THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH

"But They're Gay Though": How LGBTQ+ Audiences Are Queering Contemporary Drama

A PhD Thesis
By Alexandria D. Davenport

I, Alexandria Douglas Davenport, certify that this PhD thesis is my own independent work. All data was gathered and analysed by myself, without assistance from anyone else. No work contained in this thesis has been published in any other format. All work referenced in this thesis that is not my own has been properly cited and listed throughout the body of the thesis and in the references.

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ABSTRACT

Previous research and the existing literature on LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Transgender, Queer) representation in the media has neglected to examine how LGBTQ+ audiences are actively queering media in order to fill gaps in representation and to find relatable characters and experiences in the media they consume. While we have seen a rise in research looking at increased representation, especially on television, and the online presence of fans, including LGBTQ+ audiences and their reactions to media representation, and the results of queering media (or "messing up" media for their own purposes), we have failed to see a rise in research examining how audiences react to this lack of representation and how they come to queering. My contribution to the literature provides empirical evidence of how people are actively queering media. This study uses purposive snowball sampling to gather participants, and the combined methodologies of participant observation and in depth semi-structured interviews, which were carried out in Edinburgh, Brighton, and London from 2014 to 2016. The resulting thesis argues that LGBTQ+ audiences are queering contemporary drama to address a lack of representation and for their own personal enjoyment. We can understand their queering practises take the form of careers that progress through time, many of them reflecting major life changes and life stages, starting in adolescence and discovering their sexualities and gender identities, changing as they go away to university, and then again when they start or settle into adulthood. Their queering practices are done according to personal ethical guidelines, which prohibit practices they find taboo, but also maintaining intersectionality in representation and queering. Their practices are also emotional; allowing them to explore their identities and interpersonal relationships, as well as examine emotional events in their lives; this is not reflective of the previous assumption that fans are crazed, but that they

experience a range of everyday emotions. Finally, they expand the domains of queering to expand representation beyond dyadic relationships, which dominate LGBTQ+ representation in the media, to include more romantic and sexual orientations such as aromatic, asexual, and polyamorous, as well as trans and non-binary identities. This study points to the need for continued research in this area to fully understand how and why LGBTQ+ audiences are queering media, and the need to broaden the exploration of queering outside of urban centres in the UK, and across all backgrounds and age groups.

LAY ABSTRACT

The following thesis examines for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and other queer minority identifying (LGBTQ+) people are changing, or queering, contemporary drama to expand upon representation. The data collection took place in Edinburgh, Brighton and London from 2014 to 2016. This involved watching television with participants and interviewing them to get their thoughts on how they manipulate contemporary drama to fill gaps in representation. This research contributes to the existing literature about the consumption and queering of contemporary drama by LGBTQ+ audiences. This thesis also points to a continuing need for further research into the findings presented across broad demographic groups within and outwith the UK.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

While queering media has been a passion of mine, the subject was not my initial research topic for this PhD thesis. In fact, queering media is something I have been involved with, but I never saw it as one of my future fields of expertise. This was partially because I saw it as a hobby, and not something of academic interest. Much like my participants, it felt like something that was only brought up in certain circles and not of mainstream interest. I first learned of the practice of queering media in an Introduction to LGBTQ+ Studies course while finishing my undergraduate. I elected to take the course, not to fulfil any academic requirement, but because at the time I was seeing LGBTQ+ studies becoming more mainstream at the university level and this allowed me to learn more in a less suspect manner while I was not out, professionally or in my personal life. The task for the course was simple: find a piece of media and queer it. I used *Tintin in Tibet* by Hergé, in which Tintin goes on a dangerous journey to find his missing friend Chang. Throughout the story, Tintin fears Chang is dead and he will never find him. When he finally does find Chang alive in a cave, he embraces him, and they are both relieved. As *Tintin* is a graphic novel, the visual format leant weight to this act of queering. While seemingly insignificant at the time, it opened my eyes to the practices of queering media and my interest only grew from there. This course, and leaning about queer theory, set me on the academic path I am on today.

After finishing my Master's degree, I wanted to continue my academic career by focusing on the overlap between sociology and LGBTQ+ studies. This led me to submit a proposal on talking to LGBTQ+ audiences about their opinions on LGBTQ+ representation in popular media. However, through the process of planning and carrying out this PhD, it became clear that there was a real gap in the literature when it came to

queering media; and due to my involvement and connection with people who were also interested, I had a unique opportunity to conduct a project on the topic, as a PhD thesis. Around the start of this project, I had recently become involved with a group of people who were meeting to discuss popular fiction, and as part of that, their practices of queering. While this group started as an offshoot of a local LGBTQ+ student group, it became important to my research.

Origins of the Research Project

I knew my desire was to focus on LGBTQ+ people and their media representation. My project changed when I mentioned my interested in queering media. Then my passion for it became clear. I was lucky in being able to combine these and turn it into a PhD thesis. Like a lot of research, it was simply a matter of all of the pieces falling together at the right time, a stroke of luck, and being around the right people in my institution to make this project work. My original project of discussing representation with LGBTQ+ people morphed into this project, but the background of looking at representation remained important, which will be evident throughout this thesis.

Adding to my luck was my specific connections in the UK. As an international student, I arrived not knowing anyone, and my search for common interests with other students gave me an in to this research topic that I could not have predicted when deciding to pursue my PhD at Edinburgh.

Important Terminology

A large obstacle to this research is the terminology used in fandom studies. My participants and myself use it frequently, and when said in front of people who do not use

it, it can seem like another language. There is also a lot of slang terminology in LGBTQ+ groups and communities that can also seem like another language if people are not familiar. For this reason, I have created a glossary of terms and added it to this thesis as an appendix, but I will define key terms in this introduction to make things clear before moving forward. I will also define some key terms again in the literature review and early findings chapters where they are first mentioned.

To begin with, I use the terms LGBTQ+ and queer, as opposed to queering, as interchangeable in this thesis. There are a couple of reasons for doing so. One being that while many people are familiar with the acronym LGBT, LGBTQ+ and LGBTQIA+ are attempts to become more inclusive of identities that were previous left out of the acronym LGBT, these include queer, which can be a sexual orientation or a gender identity; people who are questioning their identity; and *intersex*, a medical designation at birth; *asexual*, people who do not feel sexual attraction or who have little or no interest in sex; and *aromantic* people, who do not feel romantic attraction. All of these groups and identities are often left out of the LGBT umbrella. Queer has taken over the same meaning that gay used to have, to refer to everyone within the LGBT umbrella with one word. However, queer is more popular among younger people and in more urban areas. Older generations are less keen to adopt the term queer because of its history as a slur for anyone who was LGBT or did not fit with social norms. The term can still be heard as a slur but is has been increasingly acceptable among LGBTQ+ groups and communities, who started to reclaim the term in the 1980s (Rand, 2014).

Another term I introduce early on is *cisgender*, which is the term for people who are not transgender, but instead identify with the sex they were assigned at birth. While in sociology, we would like to keep the terms sex and gender separate (Edwards, 1989), they

are often used interchangeably by my participants and by people in general, who usually speak of as, being aligned with the gender assigned at birth. Both the terms are usually termed as gender identity terms rather than sexual identity terms, which only leads to more confusion.

Fandom and fan studies have many terms as well that can cause confusion. The main terms that are key to begin with are *fandom*, which is the fan community someone is involved in, this can be a few friends in person or online, or it can refer to every fan of a particular show, book, or franchise, and this is largely gained from context. In general, people usually mean is as everyone who considers themselves a fan of the particular bit of media. An example of when this is not true is when someone lists their ship as a fandom, such as saying the Johnlock fandom, meaning the group of people who ship Sherlock Holmes and John Watson together. A *ship* is short for relationship and means a pairing that they want to see together in a relationship and often queer the media to make that ship work within in the media they are consuming and queering. There are many other key terms that will be defined as the thesis progresses.

Another important note in is about the third person pronoun, they, which has recently become more commonly used as a singular pronoun by those who identify outside the gender binary. Throughout the thesis, there will be instances where I use the singular pronoun they for some of my participants. This is only for participants who use the pronoun they in the singular form as an alternative to the pronouns he or she. Where possible I have used their pseudonyms to avoid confusion while using this pronoun, but in some cases, it is necessary to avoid redundancy. All of my participants' pronouns are listed in the participant identification chart in the methodology chapter for reference.

Context of the Research

Contextually, this study is located in the intersections of sociology, media studies, and fan studies, with influences from LGBTQ+ studies as well. This study is heavily informed by queer theory, which will be discussed more in depth in the literature review. While it seems there might be contradictions between sociology and queer studies. I believe they can be used together in this project, and I discuss this further in the literature review. Feminist theory and intersectionality are also important to this study, which will be made clear in the literature review as well.

This study also fits within studies of the internet as a social domain, as many of my participants first gained access to queering through the internet, especially those who were from more rural areas and did not have access to a lot of queer materials in their communities. The internet is an important link and domain for queering media, as my participants discussed at length. The internet is vital to both modern fan culture and LGBTQ+ audiences. My participants skew to younger adults, and they have therefore grown up using the internet in their daily lives, and as a primary means for media consumption in general. For my participants, computers and the internet have largely replaced television and broadcast and paid television services, with the exception of Netflix. The internet also provides primary access to websites that host fan works such as Deviant Art and Archive of Our Own (hereafter abbreviated as AO3, which is the common abbreviated used by my participants and online fandom communities).

