The lamentable status of (queer) children in fandom: On being a fannish pariah

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Abstract:
This autoethnographic paper considers the place of (queer) children in fandom, focusing on fan fiction–centered fan communities. It explores, in particular, the ways in which these communities have been defined and policed by various actors, the fraught relationship between 'the queer' and 'the child,' the legal and ethical problems of children's participation in online fan communities, and the ethical quandary of barring (queer) children from these communities. This paper asks whose rights and imaginations we are privileging and protecting when we exclude (queer) children from fan fiction communities—and whose we are ignoring.

Keywords: adult materials, the child, fan fiction, reception, pornography, protection

> 'What if direction, as the way we face as well as move, is organized rather than casual? We might speak then of collective direction: of ways in which … imagined communities might be 'going in a certain direction,' or facing the same way, such that only some things 'get our attention.' Becoming a member of such a community, then, might also mean following this direction, which could be described as a political requirement that we turn some ways and not others.'
> - Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*

Introduction

This autoethnographic paper addresses 'the availability of comfort for some bodies' in fan fiction communities and the concomitant 'labour ... [and] burden of concealment' for others (Ahmed, 2014, p. 149) by discussing the burden of concealment at the conjunction of age, gender, and sexuality: the burden of concealment placed on sexual and gender minority (SGM)[1] fans under the age of majority. I here argue that the inherently heterosexist protectionist discourses circumscribing and curtailing child sexuality often foreclose (queer)

children's access to and participation in the allegedly welcoming and subversive space of media fandom, even as most previous work theorizing children's participation in fan communities considers these spaces to be important sites of agency, belonging, and identity development. In doing so, I aim both to problematize an uncritically celebratory view of fandom as a welcoming queer space for all participants and to expose the historical and continuing precarity of (queer) children's participation in the online spaces that many – including myself – have previously discussed as valuable sites for identity exploration. Online media fandom is not always an unproblematic, cohesive, and welcoming multigenerational community.

In fact, there have long been tensions between two central views of who participates in fandom – one held largely by scholars who focus on children, the other held largely by feminist media scholars. The first belief is that fandom is a space populated mainly by young people. The second, more pervasive belief is that online fan communities are spaces created by and for adult women, who have been explicitly or implicitly considered to be, in the majority, white, middle-class, educated, adult, western, and cisgender. It is this second view that has dominated fan studies discourses.

This paper discusses the complications that occur when Others who, in the digital age, have infiltrated fan fiction-centered communities supposedly organized around adult womanhood are exposed as 'not belonging,' the identity policing and exclusions that result, and the implications of this for conceptions of fan communities, past, present, and future. While the focus of this paper is at the nexus of age, gender, and sexuality, the implications could be stretched and linked to other minority groups who have expressed burdens of concealment based on race, nationality, language(s) spoken, (dis)ability, and other vectors of oppression. Overall, it seeks to trouble the idea of community at the center of many discussions of fandom, for while networked culture offers many opportunities for 'new forms of participation and collaboration' for some (Jenkins, 2006, p. 245), it also brings with it already extant 'power plays, and [patterns of] ... exclusion and inclusion' (Hellekson, 2018, p. 68). It does so through the discussion and theoretical consideration of my own teenaged banishment from a specific fan fiction community.

My Excommunication: On Being 'Found Out' as a Minor

One unassuming afternoon in the mid-2000s, when I was around fifteen years old, I received an email from the owners of my favorite Harry Potter fan fiction website, on which I was an active reader, writer, and commentator. The email informed me that my account was being terminated because they had discovered that I had been lying about my age – I was, in fact, under eighteen, and therefore not permitted to be a part of the community. (In truth, I had always assumed that the vast majority of us were minors, giddily clicking on the 'Yes, I am over eighteen' buttons of websites, and was quite surprised to learn otherwise.)

A frantic email chain followed in which I pleaded with them not to kick me off the website, making various arguments for what I felt was my right: the right to access, read, and write explicit – and explicitly queer – stories. I was legally allowed to have sex, I said,

emphasizing that I was not American. If I could have sex, I argued, I should be able to read and write about it. Moreover, the stories on the website often involved teenagers having sex, so why couldn't teenage fans read and write the stories? Even commercially published young adult books had sex in them. (Although these were not particularly satisfying accounts, and certainly did not include queer identities and sex. Did they know how hard it was to find information about being queer?) I had been a part of the community for years; surely, they wouldn't kick me out now. Had they no loyalty? Had they no sympathy? Had they never been young themselves?

They repudiated my arguments and blocked me from the website.

The hypocrisy of it all festered into bitterness, and I deleted all my fan accounts.

I became a 'lurker' – a fan who never actively participates in online culture but instead only reads other fans' works.

I never wrote fan fiction again.

Understanding My Desires and My Place

This incident was my first stinging introduction to the real-life consequences of the contradictions and tautologies, in law and in culture, that inform conceptions of childhood sexuality and consent, children's digital and literary lives, the entanglements and schisms between digital and analogue selves, and the controversial relation of the queer to childhood.[2] The transnational, pseudonymous milieu of the early-2000s internet made these contradictions all the more convoluted and navigating (adult) expectations nigh impossible. At the time of the incident, I could not understand how a community of people who appeared to accept childhood sexuality in their fan writings, which often involved fictional characters under eighteen, could also refuse to acknowledge the sexuality of nonfictional children under eighteen, like myself. Nor could I quite grasp how lawmakers had seen fit, in my local context, to make it legal for me to have sex but illegal for me to purchase, loan, or otherwise access explicitly sexual texts – by which I mean those texts which are deemed pornographic as opposed to bland, heterosexist, 'scientific' accounts of procreative intercourse or the flowery, unrealistic romances deemed appropriate for and marketed toward (straight) girls and adult women, which describe sex unrealistically in vague, unappealing language like 'his turgid member' or 'her pulsing heat.' Where, I wondered, was the boundary between 'adult' texts and 'young adult' texts, both of which often depicted fictional teenagers having sex? Where was the boundary between the popular and the pornographic? Who decided what was (in)appropriate reading material? Why did people feel so strongly about what I was reading, and didn't *I* have a right to determine what I wanted to read, what concepts I wished to explore, what knowledge I needed to know?

