, an expression of developing sexuality, a safe space to come to understand one’s own feelings and relationships.

Barnes and Pearson specifically mention in the broadcast Beatlemania, but it is still in relevance with One Direction that fangirling is an “end to passivity and it’s girls, giving their voice and the screaming is quite liberating and it takes the girl out of everyday mundane life.” Going to concerts in a safe space for these girls to try “out your sexuality as an adult” says Lillian Adams, a Beatlefan reminiscing about her fangirl days as a beatlemanaic, admitting to chasing cars and knocking over policemen to get to these boys. “Its a right of passage.” she says.

Stanish ends her article with a declaration for fangirls to not be ashamed of using that term with a sense of pride.

I’m a fangirl. I’m the mother of fangirls, sister to fangirls and friend to many, many fangirls. I engage in some fandoms very deeply and very thoughtfully, and

some simply because Rupert Graves⁴ is ridiculously hot. I applaud the creativity and enthusiasm that young fans are bringing to this crazy, amazing world and urge them to forge their own paths.

The complexity of how the word fangirl is used amongst self-identified fans, fangirls, and people outside fandom show that the meaning of what a fangirl is should not be simplified to one sexist definition. While self identified fangirls are trying to insert new meanings attached to the view of what a fangirl is and what they do, they are still acting under fandom.

Fandom Labor

As stated throughout, in fandom a person usually gets involved in some way in order to represent fandom individually, or as a community. Writing fanfiction, creating fan art, cosplay (costuming), video production, collecting valuable merchandise, photographs, etc, all of these can be seen as fandom labor. It's important to note that fangirls in music and television fandom are criticized most often for precisely these activities. It is seen as a personal violation, another form of stalking and harassment or unnecessary effort into something for nothing other than personal gain. This part of the policing that happens with fans constituting what constitutes a regular fan and what constitutes a fangirl is simply by what a person *does* in a fandom. Fandom labor is the notion that anyone participating within fandom is not simply acting as a fan or fangirl, but rather acting as part of the larger community that fandom represents.

Fandom labor is the active participation and/or product making created by a fan or fangirl that further represents the fandom as a whole. Fandom is the umbrella term that

⁴ Rupert Graves plays a character on the BBC show *Sherlock*.

includes both fans and fangirls. Fandom scholar Henry Jenkins writes in *Convergence Culture* that this active participation goes beyond enjoying whatever content is given commercially, “writing over it, modding it, amending it, expanding it, adding greater diversity of perspective, and then recirculating it, feeding it back into the mainstream media” (257). Fans and fangirls actively involved in fandom are acting in convergence. Convergence is a term Jenkins coined as the idea that traditional forms of media have a “flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences [fans] who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want” (12).

Fan and fangirls are not always simply satisfied with the information that is given from the mainstream. They are taking what is commercially given and creating new ways to enjoy their fandom. Fandom labor is taking the knowledge and the products that are already given and reworking them in order to learn more and expand upon ideas already present to enhance the experience. These new experiences are the product making, the collecting, and the participation in discussions. The amount of effort that an individual or group puts into a product and then shares on social media, fan forums, or at conventions becomes an act of convergence when mainstream media and producers acknowledge or give fans more encouragement to create these products. It is important to note that fandom labor is unpaid, voluntary work. Producers use this unpaid labor for promotion purposes and to showcase that their show is in fact worth watching. Little work needs to be done as fans and fangirls do most of the work for producers. Fan scholars who are interested in fandom look at the work done within fandom, leaving no separation or

mention of a difference between fan and fangirl labor. It all acts within the ideas of fandom.