Contextually, this research also took place in the UK, specifically England and Scotland, with data collection taking place between 2014, for the pilot study and 2016, in Edinburgh, Brighton, and London. Participants were largely drawn from university

societies, and people who were recently members of university society and other student focused groups and this is reflected in this research project.

Organisation of the Thesis

This thesis seeks to answer the question: why and how are LGBTQ+ people queering media? This question gives us insight into an everyday practice that was not previously studied directly, but rather by looking at what fans and audience produce when consuming media, such as fan fiction and fan art. Each chapter looks into the how and why of my participants active queering processes and focused on a different aspect of these practices. The chapters are by no means exhaustive when it comes to queering practices but highlight the important factors for my specific participants when it comes to queering media, and their responses to a lack of representation in the media.

Something this thesis does not do, is seek to compare the queering practices or broader audiences to those of LGBTQ+ audiences. I do however, make attempts to explain why my participants felt the need to queer contemporary drama, in addition to it being a fun hobby. While there of course been studies that look at how heterosexual participants queer contemporary drama, the difference from my participants is that they were also seeking connections with characters that they were not seeing in their daily lives and had not often seen on television until fairly recently. while there has been an increase in LGBTQ+ representation on television and in contemporary drama in general, my participants felt that there was not enough representation. While the argument the argument has been made that participation is not sorely in numbers, which I will discuss in the literature review, my participants felt that it was necessary to have more blatant representation and carry this out through queering. While heterosexual audiences have

taken part in queering as a hobby and for fun, my participants added on top of that the need to see reflections of themselves in contemporary drama. While it may be true that heterosexual and cisgender audience members we're interested in seeing more diverse drama as well in addition to the aspect of taking part in queering contemporary drama for pleasure, for my participants as they discussed it also carried much deeper meanings and more emotional work.

While I expect there to be at least some overlap between different audiences when it comes to wearing media and by no means would say that LGBTQ+ audiences are the only ones queering contemporary drama, for my participants it was necessary. This of course does not mean that they do not take pleasure from doing so but they also felt that there was some work behind it, which will also be discussed in the findings chapter, but that for them, it was beyond just a fun hobby.

This thesis consists of eight chapters, the introduction, followed by the literature review which not only lays out the relevant literature to this study but also includes theory, then the methodology chapter which includes a table of participants and their identities that can be referred back to. There are four findings chapters, queering careers, a look into how people come to and learn to queer media. Then ethical queering, which looks at how while queering might be considered a somewhat deviant activity, queering does have a set of ethical guidelines and off-limits subjects and topics within queering, and the balance my participants maintain when participating in queering media. Then I look at how queering and emotions are linked and how queering is an emotional process for my participants, but also how it is used as a form of social cohesion to maintain interpersonal relationships. Finally, I look at how groups who are underrepresented even under the LGBTQ+ umbrella are using queering to make up for what is often non-existent representation in the media,

and providing representation of relationships that are often neglected for a focus on romantic and sexual relationships between LGBTQ+ characters in the media. Finally, I wrap up the thesis in the conclusion and look toward future research that could build upon my findings and fill gaps that are still present in the literature. I begin by outlining these gaps in the following chapter.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

To examine queering as an everyday practice, we must first look to what we already know about queering media. What does the current literature tell us about queering media as an everyday practice? The literature presented here has been divided into looking at what Queer Theory has to say about queering, a look at why people want or need to queer media -based on lack of consistent and accurate representation in the media- and what other researchers have found on queering media, beyond just television, to look at music, magazines, and books, and beyond LGBTQ+ queering to other forms of queering media.

I will begin by looking at Queer Theory and its explanation of why queering exists. Then I will move on to looking at under representation of LGBTQ+ characters in television programming, in both U.S. television programming, which is often seen around the world both in syndication and via the internet, and UK television representation, which would give more of a local indication of what people are exposed to on a regular basis from the BBC, Channel 4, and Freeview.

While Queer Theory and actual statistics on representation give us a small portion of the picture when it comes to queering media, we must also look at how audiences are interacting with media. This leads me to look at media theory literature on passive versus active audiences, how these debates have changed over time, and where I stand when it comes to how involved audiences are, especially LGBTQ+ audiences, when it comes to audience participation and creativity. This also brings me to the literature on "spreadable media" and queering; how have audiences been interacting and creating in relation to media consumption, and how does this relate to queering television programming?

I will then look at the current literature on queer representation in the media, research in queer television, as in television that is in itself somewhat queer, or out of the ordinary, and finally look at research in queering, including queering television and queering other forms of media. Lastly, I will discuss how my research on everyday practices of queering contemporary drama programming by LGBTQ+ audiences and how this fills a gap in the existing literature. I argue that LGBTQ+ audiences are queering media for multiple reasons, but also look at how they are actively doing this, as opposed to looking at what might be called the products of their queering, as much of the previous literature has done.

Queer Theory

The foundation of the idea of queering comes from Queer Theory. Key to this is Judith Butler's theory of gender and Queer Theory. Butler (1990) states that gender is a learned behaviour and a constant performance that is maintained by individuals once they learn how to perform the gender they are assigned by society. "When this conception of social performance is applied to gender, it is clear that although there are individual bodies that enact these significations by becoming stylized into gendered modes, this 'action' is immediately public as well" (Butler, 1988, p.527). In order to perform certain performances, individuals take cues from their surroundings. How do other people with the same identities behave? In our society, sex, gender, and sexual orientation are often assumed to align perfectly into a binary; women are feminine and attracted to men, and men are masculine and attracted to women. There has been little room for deviation from this strict binary though this does seem to be slowly changing over time (Sullivan, 2006). However, for individuals that fall outside of this strict binary, what gender do they

perform? Gay men are often stereotyped as being more feminine than straight men, and lesbians are often stereotyped as being more masculine than straight women. Butler's idea that there should be a range of gender identities and sexual orientations outside the standard binary are related to the queering of media. Of course, Butler calls for subversion and presenting ourselves in multiple ways to break down this binary. LGBTQ+ audiences do something similar when queering. Audiences are breaking down the binaries present in popular media, most often heterosexual/homosexual and man/woman binaries and creating a wide range of other identities through subversive action. Butler (1990) explains queering as a way of looking at things through another lens, a non-heteronormative or non-heterosexist one, which LGBTQ+ audiences do in everyday practice, as future chapters will show.

Queer Theory has not always been used in a sociological context, and Queer Theory has often been seen as inaccessible, especially Judith Butler's work. Steven Seidman discussed how sociology and Queer Theory can work together to bring new insight to many different research topics that overlap between the two (1996). Seidman points out that the two fields have often avoided each other, however both can benefit from the other. Seidman sees queer identity as something that is socially constructed. He goes beyond Butler's idea of performance to include how laws and ethics in society have combined to create queer identities to begin with. Prior to laws against specific sexual practices, there was no "homosexual identity" an idea he borrows from McIntosh (1996). So while we may not have a gender at birth, the social categories are already place and this is why I find Seidman's argument slightly more convincing. Being queer took on a new meaning once it came to be seen as defined by deviance and as this idea of deviance led to people seeking out others who were part of this queer lifestyle.

However, I find Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's definition of queer far more useful and accessible. Sedgwick defines queer as the term used to define anything outside of the monolithic definition of gender or sexuality (Sedgwick, 1994). Sedgwick defines queer as

> The open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically (Sedgwick, 1993, p.8)

Queer is open to possibilities, which reflects what is outside the binary that Butler so clearly states in her discussion of language. Queer is not constantly defined and is always changing, which is something that my participants reflect in this study. Queer is purposely difficult to pin down. I would argue that if we were able to find a single static definition of queer, it would lose its meaning. When my participants take part in queering media, as will be seen in subsequent chapters, they continue to define and redefine queer to fit their own needs, which are often found outside several binaries, including black/white, production/consumption, homosexual/heterosexual, platonic/romantic, as others that are reflected in the findings' chapters in more detail. While Butler's ideas are foundational to the field, I find Sedgwick's more amenable to this study, and they will be my basis for the idea of queering and the ongoing discussion of queering scripted drama in everyday life.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), is similarly valuable to my discussion of queering and this project as a whole. These ideas are explained further methodology chapter and at length in the findings chapters.

I move through my work as a queer sociologist, using both sociological theories to carry out my study and Queer Theory, as a foundation, to look at how my participants are queering popular media.

Queering as a practice is also about messing things up and changing them to become things that are outside of the heterosexual norm, or different, even things that might be unexpected. A queer identity, and relationships, can still be seen as very much outside of the norm. Queering media texts can take the form of changing assumed or taken for granted identities, usually heterosexual and cisgender, and messing those up (Spargo, 1999). It can take the form of changing assumed platonic relationships to be homoerotic relationships, or even pairing characters that are never shown interacting in the text (Jenkins, 2013). Writers might imagine characters one way, but audiences can queer them to fit their own idea of the ideal relationship between the characters. With limited representation, some audience members may turn to queering to find characters whose stories they are interested in and who they can relate to. Queering provides an additional outlet for queer audiences that are left with limited representations on television, though this has been steadily improving in the past couple of decades (GLAAD, 2012; Stonewall 2010).