Like many millennials growing up in a western context, by my early teens, I already knew the mechanics of heterosexual, reproductive sexuality, as well as the dangers of sexual disease and the mainstream modes of protection against both disease and unwanted pregnancy: condoms, the pill, and regular health checks. I knew, too, that everyone 'developed' differently and at different times. I didn't need a stuttering, blushing,

uncomfortable science teacher to remind me of these embodied realities. My questions were different: what did it mean to be 'gay' or 'lesbian' as opposed to 'bisexual' – where was the boundary? What precisely were the differences between 'transsexual,' 'hermaphrodite,' and 'drag queen'?[3] How did sex between two men work beyond mutual masturbation or blow jobs? How did sex between two women work *at all*? How did sex with someone who didn't fall into these binary categories work? How could you gain pleasure from sex? Was it strange to cross-identify with opposite-gendered figures more frequently than to identify with same-gendered figures? Why was being seen as a woman so uncomfortable? Was it normal to feel like your body was wrong for you – and to what degree was it normal? Did I have to fall into the categories I had discovered already, or were there other ways of existing – as neither man nor woman, as neither straight nor gay, as neither ambivalent nor as fluid and fluctuating?

Autoethnography and/as Methodology: Affordances and Limitations

I begin with this personal account because this incident and the concerns linked to it demonstrate an aspect of fandom, and in particular, the communities surrounding fan fiction, that has yet to be adequately addressed. Yes, fandom is beautiful (Coppa, 2014), but it is also itself a space in which norms for participation are created and policed (Hellekson, 2018; Hills, 2002). In my case, I was excluded due to the intersection of my age, the 'adultness' of slash, and possibly my burgeoning SGM identity, which did not fit within the norms of the website community as understood by the fans running the website. It is clear that my presence there clearly made them feel unsafe, awkward, or both, in part because I, a questioning teenager seeking both pleasure and a better understanding of myself and the queer world, did not fit into the exclusively adult, exclusively female community in which they imaged themselves to be.

Moreover, this experience illustrates what to me are essential concerns for the future of fan studies and children's literary studies, both, because it emphasizes how interconnected and important issues of identity can be in the online interpretive communities surrounding children's texts. It demonstrates 'the imagined subjectivities – the different guiding discourses and ideals of subjectivity which are adopted by fans ... – which are linked to cultural systems of value and community' (Hills, 2002, p. 8), as well as how these imagined subjectivities shape the communities in question. It also illustrates how the 'collective direction' (Ahmed, 2006, p. 15) imagined by interpretive fan communities depends on a politics of exclusion (e.g., Hellekson, 2018; Walton, 2018; Wanzo, 2015). This recollection highlights the complicated, at times fraught, relationships between individual fans and the interpretive fan community in responses to reading centering on identity politics. My experience makes very clear the structures of power at play in fan communities, revealing one of many struggles over the validity of readers' interpretations – and who has a right to access and express explicitly queer interpretations.

I have chosen to discuss these matters autoethnographically because as a mode of inquiry, autoethnography allows researchers to make clear their own perspectives, including

their biases, to readers while simultaneously using these as a starting point for critical consideration. As Holman Jones, Adams, and Ellis (2013) argue, emotions and experiences are always central to the research process, whether we choose to acknowledge and center them or not (p. 21). To me, it is Audrey Lorde (2007) who best expresses the value of the personal: 'As they become known to and accepted by us, our feelings and the honest exploration of them become sanctuaries and spawning grounds for the most radical and daring of ideas. They become a safe-house for that difference so necessary to change and the conceptualization of meaningful action' (p. 26). She argues that even as we are 'afraid, because the transformation of silence into language and action is an act of self-revelation, and that always seems fraught with danger' (p. 30), sharing our experiences and truths is essential to countering the 'forms of human blindness' at the root of all prejudice (p. 35). For Lorde (2007), as for many feminists, queer/trans activists, and people of color before and after, the personal is political. It is in the events of everyday life that we can most clearly see the effects of structural bias, such as structural racism or structural heterosexism.

Autoethnography is valuable, Hills (2002) argues, not only because the ''personal is political'' but also because 'it indicates that ... the 'personal is cultural'; our identities are constructed through *relatively homologous* systems of cultural value' (p. 72, emphasis in original). By this, Hills does not mean to suggest that our identities are homologous but rather that they are constructed in relation to the overarching, hegemonic systems of power and discursive structures that shape our individual and communal lives (cf. Foucault, 1977/1995, 1978, 1980). The norms we use to define and understand ourselves and our place within a community are pre-defined for us. As Butler (2004, p. 32) argues,

> The sense of possibility pertaining to me must first be imagined from somewhere else before I can begin to imagine myself. My reflexivity is not only socially mediated, but socially constituted. I cannot be who I am without drawing upon the sociality of norms that precede and exceed me.

This link between the personal, the social, and the political has made autoethnographic modes of inquiry central to many areas of study and theory, including fan studies. Indeed, as a field, fan studies is deeply indebted to feminist theoretical, ontological, and epistemological traditions (see especially Hannell, 2020), whose emphases on lived experience, the subjective, and the personal overlap with other strands of critical thought focusing on resistance from the margins, such as critical race (e.g., Crenshaw, 1994; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Lorde, 2007), disability (e.g., Hall, 2019; Kafer, 2013), queer/trans (e.g., Butler, 1990, 2004, 2011; Sedgwick, 1993; Stockton, 2009; Stryker & Aizura, 2013; Stryker & Whittle, 2006), and critical pedagogical theory (e.g., Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994, 2004). Because these critical-theoretical traditions often focus on counterhegemonic ways of living, they often value autoethnographic, self-reflexive modes of inquiry that intertwine theory and research practice in their focus on subjects and identities as 'uncertain, fluid, open to

interpretation, and able to be revised' (Adams & Jones, 2011, p. 110). They emphasize that we must acknowledge our own situationality, biases, and limitations through self-criticism if our work is to be considered truly objective (Haraway, 1988). Necessarily, then, self-reflexive and autoethnographic accounts resist flattening research by emphasizing the intersecting identities of researchers (Crenshaw, 1994; Weber, 2017). Such ways of looking also champion the political importance of emotions (cf. Lorde, 2007; Ahmed, 2014), a strand of inquiry inflected by what is now termed affect theory and which emphasizes 'how emotions can attach us to the very conditions of our subordination' and show 'that emotions 'matter' for politics; emotions show us how power shapes the very surface of bodies as well as worlds' (Ahmed, 2014, p. 12). The entanglements of intersecting identities, emotions, and the sociopolitical not only demonstrate the intertwined messiness of everyday life and but also highlight the constructedness of the boundaries between academic disciplines. It is because of this 'porousness' and fan scholars' continual 'poaching' of methods and theories from other fields that fan studies is considered an 'undisciplined' discipline (Ford, 2014, p. 14).