Convergence in fandom labor, though similar under the umbrella term of what fandom is, differs from music and television. In television fandom, the labor done usually has a product that is created. These products are tangible and producers can see that this is what their audiences are doing with their show and encourage more participation. Sharon Ross calls participating in television fandom tele-participation. Tele-participation is the “massive amount of information required to ‘get’ the show [...] for reworking the original text [...] through discussion and elaboration” (Ross 13). The Internet is a source to share and gain more knowledge. It is a way that fans can “interact with TV shows beyond the moment of viewing and “outside” of the TV show itself” (Ross 4). Teleparticipation is the idea that the interaction of a television show is now at a moment of time when fans can step ‘outside’ of the show itself. Fans of *Doctor Who* tele-participate by using the information of a particular episode and use what is given to learn more about a historical reference or old science fiction reference that is not explicitly mentioned in the show’s program. *Doctor Who* is a show that is part of what Ross calls obscured participation.

Obscured participation is when the show invites participation because of its complexity. *Doctor Who* is a very complex show that brings in a lot of elements and characters to the overall plot line; there is not just a single clearly defined answer in every episode or in some cases, an entire season. As a response to this, fans participate in discussions about what could possibly be an explanation on what they think the show is saying or what is going to happen next, and what the overall connection is between

episodes. Intentionally or not, producers leaving out information or mentioning references from outside the text, create this drive for fans to interact on a higher level within the show. In “Converging Fan Cultures and the Labors of Fandom,” writer Megan Condis notes this interactive engagement as a chance for “viewers to look for ways to get involved with the text in order to bring it in line with their own needs” (80). This is not to say that labors are just ‘poachers,’ which is a term Jenkins refers to fans who take bites and pieces of a text, and form a meaning behind, tossing aside the rest and making their own interpretation within those bits of information to critique.

Through “informal conversation, be it oral gossiping or online debating [...] they create and explore knowledge through constant readjustments that emerge through negotiations and retellings of stories” (Ross 23). As fans go through these shows and place their own meaning into them, or figure out exactly what the show is saying, other acts of labor come out of this as they figure it out. These other acts of labor happen through that Ross calls organic participation. This is when producers assume people at home are online/talking/being fans and they might thread in ‘prompts’ within the show to aid in their tele-participation. It is “an apparently natural style designed carefully to appear as if the show (or in some cases network) is not “asking” the viewer overtly to extend the text” (8). Acts such as costume designs for cosplay, fan fiction, videos, and other creative process is a response to the organic. This leads into music participatory culture, which operates similarly.

Music participatory culture fits within obscured participation because musicians do ask listeners to participate. While fandom labor within music fandoms are not as complex as in television’s, finding the meanings of songs, going to concerts and learning

more about the artist/s as a whole is the extension from what is just given commercially from a record label. Songs from One Direction are very literal in their meaning. Their songs rarely use metaphoric elements that make the listener question the intent. However, One Direction fans take these songs or sections of songs and expand the meaning, using different songs to reaffirm their point that the artist is singing about what the fans want the song to be about. The labor is then created to learn more about the music and the artists themselves. Music fans watch interviews, watch banters from concerts, read liner notes, and communicate with other fans to find out the meaning of songs and to hear the behind-the-scene stories. With music fandom, there is not always a product that comes out with labor. Finding deeper meaning within the songs, finding out information about the group and personal information, they are becoming 'closer' to these groups. As Reyes says:

This is probably the hardest part about the job. As a fangirl, it is your duty to know your stuff. A fangirl has memorized every possible fun fact about her idol. Some examples are favorite color, favorite restaurant, name of their first pet, cause of death of that pet, names of parents, intermediate family, friends, and neighbors, and most importantly, their birthday. You have it down to a science. You know the month, day, year, day of the week, and time of when your icon was born. In short, a fangirl has her idol's entire Wiki page committed to memory and shows no shame in it. When given the chance, test a fangirl. You'll be shocked at her knowledge!