Queering also relates to feminist theory and my research especially relies on the idea of co-constructing knowledge, which comes from feminist theory and feminist research. Feminist theory and Queer Theory are often assumed to be clearly different, but can the two be used together? There are some scholars who are considered to be feminist queer theorists, especially Judith Butler, but beneath this there is an ongoing argument between the two. Feminism has felt attacked by Queer Theory's breakdown of gender (Weeds, 1997). There is a concern among feminists that Queer Theory's disruption and breaking of

the binary will just lead to a new type of oppression against women, rather than eradicate it. Many feminist scholars seem hesitant to discard the gender binary when it clearly still impacts women negatively, both those self-identifying as women, and people who are were labelled as girls at birth, regardless of how they now identify. Weed herself said, "Queer Theory's feminism is a strange feminism" (1991, p. ix). However, Rudy posits that Queer Theory and Feminism should be allies, because behind Queer Theory you find feminism (Rudy, 2001). Rudy is quick to point out that intersectionality is important to feminism as well, again pointing to the idea that feminism and Queer Theory can be used together.

Queer Theory and Sociology also still seem to be largely separate. LGBT studies courses often cropped up in English departments, anthropology, and film studies, but failed to show up in sociology (Stein and Plummer, 1994). When LGBT studies, or a form of it did show up in sociology, it tended to be linked to deviance, or else fall into gender and sexuality studies, without a distinct LGBT studies area. Stein and Plummer are also quick to point out that feminist sociology tends to confuse gender and sexuality. While they are certainly related, one does not predict the other.

While there has been a lot of friction between feminism and Queer Theory, I use both in my work, because they both offer important insights into understanding why and how LGBTQ+ audiences are queering media. As will also be seen in later chapters, many of my participants were aware of both feminist theory and Queer Theory and actively consulted and engaged with both in their queering processes.

Closely related to this is the idea of compulsory heterosexuality, as first theorised by Adrienne Rich (1980). Compulsory heterosexuality is the idea that heterosexuality is both the natural sexuality of both men and women, and that it is enforced by patriarchy, but especially upon women. This is also carried out through cultural representation, which is

partially transmitted through television and other forms of popular media. The majority of media portrays heterosexual relationships between cisgender individuals to be the social norm. Similarly, not seeing other types of relationships and positives representations of these relationships further points to the idea that they are not the norm and not relevant.

Media Theory and Active Audiences

In order to understand queering of media it is important to look to media theory and counter arguments that audiences are passive consumers. For my research, I look to the idea of queering media as it points the idea of active audiences. Over the past several decades theory of media has moved from seeing audiences as passive sponges that simply absorb the messages that are projected through the radio, newspaper, television channels, and cinemas, to the idea of audiences being active and contracting and interpreting the messages being broadcast in their own ways and making meaning out of them that relates to their lived experiences, the newer understanding of audiences (Williams, 2010).

Richard Dyer (1977) was one of those that argued audiences are active. He outlines four relationships that can develop between an audience and public figures. This was a move away from audiences just passively absorbing media and looking at how these relationships include loose emotional affinity for a character; self-identification with the public figure or character, or relating to a character that has been through a similar struggle or circumstance as yourself, imitation of the public figure or character, by wearing similar clothes or accessories, and projection which moved beyond simple imitation of clothing style and actions, more closely to wanting to be like the public figure. These relationships provide a key theoretical base for how audience react to and identify with the figures they see on television. It further points to why limited representation and a lack of diversity

within the queer community portrayed on television is problematic. If people are unable to form relationships with the characters in these ways, how does that affect how they feel about their lives and what messages do they take from the programmes they are consuming?

Another important factor in understanding audiences as active is to appreciate the diversity of available ways to watch television. David Morley's *Family Television* (1986) showed that men and women have different viewing patterns for television. Morley explained, men usually focus on television as a primary task. They usually sit and focus on the programme without carrying out conversations or chores. Women on the other hand, were often carrying out chores and tasks in the home, including cleaning, doing laundry, and cooking dinner. Some even moved between the living room television set and the kitchen television set as they worked. Morley also found that when viewership was a mix of men and women, and sometimes children as well, men were in control of what would be viewed. This gendered form of television might still be present, but what about the queering audience?

It seems audiences are finding ways to reinterpret shows to fit their needs. Fiske (1987) expanded upon Morley's work by discussing how media texts can be directed toward men and women and how they have varying styles. He found that men's shows, which were usually formulaic dramas, often have stories that have closure by the end of the episodes. Whereas soap operas, which are primarily the domain of women, have long story arcs that spread across multiple episodes, with shows often having multiple episodes per week. I am interested in how this relates to queering media as well. Is there a type of show that is more often or more easily queered? My participants shed some light on this.

Fiske (1987) discussed active audiences most clearly in his book *Television Culture*.

Fiske describes media programming texts, saying they can be read and reread like any text can. Different audiences can read texts in different ways. Fiske gives the example of men and women reading texts in different ways. He uses the show *Charlie's Angels* as an example. Men could read the text as women fitting into the patriarchy by being the characters under the command of Charlie, and by being in hyper-sexualised outfits. However, women were able to read the show as being transgressive, because the three heroines worked mostly independently and in a traditionally unfeminine profession. Fiske also made similar comparisons for audiences across countries and regions. Even outside of a show's home culture, other audiences were able to relate to and read the show in different ways. Fiske demonstrates that audiences are clearly not passive sponges absorbing single messages that follow the intention of the writers and producers.

Related to active audiences and much more recent, Skeggs and Wood (2012) also identify emotion and reactions to reality TV in when they looked at how women react and identify with reality TV programming personas. While they started out focusing on identity, which is a main focus for my participants in this study as well, they found that the discussion ended up being less about identity and more about morality. The part I find most relevant to this study, is the idea of TV triggering emotional reactions in audiences. Skeggs and Wood also discuss the emotional attachments that audiences form with reality TV personas, which is not dissimilar to what can be found by looking at how audiences connect with other forms of TV. The importance of their study is that they look at how television creates characters of excess, by choosing people who generally display behaviours that our society has deemed unacceptable and looks at how audiences do not fall in line with the ideas of governance. They instead found that people are reacting from within the bounds of their social relationships and identities, which is fundamental to my thesis as my

participants also show that they react from within their identities and the social relationships they seek to see reflected in contemporary drama.

Recent media research has moved toward seeing audiences as creators in their own right just as Fiske said they are active participants (Williams, 2010). Fan communities are now producing stories, writing songs, adapting and parodying existing songs, creating fan playlists, and producing all kinds of art as it relates to their favourite shows and characters (Hills, 2002; Jenkins, 2013). Non-canon relationships, or relationships outside of what is explicitly written in the scripts, especially queer relationships, between characters can be explored through these mediums and in fan discussions, whether the characters involved have a lot of interaction in the actual show or not. There are even relationships with characters that have never met on screen, but audiences take the background stories and character information and create their own stories and theories about their interactions and relationships sometimes in direct contradiction to what is depicted on screen. Audiences are queering media even if they are not using that term to describe it.

Spreadable Media and Queering

The idea of "spreadable media" is important to queering media, and especially to my research as it focuses on both fan products, and consumption of those fan products as part of my participants overall experience of queering popular media. Jenkins, Ford, and Green (2013) attempt to cover a range of topics related to audience participation in their book *Spreadable Media*. Many of these activities include queering media and sharing it with others. Their book covers not only how audiences respond to and participate in media but also how media producers respond to the actions of fans. They explain that fans have their own system for assessing the value of gifts, such as fan art of fan fiction, that are passed

around within the fan community. Media producers sometimes see these gifts as an infringement of their rights as owners. Some fan participation is seen as more meaningful and valuable than other forms are. Fans that attend events and spend money on merchandise, as well as fans that buy products that are advertised during the programmes commercial breaks are seen as having value and being economically useful for media producers. Fans who are writing fan fiction, creating fan art, and creating video mash-ups and manipulations can be seen as less valuable because they are circulating products over the internet that are not completely their own creation and are actually created out of the existing media from their favourite programmes although this is usually done for free in an informal gift economy as fans so that everyone can enjoy them free of charge (Dedominicis, 2017).

Also related to queering is fan involvement. Many fans see this as a part of being in the fandom, including the informal economy and exchange or what might be seen as non-economic value goods or fan works, like fan art and fan fiction. Fan involvement with their favourite shows has wavered back and forth between being discouraged, tolerated, and welcomed by media producers. One of the more prominent cases was when members of the *Mad Men* fandom set up twitter accounts to role play, or act as their favourite characters from the show via twitter (Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013). AMC, the cable channel that owns and produces *Mad Men*, immediately sent cease and desist orders to the owners of the twitter accounts in question upon learning of their activity and asked Twitter to assist them by shutting down the accounts. Twitter complied in the face of legal action. However, the fan community was in support of the people who were running the accounts and saw it as an extra form of entertainment related to the show. AMC ended up doing a quick turnaround and instead saying that they were fine with the twitter accounts as long as there

was no financial gain from them and they did not hurt the show in any way. Some fans created the accounts again but others decided it was time to move on after their accounts had been deleted and some feared being revealed as fans and involved in roleplaying their favourite characters at their places of work.

On the other end of the spectrum, shows like *Hannibal* and *Revolution,* both from NBC, have embraced the fan communities by setting up Tumblr accounts. The producers of *Hannibal* encouraged the fan interaction with the show and even the queering of their show and characters. It is one example of a show that was tuned in with queering and saw value in fan engagement and queering, and one of the positive fan-producer relationships in media production and consumption. They regularly posted and reblogged, or shared, fan contributions, including fan art and GIF sets, series of short clips that automatically loop and replay, of popular scenes and character pairings. A popular trend on the blogging website has been to add flower crowns to favourite actors and characters and the cast and crew of *Hannibal* wore flower crowns at their panel as the San Diego Comic-Con 2013 (nbchannibal, 2013). NBC even set up an event so that fans could ask the cast about the show and showed the cast some of the fan contributions that can be found circulating on Tumblr.