Indeed, fan studies is founded on the principle that fans' lives are subcultural, and the founding works within the field wrote back against both academic-authored ethnographies and mass media coverage that stigmatized fans as abnormal, delinquent, immature, and 'deviant' (e.g., Bacon-Smith, 1992; Busse, 2013; Jenkins, 1992/2013; Lewis, 1992; Penley, 1991; Russ, 1985/2014). These founding works also located feminist impulses within fans' works, especially fan fiction, and often took feminist stances toward their subject matter (Click & Scott, 2018; Hannell, 2020; Hellekson & Busse, 2006). As a result of these dual histories – writing against the so-called deviance of fans and writing from and regarding feminism – studies within the field often emphasizes positionality, reflexivity, sympathy, and the subjective (Barnes 2015; Click & Scott, 2018; Click, Gray, Mittell, and Scott 2018; Hills 2012; Hannell, 2020). The self as a starting point for inquiry is therefore not only justified but necessary.

Nonetheless, while autoethnographic and self-reflexive inquiries are increasingly popular, provide many affordances, and can be considered the preferred method of fan studies, I feel that I must address their limitations as a mode of inquiry before I continue. First, there is increased pressure upon researchers within certain fields to include self-reflexive and autoethnographic discussions in their research. While this positively suggests that these once frowned-upon practices are being mainstreamed, it nonetheless places an undue burden on researchers to be discomfited and, perhaps, to reveal parts of themselves that they would otherwise prefer to keep hidden. This discomfiture is both an affordance and a limitation for researchers, for, as Ahmed (2014) emphasizes, discomfort is a 'sense of out-of-place-ness and ... involves an acute awareness of the surface of one's body, which appears *as* surface, when one cannot inhabit the social skin, which is shaped by some bodies, and not others' (p. 148). Discomfort, then, can enforce a distanciation from oneself that can be useful in self-reflexive inquiry; that is, discomfiture can be productive, especially as it allows one to ask oneself *why* one is discomfited, a question that can lead to critical

reflection regarding oneself, an event, a location, or a community. Nonetheless, autoethnographic and self-reflexive modes of inquiry do require, to some extent, that researchers share experiences and aspects of identity that they may be uncomfortable sharing. Unlike research participants, whose identities can be anonymized though pseudonymization, researchers engaging in self-reflexive and autoethnographic work must be open about their identities, and this openness can be problematic in that it may open them up to discrimination or limit their future career opportunities, amongst other possibilities.

Second, there is a very real risk that self-reflexive and autoethnographic modes of inquiry may essentialize identities that are, in fact, fluid (Adams & Holman-Jones, 2011; Emirbayer & Desmond, 2012; McDonald, 2013) and that they may encourage researchers to place themselves within stereotypes, such as those of emotionality. Many autoethnographic accounts gesture towards the intersectional only at a surface level because, as McDonald (2013) argues, 'stating one's social location is central to current approaches to reflexivity, [and] it is often assumed ... that by disclosing one's identity as a women or as a white researcher, the meanings of these categories somehow speak for themselves' (p. 132). Indeed, these categories run the risk of being reified and made out to be stable and fixed rather than fluctuating and fragmented through so-called self-reflexive accounts (McDonald, 2013, pp. 132–133). For example, Nadena Doharty (2020) addresses the 'intellectual bondage' of the figure of the angry Black women, explaining that others' expectation that she address and use her emotions as a part of her research is, in essence, stereotyping. She argues that women, and particularly Black women, 'face controlling images guiding our womanhood and also our emotionality' and that we must engage a 'keen double consciousness' as researchers when deciding whether to include accounts of emotionality and the self in our work (p. 558). Thus, what Adams and Homan Jones (2011) term 'the feminist insistence on historicized, strategic, politicized, and thoroughly lived standpoints' (p. 108) can, at times, also be experienced as problematically forced. As Doharty (2020) argues, while 'only the wearer knows where the shoe pinches,' they may nonetheless feel 'uncertainty ... around expressing emotional vulnerabilities, and ... challenges in deciding how far they should go in being honest about the impact of their experiences,' particularly if they are part of a minoritized, stereotyped group (p. 555). Moreover, members of minoritized groups may be forced into being 'academic translators and interpreters' for the assumed majority readers, and this can be experienced as 'a form of entrapment' (p. 556) or as simply exhausting.

Third, as has been highlighted eloquently by Matt Hills (2002), in fan studies in particular, a reliance on acafannish recollections – that is, the recollections of academic who are themselves fans – has perhaps overly emphasized very specific types of fandom and fan subjectivities. As Hills (2002) argues, this dual-subject lens encourages acafans to emphasize the aspects of fandom, such as criticality and resistance to hegemonic forces, that are valued by academics. This focus results in other aspects of fandom remaining undertheorized, including the aspect of fandom discussed here. I was kicked off my favorite

fan website because my age, and possibly the conjunction of my age and my nascent SGM gender identity, discomfited the website owners. This discomfiture, as well as my distress, confusion, and anger, are a useful starting point for a discussion of 'fantagonism' and the prejudices, elisions, and exclusions that shape fandom as acafans have theorized it: as a space for women, who are implied or explicitly stated to be cisgendered, middle-class, mostly straight, white, able, and educated.[4]

Fourth, it must be stated that I have no crystal ball to the past. My recollection of the event described above may be flawed. This is one of the reasons I have kept the recollection vague, my other major motivation being the protection of the other fans involved, who are unlikely to consent to having their personal data and stories shared as they may not be out of the fan closet or could be prosecuted under local laws intending to protect intellectual property or the innocence of children (McLelland, 2011). I wish to protect the fandom and my fellow fans as much as I wish to advocate for young people's right to their own imaginations.

Autoethnography, like all backward-looking subject-based research, is limited by teleological distance and the refraction of the event through distorting forces such as nostalgia and sociopolitical attachments. For the purposes of this project, however, the accuracy of my account is not terribly significant, for it is how I recall the event in the present that matters most. Whether or not my recollection is precise and detailed rather than vague, the event in question motivates my current research concerns, shaping my emotional, political, and academic interests in childhood reading, queer childhood sexualities and genders, childhood understandings of identity in and through literature, and so forth. These concerns, too, likely shape my recollection of the event.