In music fandom, specifically with Directioners, people outside the fandom labor criticize and shame these fangirls that doing anything else besides listening to the music, going to

the occasional concert, or getting a few merchandise items can be looked at as fangirl behavior. The word labor or participation is no longer used and instead is replaced by ‘stalker’, ‘crazy’, ‘insane’ and so on. What makes music fandom labor in fact *labor* is that fans are putting in the effort and the hours to look up this information, memorizing facts and forming this connection. This simulated relationship is ultimately the ‘product,’ As well as forming a relationship with the music and singers, fans and fangirls will buy and create gifts to throw on stage or give during meet-and-greets as a way to show that the music means something to them but the core of music fandom is the extension of just listening to the music. Labor is going beyond listening to an album, buying mass-produced merchandise or buying a t-shirt at a concert.

In television fandom, specifically with Whovians, things get a bit messy, as they are not just critiqued outside fandom, but also by other fans. These ‘fans’ place certain acts as being a fangirl’s and others as being of a typical fan. Being a regular Doctor Who fan to one fan can mean watching the show every week and regularly attending conventions while being a fangirl is writing fanfiction, having crushes on the doctor, or creating fan art. A regular *Doctor Who* fan or a fangirl can be the opposite of another fan.

In critiquing fandom labor by saying that it just fosters stalking tendencies, over-reaching theories about a show, actor, musician, etc, it dismisses all labor as something superficial and creepy. This ignores the dedicated, intellectual, and collaborative collection of information that fandom labor *does* provide. Fandom labor is not just a stereotyped image of what fangirls do. It is convergent effort. Fandom participation and knowledge collecting is collective intelligence. It is knowledge produced not by just one single person, but rather by a community.

Conclusion

Having fandom labor being both praised and criticized depending on what is done, and who does it, the expression of fandom is not restricted to just one type of labor. As self-identified fangirls Sarah and Jen mention in their article “What’s a ‘real’ Whovian? Female ‘Doctor Who’ fans speak”, “everyone’s expression of enthusiasm about the thing they love should be accepted in geek culture. The Tumblring of photos is just as valid a way to express love of fandom as recitation of fandom trivia.” No matter the labor, be it finding every photo of Harry Styles in a blue beanie, or a collection of Matt Smith photos in the Tardis, it should not denounce or discredit the work that is put into being part of a fandom. Fandoms of shows or musicians are a way for dedicated fans and fangirls to learn about these references and do the research and gain a better understanding of the show or song, as well as any historical or abstract references themselves. Identifying as either a fan or a fangirl is different for every person and there is no real one way to call someone simply a fan or fangirl, because of his or her behavior.

Historically, fans in general of popular cultural texts were dismissed as irrational, emotional loners. Fan studies worked to dispel this stereotype, focusing on how fandom is collective, creative, and collaborative and involves rational critical analysis and thoughtful discussions. In this move to create more thoughtful views of fans/fandom, it was only natural to find another section of fandom to be devalued. Fangirls was this new source of devaluation being that these new set of fans are assumed to only be fueled to participate because of emotion and desire. This devaluation served to solidify power among ‘proper’ fans by giving them an ‘outsider group’ to point out to as ‘improper.’

The digital age gives us access to new information; the perspectives that can be gained about the inner workings within fandom are clearer than ever. Fandom scholars have gone from looking at the listeners/viewer, to the fans, and now looking at a whole new perspective of fandom: fangirls. They now have the privilege of looking in from a fangirls' perspective that is looking at the fan. This new privileged perspective is giving new information about what exactly fans are doing from a side that was not once looked down upon in fandom studies. Getting that new perspective and seeing how much deeper fandom can get is the next step within research.

In part, fandom is being in a diverse community filled with different kinds of people with different ideas. Whether it's YouTube Star Tyler Oakley who declares himself a professional fangirl, or is just a person getting into a fandom for the first time, a fangirl is not an age or a gender or one idea or an action. Being part of a fandom and expressing and participating in certain ways is not to say that they are simply just fangirls or poachers. The perception of what it means to be a fan in today's society is a concept that should be kept neutral. Whether someone is a fan of One Direction, *Doctor Who*, or both, gender, performance, or age should not come into play of their validity of fandom participation.

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