There are a large range of responses from media producers, but it seems that at least a few of them realise how much a fan community can support and draw new fans to their shows. In fact, Tumblr and fandom activity on Tumblr is now being studied in its own right. Hillman, Procyk, and Neustaedter (2014) found that Tumblr is its own culture and that does not seem to be shared by other social media websites. Tumblr users are always engaged, or "always on." The authors even point out that people active on Tumblr have developed their own jargon and have ways of interaction via images or looped video footage

known as GIFs (graphics interchange format). However, it is important to note that these forms of support and encouragement from the show creators do not seem to translate to the networks themselves, as both *Revolution* and *Hannibal* have now been canceled. *Revolution* was canceled at the end of their second season in 2014, and *Hannibal* was canceled in June 2015, before the show had finished airing its third season. In a salute to fans, Bryan Fuller, the showrunner of Hannibal, has promised fans that ship Hannigraham (Hannibal Lector and Will Graham) that there will be plenty of Hannigraham moments for them in the remaining episodes of season 3, and implied that they would be explicitly queer in nature (Fuller, 2015). So while producers might be engaging with fans and queering more recently, it so far has not translated to keeping shows with large fandoms on the air.

Jenkins, Ford, and Green (2013) contributed a lot to understanding how fans interact with their favourite programming in a variety of ways and how media producers react to these interactions and expansions of the stories and worlds that they have created, whether it be with open arms, amusements upon discovering it or threatening legal action. However, to what extent queer audiences are queering these programmes remains unanswered. It is clear that regardless of threats of legal action and questions of legality of publishing fan contributions online or perhaps for free over Amazon and other e-book websites, it is clear that fans will continue to play around with and expand upon their favourite fictional characters and worlds. Though Jerkins, Ford, and Green offer probably one of the most comprehensive looks at how audiences interact with and reinterpret their favourite programming.

Media Representation

As I will show in later chapters, queering develops because of the poor representations of queer people. The limited representations of queer people on television brings them into the entertainment industry, on television programs, which are a type of entertainment commodity, but often portrays them in a negative light, or in one-dimensional roles that focus primarily on their sexual orientation exclusive to their other identities. This is even more problematic because it is often only white, gay men who are portrayed. The representation of lesbians, bisexuals, and trans men and trans women are lower, and it is even more rare to see people of colour portrayed as part of the queer community (GLAAD, 2012). Non-binary identities are still practically non-existent. It is also common to portray these characters as deviants in many different ways. It is not uncommon to see deviant behaviour linked to the queer community by portraying characters that are murderers, paedophiles, rapists, and mentally unstable people. In the past, resolution to the story arcs of queer characters often included suicide as the only way to finalise their stories, with straight characters often overcoming the possibility of being led into deviance by the queer characters and having a happy ending once the queer character's life has ended (GLAAD, 2012). Another researcher has also looked into how age is another problem in that only a certain age group is represented within the larger LGBTQ+ population, and that is young gay men, older gay men are largely invisible when it comes to television programming and many other forms of media today (Johnson Jr., 2013).

Russell T. Davies' work including *Queer as Folk*, *Doctor Who*, and *Torchwood* introduced more queer characters to British television allowing for more visibility and more positive representations that a queer audience could relate to. However, there is still the

question of how audiences are really affected by these relationships and what still needs to be improved upon when it comes to media visibility and representation. Also, while this is a great improvement over representation in the past, queer characters are still in the minority and because of the lack of representation there is incidentally a lack of diversity when it comes to the types of queer people that are represented.

The media watch group Gays and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) releases annual reports on queer representation in the United States Media, specifically looking at television programming. GLAAD breaks down all hours of television programming on each channel and gives a percentage for queer inclusivity over all hours of programming. One thing that is very striking is that cable programming, those channels that are on higher tiers and cable plans, and that often have channels that are blocked by parental controls have more queer inclusive programming (GLAAD 2012). Network television does not make it above 30 percent inclusivity for the 2011-2012 season with The CW having the highest percentage of inclusivity at 29 percent, followed by ABC (27 percent), Fox (24 percent), NBC (19 percent), and then CBS (8 percent).

For the cable networks, Showtime leads with 46 percent queer inclusivity (GLAAD 2012; 5). ABC Family, FX, and TNT come in second, all with a score of 34 percent, followed by HBO (33 percent), MTV (23 percent), TLC (20 percent), USA (27 percent), TBS (5 percent), and History (3 percent). There has been some shifting in the numbers year to year as shows are cancelled and new shows are picked up, but the numbers have stayed relatively similar from the 2010-2011 season to the 2011-2012 season. However, the general consensus seems to be that queer representation has improved over the last two decades, with more queer characters not only on television weekly but also in more roles. Where there used to be only queer characters depicted as drugs addicts, paedophiles, and

victims of violent crime and suicide we are now seeing queer people as sons, daughters, parents, doctors, lawyers, businessmen and businesswomen, and important members of our society, but with a subtlety that helps them blend in as it were, with the rest of the people we meet in our everyday life. The representations are moving away from the caricatures that we often saw before. However, as the report states, it is often gay men who are portrayed above all other queer people. There is much less visibility for lesbian, bisexual, and transgender individuals (GLAAD 2012; 5). Another problem is that many of the queer people portrayed on television are white and there is little representation of people of colour, though admittedly this is still a problem when it comes to television programming in general, with the majority of casts being made up of white actors and actresses (Smith et al., 2016).

GLAAD provides their report as a place to start but they acknowledge that not all of the representations of queer people on television are positive and even include the fact that Showtime, which has the highest percentage of visibility on cable networks, has programs in which characters express disgust when it comes to a trans woman which prevents them from receiving a higher score (GLAAD 2012, p. 6). However, Showtime still received a ranking of "good." Many networks received good or adequate scores. One cable network stood out with its failing score, The History Channel, which came about from only 12 hours of visibility and 100% of the 12 hours representing white gay men (p.12). However, this was the first time that The History Channel was included in the report, so they may improve greatly over the next few years. Race and ethnicity as well as class are common issues when it comes to queer visibility.

GLAAD's media report cards show that representation in the United States is generally increasing if not always positive and realistic, but my research is taking place in the

United Kingdom. While many people in the UK are likely watching American television programmes, these reports and statistics do not speak to the representation on British television. Christopher Pullen has previously discussed how Russell T. Davies work in television brought more queer visibility to British television, with *Queer as Folk*, *Doctor Who*, and *Torchwood* (2012). Pullen argued that this provided a presence for queer people on television and also helped challenge negative histories of queer people (2012, p. 139). But what are the actual representation numbers? Is it mainly positive representation? There is a notion that the UK and Europe are more accepting of queer people, is this what we see on television in the UK?

Stonewall UK released a report on Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual (LGB) representation on British television in 2010, called 'Unseen on Screen' (Stonewall, 2010). They focused specifically on Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual representation. There was no discussion on Transgender representation on television. Stonewall's researchers monitored the twenty most popular television programmes among young people. They based their decision of which programming to include on information from BARB, the Broadcasting Audience Research Board. Their study included programmes from BBC1, BBC2, ITV1, known as STV in Scotland, Channel 4, and Five. They monitored programming over a sixteen-week period. Researchers then conducted focus groups with young people around Britain to ask their views on LGB representation on television.

Stonewall UK researchers had a sample of 126 hours, 42 minutes, 17 seconds of programming in which LGB people were portrayed (Stonewall, 2010). This accounted for 4.5 percent of total programming during their study. When they looked at only positive and realistic representations that number fell to just 0.6 percent of programming. Channel Four had the most representation (6.5 percent), followed by ITV (5.6 percent). The BBC

has the lowest percent of representation at 1.7 percent. Of note, only 44 seconds of positive and realistic portrayal were found on BBC programming out of a total of 39 hours and 30 minutes. Channel Four had 12 minutes of positive portrayal out of 34 hours and 14 minutes. ITV had 34 minutes of positive and realistic representation out of 50 hours and 3 minutes of programming.

The type of programming was linked to representation as well. Two-fifths of portrayal of LGB people was on soap operas, another third coming from reality TV programming. There was no portrayal in drama programmes, and very little on magazine news and talent shows. Similar to American television, there is not a large diversity of LGB people being portrayed. Three quarters of depictions are of gay men; lesbians made up one-fifth of portrayal. The vast majority (74 percent) of lesbian depiction was on a single programme, *Hollyoaks*.

Stonewall UK also included data from their focus groups. They split their focus groups into two categories; young people ages 12 to 16, and self-identifying LBG teens age 17 to 18 (Stonewall, 2010). Both groups noticed that representation was rare. The younger group perceived the representation as largely negative, pointing out that characters were often sad and bullied. They also pointed out that the portrayals of LGB people were often stereotyped, including men using a lot of skin products. Stonewall found that about 49 percent of representations on television were stereotyped. The researchers also found that while these young people recognised these depictions as stereotypes, they tended to hold similar views of LGB people, one person mentioning that they were afraid LGB people would be looking at them in the changing rooms at school (p. 9). Another expressed the idea that bisexuals are greedy (p.9). Young people were also perceptive of other identities being represented and one said, "you don't think of black people as gay" (p.10). The report

did not mention what percentage of the depictions of LGB people were also white British as opposed to BME identities. Older teens that identified as LGB, said they simply could not identify with the LGB people depicted on television. One young woman pointed out that there aren't many lesbians on TV at all.