Fandom and (Non)belonging

While the experience I share above is unlikely to be singular, nor is it likely to be par for the course. Claiming that my experience is one that is widely shared would be disingenuous; I have no data to back up such a claim. However, inferring that other young SGM people's experiences might reverberate with mine is less so (see, e.g., Duggan, 2021; Ledbetter, 2020; McInroy & Craig, 2018; Rose, 2020). My experiences *do* gesture towards a group of fans who have not felt a resonance with the wider fan community because of fundamental, yet oft unacknowledged, differences; fans who may have lurked; fans who may have been actively rejected by a fan community; fans who may never have bothered to try to be a part of communities – in other words, liminal fans, those fans who haunt the edges of and trouble what it means to be 'a fan.' It is for this reason that I feel an impetus to share this experience openly with the acafan community. My research oeuvre would not feel complete if I were to keep it secret, and the affordances of sharing the experience through autoethnographic self-reflection far outweigh the concerns outlined above.

Fans who have been marginalized deserve to have their experiences discussed and theorized; in fact, it is imperative that fan studies broaden its understandings of who fans are rather than relying on stereotypes of the fan that developed out of pre-internet zine

cultures. Marginalized fans may be fans who, like me, are not the 'right' age. They may be male fans who feel they cannot be vocal about their sexualities (e.g., Brennan, 2014; Coleman, 2019). They may be trans fans who feel uncomfortable being 'out' in fan communities that are implied to be made up of ciswomen (e.g., Duggan, 2020, 2021). They may be fans of color who feel the fan community is, in the main, white (e.g., Pande, 2018; Thomas, 2019; Wanzo, 2015). They may be fans who do not have the means to meet up with their peers due to distance or lack of finances (e.g., Hellekson & Busse, 2006). They may not be heterosexual (e.g., Brennan, 2014; Driscoll, 2006a; Russo, 2013, 2018; Willis, 2006). They may live outside of North America (e.g., Chin & Morimoto, 2013; Chin, Punathambekar & Shresthova, 2018; Morimoto, 2018; Pande, 2018). They may not be Anglophone or may not be confident users of English (e.g., Black, 2008; Duggan & Dahl, 2019; Franceschi, 2017).

Many of us, too, are to a degree inside systems of privilege: women who, as media fans, make up the majority of fan communities; adults, who control systems of power and subordinate children; men, who have long held power across most societies; academics, who hold institutional power; those who are both straight and cisgendered; white people, who, within western systems of power, hold privilege based on appearance; Anglophones, who hold power in the many domains in which English is a lingua franca – the list goes on.

As Hannell (2020) argues, fan studies and its modes of inquiry are deeply indebted to feminism. But we must consider who fan studies particular brand of feminism includes and excludes, for various kinds of feminism currently circulate and compete within both the popular and the academic realm (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Both Banet-Weiser (2018) and Phipps (2016) argue that we must consider who is made most and least visible within any given domain. Banet-Weiser (2018) asks us to consider the economics of visibility at play in any arena: whose purposes are being served by making some fans and their practices visible and eliding others? What is at stake? As Phipps (2016) argues, 'All experiences are valid, [but] they are also asymmetrically situated. … They must be understood in relation to dynamics of privilege and marginality' (p. 315). She further argues that we must both recognize and accept our own privilege, and be willing to risk it, if we are to practice a truly emancipatory feminism.

I, certainly, find myself within systems of power. I am white. I am Anglophone. I am North American and live in Europe. I am middle-class. I am educated. I am the child of white, middle-class, educated, successful English parents, and I have benefitted from being a part of these varied and intersecting systems of power. Yet I also have desires across the sexual spectrum. Although assigned female at birth and embodied as female (i.e., I have undergone no surgical interventions), I have a very uncertain, and at times, deeply troubled, relationship to my body and how it tends to be read by others. While I consider myself queer, I nonetheless accept that I in many ways remain a part of the category 'woman' because my body tends to be read that way. Moreover, my appearance and my current partner mean that I am often questioned on the authenticity of my queerness, both by those within the queer community and those who do not consider themselves a part of it. I

am both a second- and a first-generation immigrant. My mother tongue is not the majority language where I live, but it is a privileged language even here. I am not considered to be part of the ethnic majority, although my whiteness gives me privileges other immigrants do not enjoy. In short, I occupy a partially privileged, partially minoritized position. But in the main, I am privileged.

Children in/and Online Fandom

At the time I was forcibly removed from the fan website in question, however, I was a minor. This meant that despite all my privileges, my rights were severely curbed due to my age, for children are afforded only partial and limited rights, including over their own bodies (Archard, 2015; Archard & Macleod, 2005). My being kicked off the website – as well as my being on the website in the first place – was shaped by a number of social and historical forces. As a young person growing up in the early 2000s, I had access to the internet, certainly, but not to the same wealth of information that is readily available today. The internet, I had been told, held only a wealth a *mis*information – nothing posted online could be trusted. I had been taught from a young age, too, to be wary of strangers, to mistrust the stated identities of those whom I met online, and to protect myself by falsifying my own identity and using pseudonyms. This made it easier to operate covertly and to access information and spaces typically closed to people in my age group.

Even today, the internet is characterized by a fight between privacy (often demanded by users) and openness (often demanded by lawmakers). In particular, many of the conversations regarding children and the internet remain the same. These conversations very often relate to children's safety and the need to protect them from sexual exploitation, a very real need which is also often – and unfortunately – conflated with efforts to limit children's access to information and explorations or enactments of their own sexual desires, as well as limiting the imaginations of all internet users, whether they are above or below the age of majority (Archard, 2015; Levine, 2002; McLelland, 2011). Livingston (2012) writes that particularly as relates to sexualized content, 'risk' and 'harm' are often conflated. But, she cautions, ''Risk' is not the same as 'harm.' ... Risk may have positive as well as negative outcomes' (Livingston, 2012, n.p.). Moreover, as McLelland (2011) argues, in many countries, 'existing legislation targets not only a small coterie of adult paedophiles dealing in representations of actual children, but also ... [those] whose activities involve the consumption, creation and dissemination of representations of fictional 'under-age' characters' (p. 469), whether or not the communities creating and sharing those depictions include minors. He persuasively argues that many fan fiction communities are 'youth oriented' and that it therefore cannot be unexpected that young people under eighteen would be interested 'in sexualized representations of characters who are or might 'appear to be' under 18': 'The point that needs stressing here is that ... it is *young people themselves* who create, disseminate and consume the majority of *fictional* representations that could be classed as 'child-abuse material'' (pp. 469–470).

While historical, analogue fan fiction communities have been theorized to have been created 'by women, for women, with love' (Russ, 1985/2014), the advent of the internet brought with it a diversification of fan communities (Hellekson & Busse, 2006; Jenkins, 2006; Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013). As Jenkins (2006, p. 178) has argued, one group which has become increasingly active is children, in large part due to the popularity of *Harry Potter.* This increasing presence of children in online fan spaces is discussed by Jenkins (2006) as positive, particularly as regards literacy. In this regard, he characterizes the relationships between adult and child fans in utopic terms, as mentorships, in which adults have 'gone to extraordinary lengths to provide informal instruction to newer writers' (p. 179). According to Jenkins (2006), adult fans view themselves as 'den mothers' who encourage emerging young writers by offering 'scaffolding' and support (p. 178). As such, he envisions the Harry Potter fandom as a space of 'empowerment' for young people, who often feel otherwise disenfranchised (p. 183). He argues that children are not 'passive victims of … regulation and restraint' but are 'active participants in these new media landscapes,' in which 'conversations … occur across generations' (Jenkins, 2006, p. 205).

Other scholars, however, discuss the cross-generationality of the Potter fandom as both beneficial and problematic. Cathereine Tosenberger (2014), for example, argues that 'there was a great deal of friction in the early years between older media fans ... and newer so-called 'feral' fans' (p. 9). Nonetheless, Tosenberger (2014), too, focuses on the positive sides of cross-generational spaces, arguing that youth-authored fan texts have 'considerable potential to unsettle adult gatekeeping' (p. 17) rather than focusing on the frictions between adults and children. She frames fan fiction as enabling 'young readers to speak for themselves: to talk back to the narratives given to them and develop aesthetic forms and traditions to suit themselves, outside of the direct control of adults' (p. 22).

However, children – particularly the youngest ones – nonetheless remain absent from most accounts of digital fandom. They are an 'assumed but understudied' group (Walton, 2018, p. 235). As Hunting (2019) argues, this is in part due to the ethical and regulatory difficulties of working with children (and their guardians) and in part due to the ways in which we in fan studies have defined participatory fandom. It is also due to the strong history, in fan studies, of repudiating charges of immaturity, juvenility, and childishness (e.g., Busse, 2013). Where minors do appear, it is usually in accounts that describe fandom as a positive space of literacy development and learning (e.g., Black, 2008; Bond & Michelson, 2008; Jenkins, 2006) rather than in conjunction with explicit sexuality. Where the latter topics are discussed, they tend either to be explored at a distance – achieved either through widescale, anonymized social sciences work (e.g., McInroy & Craig, 2018) or through a focus on theoretical discussion (e.g., Tosenberger, 2008a, 2008b, 2014). Some exceptions to distanced explorations come from countries where minors' sexuality is less subject to intense scrutiny and hostility than in Anglophone countries (Archard, 2015; Levine, 2002), such as Sweden (e.g., Wikström & Olin-Scheller, 2011). Closer studies of minors' engagements with fan fiction may also, like this autoethnographic study, discuss the past practices of fans who are now above the age of majority (e.g., Duggan, 2017, 2021).

However, most accounts of young people's participation in digital fandom are heavily sanitized. As such, and while it is certainly true that many young fans enjoy friendships and mentorships with older fans – or, more likely, have positive and negative relations across age groups – the 'frictions,' to borrow terminology from Tosenberger, between adult and child fans ought also to be addressed. As I have suggested, these frictions often revolve around sexually explicit fan fiction, particularly the popular queer genres of slash and femslash. The reasons for this are deeply entangled with western ideologies regarding childhood innocence.

The (Queer) Child and Innocence

The constructed category of the child, as we know it today, is more complex than it at first appears. Largely theorized to have first appeared during the Industrial Revolution, the modern figure 'the child' is caught up in multiple contradictions and paradoxes. While the concept of childhood varies between times, places, and cultures, the figure of the child in the modern-day western context assumes children to be 'vulnerable, susceptible, and [in need of protection] from manipulation' (Hunt, 2005, p. 2). These assumptions are based largely on Rousseau's, Locke's, and the Romantic poets' conceptualization of childhood innocence and of children's being born as *tabula rasa* (clean slates), which gained traction during the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Bruhm & Hurley, 2004; Hunt, 2009; Jenkins, 1998; Levine, 2002; Rose, 1984; West, 2004). As Phillippe Ariès (1998) documents, prior to this, children were most often considered to be immodest, course, sexual beings with little impulse control. In many western contexts prior to Rousseau, Locke, and the Romantics, children were conceived as born sinful and in need of discipline to become good adult citizens (Levine, 2002). Indeed, throughout most of human history, children have participated fully in cultural and economic life and were not considered in need of any special protections – children worked, were only educated if they were a part of the upper classes, and often died before reaching adulthood (Jenkins, 1998; Levine, 2002). As Jenkins (1998) argues, 'Like all myths, the innocent child has a history. In fact, one reason it can carry so many contradictory meanings is that our modern child is a palimpsest of ideas from different historical periods' (p. 15).

This universalized, utopic, and flattening notion of the child as innocent suggests that all children are equal, that childhood is 'a natural, fixed category [of] ... innocent Others [who are] decisively prelapsarian' (O'Sullivan, 2004, p. 14). However, the innocence ascribed to children has historically been most associated with a very specific set of children. It is therefore considered also to be a troubled descriptor, for innocence is a privilege granted to some children (usually white, middle or upper class, presumed straight and cisgender children) more than others (e.g., those who are raced or who belong to the lower classes) (e.g., Bernstein, 2011; Jenkins, 1998; Nel, 2018). Resultantly, most critics of childhood and children's media and culture consider childhood innocence to be a cultural construct stemming from adult nostalgia and political desires (Hunt, 2009; Jenkins, 1998; Rose, 1984). Nonetheless, the presumption of childhood innocence has some very real effects for both

children and adults. The nostalgic appeal of children is directly related to their presumed innocence and their futurity – it is through children that the future of a culture or nation are seen as able to be shaped (Jenkins, 1998). This makes childhood – including all products produced for children – a political battleground rife with tensions and tautologies.