Stonewall did find some positive things that young people had to say. Some expressed that seeing positive portrayals was a good thing because it helped them understand LGB people better (Stonewall, 2010, p. 11). Young people said they wanted to see realistic portrayal of LGB people, and also to see them as normal people. They do not want the character's entire storyline to be about their sexuality. When there was positive portrayal it was largely on reality TV, much of it on *I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!* when cast members mentioned their personal lives and relationships without their sexuality being sensationalised (p.11). Positive and realistic portrayals were much less likely to be seen on contemporary drama programming. When sexuality was the main focus, it was rarely positive and realistic representation, and accounted for 37 seconds of total programming reviewed. Stonewall ends their report with a list of ways representations can be improved on television. They focus on depictions being realistic and diverse, and making sure that LGB people are presented similarly to everyone else.

There is one major argument against this that I want to include here, as it is definitely not without merit. Amy Villarejo, in her book *Ethereal Queer* (2014), argues that GLAAD's practice (which I would also extend to Stonewall UK, which took up a similar practice after Villarejo's book was published) of simply counting characters does not truly capture all of queer representation, and I tend to agree with her. She argues that we must take into account more nuanced representations of queer people and queer practices and she uses several examples to make her point.

While I mostly agree with her argument, I did not find these arguments and ideas reflected in my research. While this is likely due to limitations of my sample, which I discuss in the methodology chapter, it is still of note, because while there may be more nuanced representations than GLAAD (and Stonewall UK) are counting in their reports, my participants still find that these representations are not adequate. I agree with Villarejo's arguments about the more nuanced representations of queer identities that appeared before the 1980s and 1990s which are often ignored, and her examples were relevant and made her point clearly. However, as this thesis will show, my participants are not appeased by more nuanced representations, they seem a diverse array of representations, and if these representations are not as clear as they would like, they will make their own through queering.

Finally, with there being limited representation of queer people on television as it is and the dominant messages being of deviant behaviour or mental health problems, this repeats a negative message that not only impacts queer people but also the dominant groups in society who are consuming the media. Since we live in a society where having a queer identity is still not completely accepted there may be many people who do not personally know anyone who identifies as queer leaving them with the representations they see on television as their own example and experience with queer people. This is damaging for a number of reasons. However, it might lend a reason to why LGBTQ+ audiences are queering media today.

Research in Queer Representation in The Media

Queer people often struggle to find people to identify with on television, which my later chapters will discuss at length. Most of the studies that have looked at LGBTQ+

visibility do see it as a positive thing, and many point out how it is important for queer people to have someone to identify with in the programs they are watching. Waldowski (2008) provides a history of queer people on television. It provides a concise history of queer people on television from the 1960's through 2008, and really gives an introduction for those that are not familiar with the history of queer television and includes a mention of GLAAD's annual network visibility reports. While this provides important background information for my study, it also points to why some of my participants take part in queering in the first place, when they do not seem representations of themselves on screen.

Where there is queer content, it is usually outside of primetime and limited. Most of the studies looking at queer television representation understandably focus on primetime viewing, and many networks air most of these programs after the watershed due to not only the presence of queer characters, but also violence, language, and drug use in the programs. It makes sense that this is where most research would be focused due to a history of negative representation, but one researcher looked into children's television and the messages contained within those programs about queer people (Dennis 2009). Only programs that aired before nine pm were included in the study and all were on networks that are traditionally thought of as children's networks in the United States. People's responses to the shows were largely gathered from websites, such as the network websites, general television websites, and fan fiction websites. It was found that heteronormativity was reinforced in the programs and also that the potential to mistake same-sex pairings was diminished by having groups of characters that interacted together instead of pairs. However, it was noted that there were often hints to same-sex attraction or pairings, especially in animated shows, and that these instances were often meant to be a funny or done in a joking manner. People's reactions to the references were varied, but Dennis found

that a lot of viewers did not seem to think too far into the references. He also pointed out that these references sometimes required knowledge of gay culture and that children might not get the references but that parents would. Heteronormativity was still rampant in the programmes, but these references did offer a reprieve from it for queer audience members.

As I have discussed in the previous section, Villarejo (2014) does provide examples of there being an earlier history than many of the aforementioned studies would seem to imply. Villarejo discussed representations in episodes of *Starsky and Hutch, All in the Family,* and *Our Miss Brooks*, among others. As Villarejo points out, there were more nuanced queer representations before characters who openly self-identified as LGBTQ+ started appearing on screen. Although Villarejo also points out, many of these representations involved characters that were only one offs, only to disappear or die, and often were not discussed by the other characters again.

Being able to identify with queer characters on television might be even more important for queer youth. A few studies have looked at how queer youth are affected by television representation specifically. One study looked in particular at the show *South of Nowhere* and how it affected queer youth who watched the show (Wade 2009). *South of Nowhere* is a show that premiered on cable television in 2006. It revolves around a family that moves and the 16-year-old daughter finds herself falling in love with another girl at her new school. This study brings today's information technology and online communities into the mix by looking at message boards where fans of the show congregated and discussed the show and how it related to them personally. Many fans shared personal stories of how they could relate to the character and how it helped them express what they had personally experienced in their everyday lives. This study found that these online messages boards devoted to this television show created a space for queer youth to discuss their own

stories and how they came to terms with being queer, but not their queering practices. It is a very interesting look into how queer youth feel about queer representation on television and provides what seems to be a platform for honest discussion about people's reactions and interpretations, however is does not look at the active practices of queering amongst LGBTQ+ audiences, which is a gap that my research fills. Others have looked at how teens seek to imitate what they see in the media so that they can learn to identify with a queer identity. Pullen (2009) looks into how queer teens have few role models on television and are therefore left with very limited structures that they can fit themselves into, which might motivate them to queer the media that is available.

It is not surprising that there is among queer people for more representation. This can also be seen in queering practices, which I will discuss when I look at how audience negotiates queering. There has been some research into fissions within the larger queer community when it comes to who is represented and how lack of representation can lead to conflict. One study looks specifically at how LGB people responded to transgender characters on the popular soap opera, *All My Children* (Morrison 2010). Initially the researcher found that LGB people were more likely to dislike the transgender character on the show than straight viewers, but they were also more supportive of the character than straight viewers. The researcher was able to find the reason for this somewhat surprising finding. The LGB viewers only reacted negatively to the transgender character because they saw that character as a threat to a lesbian character on the show. This seems to say something important about division within the LGBTQ+ community and who gets visibility and who does not. Looking back to GLAAD's report, this does not seem surprising when we think about how gay men and white people are more likely to have visibility than any other groups and identities overall, and with low visibility overall as

opposed to the dominant straight population.

The subject of bullying could come up in personal interviews and it would be interesting to hear first-hand how media portrayal may have affected queer individuals. While this is not my question, it does tie into representation and why audiences engage in queering. Bullying of queer people as portrayed in the media has been another popular area for study when it comes to queer representation, because it has been a frequent storyline or plot device in recent years. Padva (2008) examined many forms of media, television, music, literature, cinema, and advertising. One problem he sees is the formulaic story of queer bullying and bashing. In many cases, one of the victims ends up having to die for any real consequences to come about, including helping another victim deal with their identity and the abuse they receive for it. Padva also briefly discusses how non-profits and celebrities affiliated with them are creating positive advertisements within many forms of media, and how this can help queer people by showing that it does exist, providing visibility, and being a resource for professionals who help queer individuals cope with bullying they may have endured. However, with the limited amount of representation, focusing on bullying can lead audiences to feel that bullying is the only thing that matters about LGBTQ+ people's lives, which is another reason it will be discussed in my thesis.

All of the studies considered have added considerably to the literature on the representation of LGBTQ+ people on television programs, but there is still more work to be done in this growing area of interest that intersects between media studies, gender studies, and sociology. We have gathered and dispersed a lot of information on how queer people are being portrayed and represented on television, but there has been less research into how queer people are taking stories, characters, and worlds from their favourite television programmes and interpreting them or queering them in their own way.

Queer TV

There has been research into "queer TV" but queer TV is not necessarily about LGBTQ+ representation. Queer TV is a form of contemporary drama programming that has characters or themes that break traditional television norms. The book *Queer TV* (2009) talks not only about queer representations on television, but also other ways in which TV can be queer, the simplest way is by doing things that go against what is expected, and also refusing to ignore taboo topics. The essays contained in the book look into shows with queer representation but often break them down further and queer the show more. One researcher looked at the show *Will & Grace* and posited that the gay couple in the show is in fact *Will & Grace*, even though they are not sexually involved, their lives are tied together in intimate ways (Davis and Needham, 2009). The question was also asked, are characters played by queer actors automatically queer? If the audience's awareness of their real-life identities reason enough for the character to then be queer in some manner as well? Or even the possibility that queerness is present because an out actor is playing a character that has a different identity than they do (Davis and Needham, 2009).