One of the underlying tautologies subsumed within the notion of childhood innocence of particular importance to this reflection is the presumption of children's sexual innocence. The concept that sex is harmful to children is relatively new, having developed mainly in the nineteenth century (Levine, 2002), but it is a concept that has gained force over time. Nonetheless, sexuality is the Schrodinger's cat of childhood: children are presumed to be both asexual and heterosexual simultaneously. As both Stockton (2008) and Pugh (2011) discuss, although children are assumed to be sexually innocent, they are also presumed to have a limited, latent, childly sort of heterosexuality which will, eventually, bloom into a normative, monogamous relationship resulting in procreation. This 'recalcitrant ideological conflict ..., in which innocence and heterosexuality clash and conjointly subvert its [the presumption of childhood innocence's] foundations,' makes heterosexuality a futural and 'spectral' presence in childhood (Pugh, 2011, p. 1) – and shows innocence to be 'queerer than we ever thought it could be' (Stockton, 2008, p. 5). The narrative of growth assumes both that children will not develop sexually until a certain, appropriate point (Stockton, 2008, p. 6) and assigns to the individual a teleological progression, resulting in a straightforward knowing of sexuality and place within the social order, that does not, in fact, exist even in adulthood.

Nonetheless, the image of the child as blank and innocent has very real effects on real children and on adults interactions with children (Fischel, 2016). Few would deny that child sexual abuse is a very real problem; however, the legal and social protection of children also means that 'almost all representations that acknowledge children's sexuality are subject to legal sanctions' (Jenkins, 1998, p. 24). Levine (2002) argues that 'a sentimental, sometimes cynical, politics of childhood protectionism ... now dominates the ways we think and act about child sexuality' (p. xxi). But child protectionism is a double-edged sword. We try to sanitize childhoods, removing mentions of sex, but this very act makes children more vulnerable to predation, both as children absorb the knowledge that sex is not something to be talked about and as they lack the space and knowledge to determine their sexual rights and freedoms – including freedom from unwanted touching (Levine, 2002). Sexual knowledge, adults often argue, must come at the right time and must be delivered in the right way from the right people (Levine, 2002). Moreover, adults punish children who flout the rules, treating their curiosity about their own and others' bodies as abnormal, and this forces children to seek out knowledge in strange places and to hide their sources of knowledge. The stereotype of pornographic magazines and romance novels tucked under mattresses and into textbooks is a direct result of adult attempts to keep children innocent – and their inevitable failure to do so. For while adults may desire that children remain sexually pure, children share a 'curiosity about bodies and pleasure' and a

'desire to make stories that are not the colonizing narratives of heteronormativity' (Bruhm & Hurley, 2004, p. xxi).

The contradictions of presumptive childhood innocence are easily revealed through, for example, the variance in ages of consent throughout even the western world and the ways in which these ages clash with other child-protective laws, such as laws regarding child pornography (Fischel, 2016; McClellan, 2011; Waites, 2005). As Stockton (2008) argues, 'The child is ... defined as a kind of legal strangeness. It is a body said to need protections more than freedoms. And it is a creature who cannot consent to its sexual pleasure, or divorce its parents, or design its education – at least not by law' (p. 16). In some countries, young people are seen as able to consent at twelve, while in others, they are not considered able to do so until they are in their twenties. We assume that children cannot consent to sexual contact and do not seek it out: 'The grammar of the future anterior remains firmly in place: regardless of what the child feels at the time, he or she will have been traumatized' (Bruhm & Hurley, 2004, p. xxv). Attitudes towards sexual education, too, differ between western countries (Archard, 2015; Levine, 2002). Yet because the age of consent to sexual contact almost always differs from the age at which an individual is considered able to consent to appear in sexualized images, children are often caught in a legal catch-22. The sixteen-year-old recipient of a nude image from a sexual partner who is fifteen can be subject to prosecution, even if the sixteen-year-old did not solicit the image and even if both are considered able to consent to be in a sexual relationship. The very laws that are intended to protect children can also contradictorily ensnare and punish them (Fischel, 2016; Levine, 2002; McLelland, 2011; Waites, 2005).

What is more, if the relationship between childhood and innocence/heterosexuality is fraught, the relationship between childhood and nonheteronormative ways of being is even more so. While heterosexual impulses regularly make their way into children's media, so too do queer impulses such as crossgendered play and homosociality, or close and enduring same-sex friendships (Pugh, 2011; Sedgwick, 1992). As Pugh (2011) argues, 'Playful disgust for and teasing suspicion of the opposite sex, often introduced jokingly ... , become some of children's first lessons in heterosexuality' while simultaneously undermining it (p. 5). These impulses often stem from nineteenth-century narratives, in which close homosocial relations and even homosexual experimentation were sanctioned so long as they did not prevent eventual marriage and procreation (Sedgwick, 1992). Despite this, desires and expressions of identity that go against heteronormative sexuality and gender performance are often ridiculed in children's media, emphasizing that children ought not to traverse heteronormative boundaries (Pugh, 2011, p. 8). Moreover, adult figures in children's fiction whose subtextual sexualities are hinted to be queer often carry with them a whiff of possible perversion and danger to the child (Pugh, 2011, ch. 4; Stockton, 2008). Queerness and children thus enjoy an even more fraught relationship than children and heteronormativity, as queerness and queer adults are often figured as posing a particular threat to the child (Bruhm & Hurley, 2004; Fischel, 2016; Stockton, 2008; Waites, 2005). Even when homosexuality began to be decriminalized, the ages of consent for same-sex acts

remained higher (Waites, 2005). Thus, even while 'childhood erotics – and their specifically queer engagements – underlie so much of the world (Bruhm & Hurley, 2004, p. xx), queer children remain figures of discontent (Stockton, 2008).