Another focus was the regulation of queerness and how it is different on television than on other mediums. Joyrich discussed this in her essay *The Epistemology of The Console* (Davis and Needham, 2009). US television has seemingly contradictory back-to-back years in 1997 and 1998. In 1997, Ellen DeGeneres came out as a lesbian and then the following season her character Ellen Morgan came out as well. The show featured warnings to parents before the show started and saw a sharp drop in the ratings and its eventual cancellation. However, 1998 saw both the Clinton scandal and *Sex and The City*. Both of which were often discussed and did not feature parental warnings beforehand. When the sexuality is heterosexual, it was not something that needed a warning, even the president's affairs being

discussed on the evening news around dinnertime. Queer television was still a sort of

red-light district, in that it was heavily surveilled. The metaphorical closet is still present on

television. Interestingly, *Will & Grace* also premiered in 1998. As Joyrich points out

though, Will was introduced as gay. The show runners did not have to find a way to out

him, or show that he was gay, because it was revealed before the show even started. It is

interesting to note though, that a straight actor was hired to play Will, while at least one out

gay actor, John Barrowman, was turned down for the role, in his own words, because he

was not gay enough. Also, much of the discussion of relationships on the show was about

Grace's relationships with men. Though the main relationship was between Will and Grace

themselves, with a parallel relationship being shown between their friends Jack and Karen

(another gay man and straight woman). Again however, this is looking at what

representation is present on television, and now how shows and characters are interpreted

and re-interpreted by queer audiences. While it covers important points about how we

regard representation, it does not look at how queer audiences are reacting to

representation through queering media.

Another way that TV can be considered queer is by having storylines and

characters that break the norm. This has been particularly present in shows featuring strong

female leads. Adrienne Tier-Bieniek has discussed female led shows such as *30 Rock* and

Parks and Recreation as being outside of the ordinary in the sense that they have main

protagonists who openly describe themselves as feminists and have managed to gain

popular appeal (2015). *30 Rock* debuted in 2006 and aired until 2013. *Parks and Recreation*

debuted in 2007 and wrapped up its seventh and final season in 2015. Female protagonists

that explicitly refer to themselves as feminists could definitely be considered queer on

television, even in 2015. Glynn and Cupples also found queer gender politics in the show

Commander in Chief (2013). The show depicts an America with a female president and her husband, the nation's first "First Gentleman." The show often depicted gender roles as queered with the president being a wife and mother as well as in charge of a powerful country, balancing all of these roles, without boiling down to a working mother stereotype.

Queering Popular Media

While there has been much research on queer representation on television, few studies look at the activities and habits of LGBTQ+ people when it comes to their interaction with television. Though some studies have looked at new media and how queer people are using that media, there are not many that look at how people have come together online to share the products of queering. Some studies have looked at each of these separately. Macintosh and Bryson (2008) have looked into the use of social media and networking sites by queer youth as a way to find connections and belonging online. Their research looks at a queering of online spaces and also the queering that occurs in those spaces. They looked at MySpace as a place that young people were able to come together and share knowledge about queer media, some of which was the product of queering media, including fan fiction. They cited the lack of available queer fiction as a driving force behind youth looking for user-generated content. They also discussed how parents and schools seemed concerned about students being on these websites, though what they were doing was not something that was new, it was just more visible than it had been before.

Other researchers have looked at user-generated media as well. Russo (2009) focuses on fan video online. New media has made video editing and mash-ups easier than ever because many computers come with basic programmes like Windows Movie Maker installed. At the same time, the conversion to digital media has meant that media content is

quickly available online and high quality. Russo largely focuses on the issue of legality that

stems from fans making vids without permission from the owners of various television

shows. Russo does touch on some media producers encouraging fans to create content,

such as *Battlestar Galactica* which encouraged fans to make four-minute tribute videos

before the start of the latest season and even announced they would be selecting a few to

air. She even cited convergence culture as a form of queerness in itself, as it allows various

boundaries between producer and consumer to shift and change from the assumed norm.

Jenkins (1988) has previously focused on fan fiction as a form of fan involvement in

active viewing. Jenkins found that fan fiction is mainly the domain of female fans. Women

were more likely to write fan fiction and participate in that part of fan culture than men

were. Jenkins specifically focused on *Star Trek*. He found that fan fiction writers often

wrote strong female characters that were lacking from the show. He also found that men

would participate in gaming and attending conventions, but sexuality and characters love

lives were largely the domain of women. Today, fan fiction about queered characters is

prolific on the Internet and across various social networking and writing websites. Though,

Jenkins, Ford, and Green (2013) point out, it is still something of an undervalued form of

creativity. Similar to Jerkins research, McLelland (2000) found that much like fan fiction

based on popular television shows in America, manga in Japan started featuring male

homosexuality in what came to be known as Yaoi. Much like Jenkins found, it was largely

women who were writing homosexual relationships in manga. Another interesting note, in

that while there is male homosexuality, in what might be considered women's literature,

homosexuality, at least at the time of publication of this article, was not something that

could be shared openly in the public. McLelland notes that many gay men and lesbians

were wary of coming out in Japan, so while there was queer media, it did not seem to

translate to being open about being queer in real life.

From the review of the literature it can be taken that a lot of research has focused on fan communities and how they interact in, and as, groups. Studies look at online forums, social media, fan societies, especially as they have become more visible. Less research has focused on queering media as an activity, and remarkably few if any have looked at queering as it happens. There is a definite gap when it comes to the activities of LGBTQ+ audiences as consumers and producers of media as it relates to the practice of active queering.

Queering Practices

While many studies have looked at queer media, various forms of queering media, and how audiences are active participants and creators in their own right through new media, as well as past forms of fan content, such as fanzines and creating VHS libraries, none seem to have looked at queering as it happens, as an everyday practice, and as done by LGBTQ+ people. This research will fill a gap in the current literature on queering media and specifically how LGBTQ+ audiences queer contemporary drama programming. This will say something about queering as it happens, as an everyday practice, rather than looking back at the results of queering, which are often found online in the form of fan fiction, fan art, gif mash-ups, or roleplaying blogs.

Previous research has often focused on LGBTQ+ representation and on LGBTQ+ people or characters, as a form of entertainment in themselves, whether through the coming out stories of celebrities or discussions of mental health, suicide risks, and bullying of LGBTQ+ people, especially teens and children, in the news. There has been much

research into LGBTQ+ characters as victims, with many storylines focusing on negative events in these characters lives.

Also tied to queering practices is TV viewing as an everyday activity. While this will be discussed more in depth in the findings chapters, it is important to note that queering is part of my participants everyday lives, and as such, watching TV is part of their everyday lives. Some of my participants reflect ideas that Gauntlett and Hill bring up in their update to Morley's *Family Television* (1986). Gauntlett and Hill laid out the work of describing TV as part of the daily lives of people in the UK from all kinds of backgrounds in their five-year study which they present the findings of in their book *TV Living: Television, Culture and Everyday Life* (1999). While their study took place in the 90s, and largely before the introduction of DVRs and TiVo, as well as streaming services both from the BBC and Channel 4, and Netflix and similar pay services, they do point out how TV is part of daily schedules. This is also reflected in my research and will be apparent in the findings chapters. The ideas that Gauntlett and Hill bring up about changing viewership patterns due to weather, school, work and family responsibilities, will be reflected in my discussion of my participants queering practices, especially in the chapter on Queering Careers.

My research moves away from this and look at LGBTQ+ audiences as active participants in media consumption, and at times active creators, who expand upon storylines from popular media. It also looks at how these audiences gain something from contemporary drama programming as opposed to seeing television consumption as a passive recreational activity. Where positive queer representation is not present, audiences are creating a queer space, queer storylines, and queer characters, with or without the support of the creators of these television programmes. I will discuss my methods of exploring these practices in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

There are few previous studies looking at how people are queering contemporary drama programming, and very few on queering mass media at all. Most of them centre on fan fiction as a form of queering, though as Jenkins (1998) found, it is mainly straight identifying women who are queering media through fan fiction. Jenkins found that slash fan fiction, or fan fiction involving male/male pairings, was largely written by straight women for other straight women interested in erotica of the pairing. Most of the information about audiences queering is found online in fan wikis and blogs. A few authors have analysed fan fiction itself, alongside the shows that it spring from (Tosenberger, 2008). There are studies on fans of various programmes and how they are involved with fan works or looking and how audiences are reacting and interacting with each other online (Hellekson and Busse, 2006), but few have looked at how queer audiences are interacting and queering programming as it happens. This led to my research questions: In what ways are they queering media? What is the process? Is this done while they are watching? After they have watched the programme? What are types of everyday queering that they are carrying out? Are people negotiating queer readings with others or on their own? This is the gap in the literature that I intend to focus on.

Exploring how queer people are queering television programming is the type of information that can only be collected by carrying out qualitative methods. A content analysis could be used but this would look more at people's activities online or in printed fan magazines or newsletters, where they post ideas about their favourite shows and characters, however it does not answer what occurs as it is happening. One could carry out statistical analysis on which programmes and characters are most often queered but that does not help the question about how and what goes on when people are queering

television. For this study I intend to use a combination of interviews and participant observation to not only hear from participants what they think about queering and how they do it, but also to see it in action, or seeing it "how it is" (McNeill and Chapman, 2005).

Another note that affects the methodology of this project, and how future projects might be carried out is that the political climate changed rapidly during my PhD. My data collection started just before the general election in 2015 and finished just before the Brexit vote in June 2016 and before Theresa May became Prime Minister in July of 2016. During this time, we saw change from a coalition government that had legalised same-sex marriage in England and Wales, to a Conservative majority in parliament with a Prime Minister who voted against same-sex marriage as an MP. I consider myself lucky that my data collection was completed prior to the Brexit vote as we saw a backlash against many minority groups, including LGBTQ+ people, which may have made my participants more hesitant to take part in this research.

This methodology chapter will cover sampling, chosen methodologies, how programming was chosen, analysis used, ethical issues, the challenges encountered in this study and how they were overcome, my participants, and reflexivity examining my role as an insider/outsider in this research area.