Witch Hunts and Strikethroughs: Persecuting 'Obscene' and 'Vulgar' Fans, 'Protecting Children from Online Pornography'

There are very good reasons that adult fans would be discomfited by minors in their midst, for children's presumed innocence has long been used as a way to punish and expunge fan communities. As McLelland (2011) argues, 'slash fan communities are particularly vulnerable to the intrusion of legislation based upon ... 'child-abuse publication' concerns' (p. 475). In an unpublished manuscript exploring the concept of consent in and around fan fiction, Driscoll (2006b) discusses some of the history of 'cease and desist' letters sent to many Harry Potter fan fiction writers and communities, which explicitly name the 'very real risk that *impressionable children*, who of course comprise the principal readership of the Harry Potter books, will be directed ... to your sexually explicit website' (p. 1, my emphasis). These letters also suggest that warnings about sexual content will only 'entice teenagers' – assumed to be incapable of making judgements based on anything but libido – to enter the websites (Driscoll, 2006b, p. 1). Indeed, the infamous LiveJournal Strikethrough of 2007 (and a number of other events like it, both before and since), in which fans' accounts and transformative works were deleted without warning by website owners, 'was prompted by threat of legal action against the site's administrators launched by, among others, a right-wing Christian group, Warriors for Innocence, who accused the site of harboring material that promoted 'rape, incest and pedophilia'' (McLelland, 2011, p. 475).

Adult fans' fears are not unjustified, then. Slash fandom – that is, the communities in which homoerotic fan fiction and art are produced and read – has a very real history of persecution not only by academics and in the press but by website and content owners (Driscoll, 2006b; McLelland, 2011). As Jenkins (2006) has documented, many website owners have run afoul of Warner Brothers over their use of materials relating to the Harry Potter franchise. Indeed, Warner Brothers and J. K. Rowling have sent out cease and desist letters to website owners in the past regarding explicit fan fiction, and through her publisher, Rowling has expressed concern that 'young children' may 'stumble on Harry Potter in an x-rated story' (Waters, 2004; see also Driscoll, 2006b). The Warner Brothers studio explicitly states, 'We at the Warner Group require that you do not post e-mails or submit to or publish through Forums or otherwise make available on this Site any content, or act in a way, which in our opinion ... is obscene or vulgar, pornographic, ... or offensive' or that may 'harm children by exposing them to inappropriate content' (Warner Brothers, n.d.). LiveJournal and Fanfiction.net were unsafe spaces from which many fans were ejected for posting explicit content throughout the mid-2000s and 2010s (De Kosnik, 2016; Driscoll, 2006b; McLelland, 2011). More recently, Tumblr, which had previously been envisioned as a queer and fan safe space, changed its policies, banning all 'adult' content due to an

allegation that child pornography was published by blog users (De Kosnik, 2019), as well as fears over children accessing explicit content. Fears over the 'harm' to children of seeing anything remotely sexual have caused a number of states, including the British government, to float the possibility of an age-verification system for accessing websites deemed to be explicit, with large fines for any websites that did not block those under sixteen from accessing explicit content, due to a belief that children need to be protected from 'age-inappropriate or harmful content,' which they later label more clearly as 'pornography' (Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, 2020):

> Under our proposals we expect companies to use a proportionate range of tools including age assurance, and age verification technologies to prevent children from accessing age-inappropriate content.... This would achieve our objective of protecting children from online pornography.

It is not surprising, then, that adult fans may feel wary of or threatened by the presence of (queer) minors in their fannish communities.

Let us return, then, to my story about being kicked off my favorite Harry Potter fan fiction website, a website which trafficked mainly in sexually explicit queer narratives. The paradoxical politics behind this move by the website owners is likely beginning to become clear: writing about fictional queer children to appease their own adult desires was not considered to cross a boundary, for no real children were involved, but being suddenly confronted with a *real* queer child threatened the clear distinction between safe adult fantasy and an unstable, insecure reality. The whiff of playful deviance, enjoyable in their fan fiction, suddenly became an unbearable stink of potential pedophilia. The topics covered in their fan fiction were no longer playful but very real. The queer child, whom the community had rescued from its subtextual prison and freed to romp the digital archives, was suddenly flesh and blood, bringing with it the faint sound of angry crowds shouting 'corruption' and the specter legal consequences (Driscoll, 2006b; McLelland, 2011). Hypocrisy was pushed aside in the name of protection, both of themselves (legally) and of me, the corruptible child (who had long ago discovered and happily continued down the path of corruption by choice – quite probably in middle finger–waving spite of their attempts at 'protection').

This underscores the ways in which institutional control operates and undermines arguments that fandom is a space in which adults and children operate side by side as equals, although I do not wish to claim that fandom *cannot* operate so. Rather, it exposes that some adults are happy to include children in fandom *if and when* those children look up to them (e.g., as 'den mothers' [Jenkins, 2006, p. 178]) and *if and when* those children's activities are perceived as wholesome and educational (e.g., when children use fandom as a space for sanitized, innocent literacy development [cf. Black, 2008; Bond & Michelson, 2008; Jenkins, 2006]). However, they are rarely willing to admit children into fandom if and when children's presence might endanger the overall fannish community – for while adults'

predilection for explicit homoerotic fan fiction may be tolerated, children's is far less likely to be. Even though (queer) children's reading and writing queer fan fiction may be educational and, better yet, reparative (e.g., Duggan, 2021; Ledbetter, 2020; McInroy & Craig, 2018; Rose, 2020; Willis, 2006), that they may perceive sex to be pleasurable undermines hegemonic educational, social, and political systems designed to minimize the conjunction of pleasure and sex in childhood and to encourage children to take part in heteronormative sex in the future (but not the present).

The decision to actively exclude minors from fan spaces and the politics surrounding such a decision does throw a wrench in the repeated history of adult–child fan patronage touted by some scholars, however, as well as in the suggestion that fandom allows children a space in which to act autonomously and even subversively (e.g., Jenkins, 2006; Tosenberger, 2014). The truth is, as Jenkins (1998) has acknowledged, 'children's culture is not the result of purely top-down forces of ideological and institutional control, nor is it a free space of individual expression' (p. 4). Some children are able to find their freedom in digital fandom, while for others, fannish interactions brutally reify the institutional constrictions to which they are subject. Many queer children find self-affirmation in fandom, but others, like myself, find only the affirmation that their desires and very existence are 'wrong,' threatening, or dangerous.

Moments such as my own expulsion from fandom invite us to contemplate forces of oppression and exclusion within fandom. Indeed, oppression and exclusion have begun to be considered more widely over the past decade, particularly as regards racism in fandom (see especially De Kosnik & carrington, 2019; Thomas, 2019; Wanzo, 2015). The gatekeeping practices of fan communities have not disappeared as fandom has moved online and are often discriminatory or 'hostile,' particularly towards 'fans or characters that are traditionally Othered or marginalized' (Walton, 2018, p. 239). Brennan (2014), Hills (2002), and Walton (2018), amongst others, have discussed marginalization, ostracism, and gatekeeping in fandom, including discussing how those who find themselves to be in the majority within the fandom space – the stereotypical fans discussed above – may dismiss nonmajority fans and their perspectives. Importantly for fan studies as a field, these gatekeeping practices demonstrate how fan fiction communities' reputation as being spaces for adult, middle-class, straight, women is maintained through processes of exclusion and elision and may not be as bottom-up as they at first appear (Hellekson, 2018). There are expectations that the imagined fannish community go 'in a certain direction,' face 'the same way,' and our participation may depend on the 'political requirement that we turn some ways and not others' (Ahmed, 2006, p. 15). Those who do not fit in often become lurkers, leave, or are forced out (e.g., Thomas, 2019).

It must be admitted that my experience of this event, which I felt abrupt and unjust, was inflected by my various privileges. At fourteen, as a white, middle-class Anglophone, I was unused to being told I did not belong. There are certainly other populations who have been forcibly ejected from communities more regularly and whose differences are readily and regularly revealed and punished, such as fans of color (Thomas, 2019; Wanzo, 2015).

Fan-on-fan hostility is often based on perceived difference (Walton, 2018), and more hostility may be expressed depending on the differences in question. The experience did bring home to me how careful I needed to be as someone with a nascent SGM identity, teaching me that queerness, particularly in the young, will often be perceived as a threat. It made it clear to me, too, that youth was a liability. It made clear to me that I was not welcome in the fannish community, which for all its pretensions of openness, was more conservative than I had realized. I was unsure how much of this related to my age and how much to my queer leanings, because even then, I recognized that the conjunction of these two aspects of my identity were particularly threatening to the adults controlling the website in question. As Jenkins (1998) argues, the 'essentialized conception of the innocent child frees it of the taint of adult sexuality, even as we use it to police adult sexuality, and even as we use the threat of adult sexuality to regulate children's bodies' (p. 15).

The emotions evoked by the experience, too, made evident to me my own politics, based on inclusion and solidarity between disenfranchised groups, as raw and real. My anger and 'taken-abackness' at being forced to leave a community I thought of as 'mine' brought home to me how estrangement and inclusion shape the contours of our lives. The event therefore brought home to me how 'the availability of comfort for some bodies may depend on the labour of others, and the burden of concealment' (Ahmed, 2014, p. 149). Ahmed (2014) argues that 'attention to emotions allows us to address the question of how subjects become *invested* in particular structures' (p. 12, emphasis in original), including structural discrimination. The event I describe at the beginning of this piece has, through time, become an emotional touchstone in my belief that all 'isms' – racism, sexism, heterosexism, etc. – are based on an 'inability to recognize the notion of difference as a dynamic force, one which is enriching rather than threatening to the defined self, when there are shared goals' (Lorde, 1984, p. 35).

Conclusions

I have here argued that the view of fandom as a space open to children is overly optimistic. The figure of the child poses a particular threat to adult fans, and as a result, they are likely only to welcome young fans into their communities if and when those young fans fulfill certain requirements and limit themselves to some spaces and certain types of relationships. Moreover, acafans are likely to continue to leave children out of their descriptions of fandom in an effort to protect fans and fan spaces from increased surveillance carried out in the name of child protection. While I recognize that an autoethnographic, self-reflexive account cannot be generalized, the events exposed here are likely to have applied, and to continue to apply, to other adult fan–child fan relations. Although adults may hope that children do not understand the sexuality that infuses our culture, I must echo Hunt (2009): While 'censorship tends to characterize children as impressionable and simple-minded, unable to take a balanced view of, for example, sexual or racial issues[,] ... the notion that children somehow, like shellfish, live among unsavoury

things, but filter them out, and subsist in a pure, innocent state, is wishful thinking' (pp. 6, 16).

For those minors who are seeking to ask and answer questions in addition to seeking pleasure through fandom (Duggan, 2021; McInroy & Craig, 2018), as I was, adult fans' fear of our sexualities and/or gender expressions is *harmful*. Being excluded from online queer praxis tells minors that there are questions we should not have and desires we should hide. While Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington (2007) argue that 'perhaps the most important contribution of contemporary research into fan audiences ... lies in furthering our understanding of how we form emotional bonds with ourselves and others in a modern, mediated world' (p. 10), I feel the opposite is also true – it is important that we consider how bonds between fans are broken, perhaps violently, and what such breaks mean.

McLelland (2011) asks, 'How might the rights of young people to explore issues of sexuality in an online fantasy setting be protected in the face of the compelling need to support initiatives that reduce harm to actual children?' (p. 480) I don't know that there is a satisfactory answer to this question. However, it should be clear that slash and otherwise sexual fan fiction is often *sought out* by SGM young people, who have few other arenas to learn about intimacy or to imagine people like themselves being intimate (Duggan, 2021; Ledbetter, 2020; McInroy & Craig, 2018; Rose, 2020; Willis, 2006). More importantly, it should be clear from this and other accounts that these young people do not experience their encounters with slash as harmful, in the main, but as *reparative* (Willis, 2006) and sometimes as important in the process of becoming SGM subjects (e.g., Duggan, 2021; McInroy & Craig, 2018). I wish I could say the same of their encounters with adult fans.

As Ahmed (2014) argues, however, moments of estrangement and discomfort are not without affordances, as 'the 'not-fitting' or discomfort opens up possibilities, an opening up which can be difficult and exciting' (p. 154). For me, the moment of being kicked out of 'my' fan community opened my eyes to the limitations of youth and the marginality of being queer. Reflection on this moment in adulthood makes me skeptical to claims that fan fiction communities are mainly composed of a particular group of people, as there are likely many groups of fans who conceal themselves from the view of the majority or who, like me, were forcibly ejected. We need to consider these sides of fandom more closely as we move forward as a field.

Acknowledgements:

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Notes:

[1] I also use 'queer' as a synonym for SGM in this paper.

[2] I use 'children,' 'childhood,' and 'minors' throughout to refer to those people who, by virtue of their age alone, are refused full rights, citizenship, and participation in society.

[3] I here use the terminology I had available to me at that time rather than the terminology that is now available to me, i.e., 'transgender,' 'intersex,' etc. I feel it is important that my teenaged ignorance be transparent to readers.

[4] See in particular Wanzo (2015) for a critique of which kinds of fans are made (in)visible by acafannish discourses.