Sampling

Since queer people are usually a hard to identify group, and also an at-risk group due to still facing social stigma and until recently lacking rights before the introduction of The Equality Act of 2010, I used purposive snowball sampling to find a pool of participants for this study (Atkinson & Flint, 2001; Browne, 2005; Noy, 2008). As, Browne

found, it was easier to access non-heteroseuxal people via social media. I used similar ways of gathering participants by reaching out online, often through Facebook to find a pool of participants. There are strengths and weaknesses to this method of sampling. I was less likely to get a broad sample of participants, but I was able to focus on finding a subset of LGBTQ+ people who take part in queering media, which is a group that would be difficult to find using other methods.

For this study, I accepted participants who self-identify under the umbrella term of queer or LGBTQ+, and I use the two interchangeably throughout. The reason for this being that some people prefer to simplify LGBTQ+ by saying queer. This includes people who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, transgender, genderqueer, and many other self-identifiers outside of straight and cisgender, where cisgender means someone who identifies with the sex and gender expected of them by social norms, usually ascribed at birth by the appearance of genitalia (Berkeley, n.d.). It is difficult to list all of the identifiers that people may use as some people come up with their own or simply identify as queer without breaking down gender identity and sexual orientation. However, I will be making a note of how people identify as this may affect how they queer media and what shows they choose to interact with. Even in shows that do not have queer themes, different groups may prefer mostly male or mostly female casts and therefore watch different shows. For the purposes of recruiting, I explicitly stated anyone who identified outside of heterosexual and cisgender was welcome to participate, which made it clearer that I was welcoming of asexual and aromantic participants specifically, as they are sometimes excluded from LGBTQ+ spaces and events.

In addition to queer people being a hard to identify and marginalised group, people who are involved in queering and other activities in the fan community can still be wary of

admitting to identifying as fans and taking part in fandom activities, especially fan creations. This is due in part to a history of fans being considered less creative and less discriminating than those who enjoy opera or art galleries. Fandom has been seen as a lesser form of these activities because fandom usually revolves around mass media that is widely available (Jenson, 1992). Some social scientists have admitted to feeling like openly being a fan makes them less of a scientist in the eyes of their peers, and to having their ability to look at fandom through a scientific lens questioned by colleagues (Grossberg, 1992; DeDominicis 2017). In recent years, people have been more comfortable coming forward to say that they are fans, but this does not always include admitting to taking part in activities that can still be considered deviant, including queering media. However, there are people that are very open about it and make little to no effort to cover up their fandom activities.

Many people in the queer community have other contacts within it that may be interested in participating. There are queer groups both on the Edinburgh University campus and within the greater Edinburgh community. As a part of the queer community, I have access to a lot of people that could be potential participants. I talked to group leaders, as gatekeepers, who were able to help spread the word about the study and help gain access to people who were interested in participating. I also used social media to reach potential participants. Facebook and Twitter were used to reach queer people in the Edinburgh community interested in participating. Early participants suggested other people who would be interested in taking part. I hoped to include people of many different identities and avoid only learning from the experiences of a very specific group, such as gay white men.

Early on in the project, I contacted multiple gatekeepers for LGBTQ+ groups in Edinburgh, Glasgow, London and Brighton. I did manage to recruit several people from an Edinburgh student group, and some in Brighton and London as well. The Edinburgh group allowed me to post on their Facebook page and recruit participants that way. Early participants were able to point others my way and I found my Edinburgh groups in this way. Brighton and London were wary of allowing me to post on Facebook groups, so early participants told others about my study and had them email me, which is how I got all of my participants in those cities. While they may have been members of the group while rather than leaders in LGBTQ+ groups, they acted as informal gatekeepers in order to help me gain access to potential participants. without these informal gatekeepers this project likely would not have been finished. One person with a group in Glasgow forwarded me to other group leaders and I gave them the information about the project including the purpose of the project my information and the ethical information about the study again I received no response. After not receiving responses from several groups, I was forced to look elsewhere and towards informal gatekeepers. Some informal gatekeepers were able to pass me on to people involved in the same groups as them. Well they may have been members of the group while rather than leaders in several LGBTQ+ groups, they act as informal gatekeepers in order to help me gain access to potential participants.

Gaining access to potential participants was done less through official community gatekeepers and more through various connections I already had to the LGBTQ+ people in London and Brighton. In Edinburgh, it was easier to reach people through local LGBTQ+ networks that I belong to.

It is unfortunate that I was not able to gain access to what we regularly know as gatekeepers for these groups because I likely would have reached a greater pool of

participants from where diverse backgrounds. Once I gained access to these informal

gatekeepers I carried on with the rest of my study and gained participants through snowball

sampling after reaching a few initial participants. Since I was largely met with a

non-response, which means that my data is skewed to people who were very interested in

talking about queering media. This likely would have been true anyway because people who

did not want to talk about it would not have volunteered to take part. However, this meant

that I had to go through less official channels to try and gain participants as some groups

did not want me to post to their group pages calling for participants, as they simply did not

allow these types of posts as a way to protect the community.

Participants

The following chart shows my participants and their identities and will be helpful to readers throughout the rest of the thesis. There is also a glossary in the appendix to clarify terms that are largely used within LGBTQ+ communities and might be unfamiliar to some readers.

Name	Age	Pronouns	Gender identity	Sexual orientation	Romantic Orientation
Sarah	22	She/her	Woman	Pansexual	-
Rebecca	19	She/her	Woman	Bi/pan/omni	Aromantic
Jamie	21	They/them	Non-binary	"Bisexualish"	-
Merlin	21	They/them	Genderqueer	Homogrey	-
Carly	21	She/her	Woman	Bisexual	-
Michael	23	He/him	Non-binary	Bisexual	-
Sam	21	They/them	Genderqueer	Lesbian	-
Olivia	38	She/her	Woman	Lesbian/ grey ace	-
Delfinn	-	They/them	Non-binary	Primarily attracted to men	-
Charlie	34	They/them	Non-binary	Asexual	Homoromantic (men)
Joshua (Partnered with Harry)	21	They/them	Non-binary	Poly	Polyamorous
Harry (Partnered with Joshua)	29	He/him	"Not bothered"	Poly	Polyamorous
Mark	24	He/him	Man	Gay	-
Luke	22	They/them	Genderfluid	Bisexual	-
Steve	34	He/him	Trans Man	Gay	-
Tom	22	He/him	Man	Gay/queer	-

Chart 1: Participant identifications chart. Note: All names are pseudonyms. When participants did not declare a romantic orientation, I confirmed it was because it matched their sexual orientation.

Participant Observation and Interviews

Interviews are not enough to really understand what happens when people are queering television programming because they rely only on participant recall, so they may have forgotten everything they think about and do when they are queering television while watching it. There may also be things they bring up and do during the show that they forget about later. There is also the issue of dominance in interviews as I am positioned as a researcher and I am trying to gain knowledge from the participants. (Kvale, 2007). Participants might feel that they need to tell me what I want to hear as I am the one leading the study and the interviews to begin with. However, I found that once interviews started going and with the recommendation of my study by friends and colleagues, they dropped a lot of formality, and were comfortable giving their opinions. In a similar vein, interviews still take away from everyday activities as they are happening because they mostly rely on recall. Participant observation allowed me to see queering as it happens and put me on a level playing field with participants (McNeill and Chapman, 2005). Some people gather in groups to watch programming and discuss it right after they view it. Others might meet up later once they have had some time to process it further and think about their ideas for characters and story lines. I planned to carry out participant observation where I watch the programming with participants and also be present for their discussions about the programme(s).

I carried out overt participant observation with small groups and it was clear that I was there as a sort of outsider, especially for people who did not know me from the Edinburgh area. Though I am an insider when it comes to queer groups and queering television, I was an outsider for a particular group I joined that was already established. I was also somewhat of an outsider due to the fact that I was there as a researcher, not just as

a fan of a show. I planned to do five participant observation TV viewing sessions. I did four participant observation groups, partially because it with difficult to get multiple people to meet at the same time for two to four hours at a time to watch multiple episodes of a show. Group size varied, as some groups were pre-established, and others were ones that I created in order to call out the participant observation. Groups ranged from three to five people, inclusive of myself.

I took brief field notes during the participant observation. I was concerned that extensive writing while being involved would inevitably lead to missing parts of the audience interaction with both the programme and with other audience members. I also felt it would be very off-putting to the participants and lead them to be hyper-aware of being watched and observed. I wrote down my notes as soon as I left the field. I was able to make short notes while taking part in participant observation when participants mention another show they watch or something that they personally do when queering programming that could be of note later, without it being too disruptive. I also audio recorded the participant observation sessions so that I could go back and transcribe both what was said and note periods of silence during the viewings.

This research methodology is influenced by the feminist idea that interviews are a way of co-constructing knowledge with participants (Holstein and Gubrium, 2004). Participants have knowledge that is unique to them and their experiences with queering media. Though I am a part of the fandom community and actively queer media, participants will have information on how they queer television that I do not have, especially since there are various ways of queering and people within the larger queer community come from various different backgrounds. Through interviews we can come to

understand how audiences are queering programming. What it means to them to queer it, how they carry it out, and what they gain from doing so.

I used semi structured in-depth interviews with participants sometimes before and sometimes after we watched programming to understand their individual thoughts on the process and meaning of queering for them (Arksey and Knight, 1999). Participants also revealed things they thought about while queering or even things they queered that they did not reveal to the larger group. Not sharing ideas with the group could be due to several reasons; participants might feel like their idea might not be popular, so they keep it to themselves. They might know that they group prefers a certain queer pairing, so instead of bringing up a different pairing that they prefer, they stay quiet.

Semi-structured interviews allowed me to focus on the topic of queering but leave participants the freedom to bring up other points that could be explored further (Merton, Fiske, and Kendall, 1990). It also allowed for reflection on the act of queering media. I completed sixteen interviews. Participant observation group size varied from three to five people, and I carried out four sessions. I recorded the interviews and transcribed them. I also took note of any others shows that participants brought up during the interviews. There were some problems when it came to recruiting people for interviews and participants observation sessions. The main problems that arose were scheduling, and these were worked around by completing two interviews via Skype for participants in London who were not able to take part when I was in London for this research.

Choosing programming

An important part of this study was choosing the programming that was viewed during participant observation. One method is to find out what is most popular in

Scotland when it comes to television viewing. Viewership statistics can easily be obtained and the top-ranking programmes can be used for the study. Another route would be to see what queer audiences are watching and how they are queering these programmes. What programmes people are accessing will depend on whether they have television sets or TV licenses, access online streaming services, or watch television via links to pirated recordings. This may also depend on other demographic factors, since students seem to be less likely to own televisions, and instead rely upon BBC iPlayer and 4 on Demand, online subscription services, such as Netflix, or visit websites that provide links to episodes that have been recorded and uploaded. Looking at what queer people are going to first and queering rather than what is most popular nationally will likely provide different results. What queer people choose likely says something larger about queering media in general, so I ended up having participant observation sessions that were led by watching what the participants were already watching.

During data collection, the TV programming was participant driven. Participants would throw out ideas and discuss among themselves what they most wanted to watch and what seemed easiest to queer. The participants would come to a decision and then I followed along with what they chose. I only found this to cause problems for analysis when participants chose a show that did not lead to group discussion of queering, but in the instances when this happened someone would bring up that it was difficult to queer at that moment in time as a group and change to a different show. For example, one group decided to watch *Brooklyn 99,* and were queering it, but found that it was difficult to do with a show that already had what they considered to be good representation, so they decided to watch *Star Trek: The Original Series* instead.

Participants had favourite programmes and they also had programmes that they were more likely to queer rather than others. If they were already invested in a particular show it would seem to be more likely that they would queer characters and storylines in that show. It is also common for friend groups to make recommendations for more shows, which held true in the participant observation sessions, where people made recommendations for what to watch. Due to lack of representation of queer people in television, there are often online listings and discussion among friends about which shows others should watch. Even when people are usually watching alone, they will post online on Tumblr and Facebook and ask which shows they should include next. I asked them to choose what programming to use for the study by asking participants what they were watching and queering already, this led to finding out about more shows that they were watching and queering. Participant observation sessions involved watching the programmes that the groups are already watching, rather than trying to introduce new ones for them to queer in the majority of cases, with at least one person being heavily invested in a show, and other participants showing interest in seeing and queering the show.

Analysis

Qualitative analysis was carried out on interview transcripts and participant observation field notes using a mix of NVIVO and traditional pen and paper methods. Multiple copies of transcripts and field notes were kept throughout the entire process. I used open, axial, and selective coding as outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Coding started by looking for codes line by line and I used as many codes as needed. Then I recoded to look for larger themes that may fit one of more codes in the data. I used Thematic Analysis to analyse and find common themes in my data (Aronson, 1992; Boyatzis; 1998;

Best, MacQueen and Namey, 2011). Final coding consisted of looking at the overarching themes that came up in the interviews and during the participant observation and was done through a combination of using NVIVO, and manually organizing data visually to be able to make broader connections. Analysis was carried out while data was still being gathered to look for themes across interviews and participant observation field notes. Once it becomes clear that the same themes and ideas were coming up again and again in interviews and participant observation field notes, the data collection phase of the study ended, and I moved into analysis exclusively.

I carried out interviews while transcribing and analysing data from the first group of interviews and participant observation and then continued to build on that. At times, people would say similar things but in a different way, so the main challenge was going back and verifying this across participants. This was most easily done by looking at the data myself rather than relying on NVIVO to catch this in the coding. When I was getting the same responses from most of my participants and noticing common themes, I moved toward ending data collection and focusing solely on analysis and writing up.

Ethical Issues

My participants are part of a vulnerable population. They are also people who take part in queering media, and are therefore part of a second vulnerable group, one that has faced ridicule from media producers and other because they are taking part in practice that is seen as low brow (Barnhurst 2007; Jenkins, 2013; Jenkins, Ford, and Green, 2013).

Queer people are still an oppressed group in our society. They are not accorded the same legal rights in many countries and have only newly acquired the right to marry in England and Wales, and Scotland's same-sex marriage bill only recently passed in February

2014. As such, they are still a vulnerable population. Additionally, discussing the lack of canonically queer characters in television programming can be upsetting. Though it is not the only purpose of queering, it has been a way to get around a long history of lack of representation or proportional representation, and even negative representation of queer people in media. It can bring up feelings of distress especially if media is one of the only ways that people have access to representation of a minority identity. While my participants were often upset about the state of representation, and were clear about their anger on the subject, none of them showed signs of distress at discussing it.

All recordings and transcripts from interviews and field notes from participant observation were kept on a password-protected computer. Once the interviews and participant observation concluded transcripts were anonymised. I use pseudonyms when presenting data in order to protect the participants. If participants could be easily identifiable by occupation, job title, or group membership it was removed from the write-up or quotes. Once the study was finished the data was kept but records of participants were destroyed.

After carrying out a level one self-audit for ethics in social research, this project required a level two assessment to be filled out and filed. This is primarily due to queer people potentially being a vulnerable group, and the subject of queering possibly being sensitive and causing emotional distress by recalling past events. Some participants may take part in queering media so that they can relate to it, and some may have had past experiences that were traumatising to them, whether it relates to queer identities or queering and fan activities as being seen as somewhat deviant behaviour. If it becomes clear that the participants are upset, I planned to offer to stop the interview and remind them that they have no obligation to continue. When participants are upset when discussing sensitive

topics, the research takes a backseat to making sure that participants are protected (Goodrum and Keyes, 2007). Fortunately, this did not occur during this study.

As mentioned earlier, some people acquire programming by visiting websites where other viewers have uploaded the programmes after recording them. Most, if not all, of these websites are illegal. This study did not include programming that was obtained by illegal means. I used programming that is available on delayed viewing in the UK, though iPlayer, before it required a TV license, 4 On Demand, DVD, or through subscription services like Netflix to avoid any illegal activity, however participants may have been involved in illegally watching programming before, but that did not come up during interviews. I know of no mandatory reporting for television pirating. If participants reveal that they have taken part in it I will not be reporting it, as it doesn't seem to do emotional or physical harm to the producers. Additionally, in the consent form it was stated that I am only interested in discussing media that has been obtained legally. Participants could have chosen not to disclose how they obtained it. It seems unlikely that it will be a main topic of discussion, and it was not.

As for my safety as a researcher, I am a UK based and my research took place within the UK, namely Scotland and England, so I had a UK based mobile phone that I kept on me and charged at all times in case an emergency arose, or I found myself in an unsafe situation. Some of my research took me into private residences, especially when I had to rely on help from participants in order to carry out participant observation groups in a quiet and private setting, both in order to facilitate a group TV viewing and protect the privacy of my participants. I let local contacts know when and where I was carrying out data collection whether interviews of participant observation, and when they should expect me to be back in contact with them. While this feels less necessary in Edinburgh, I am let

people know as well. I attempted to secure meeting rooms on my own campus for Edinburgh based interviews, but when needed I used my own residence with participants that I knew prior to this study.

In hindsight and upon reflecting over this research, I was underprepared for how emotionally draining the research would be. Many of my participants have faced discrimination and even violence or the threat of violence for their LGBTQ+ identities. Their fear of safety reminded me of my own fear of safety, and the fact that we are still part of a marginalised group. Their recollection of traumatic events would also remind me of my own experiences of traumatic events as a LGBTQ+ person. During these times I sought out help from someone who could help me talk through this.

Strengths and Weaknesses

The main advantage to this research project is the ability to gain an understanding of how queer individuals are queering television and be able to see the process and discussion of it first-hand. Previous studies have looked into queer representation in the media, fan culture in the media, and a few have looked at queered pairings in popular television shows. Few studies have looked at how queer people are queering television programming. This study would be one of the first and could lead to new insights on where there may be other gaps in the literature than can be explored in the future.

This study is a small qualitative study and will likely not be generalisable outside of the urban UK, possibly not even generalisable outside of certain groups who are involved in queering media. However, small qualitative studies are rarely meant to be widely generalisable as they focus on information that cannot be gained through methods that lead to large data sets that rely on statistical analysis so make broad statements about the

phenomena being studied. Overall, the study will make a small impact in the scheme of things but will improve upon the limited amount of literature we have on the queering of media as outlined in the literature review. It will be particularly important because it looks at how queer people are queering media as opposed to how people are interacting with media in general.

Challenges to the Data Collection

In reality it took about a year to collect all the data collection for this study. There were some unforeseen roadblocks to collecting this data. Mainly that snowball sampling did not work as well as expected. This was mainly due to the fact that many of my participants taking part in queering largely as a solitary activity with the aid of the Internet to connect with others who were doing the same things. This meant that when I would meet a participant and ask for them to refer friends, many of them realised a good deal of their online friends are not resident in the UK. It was also difficult to find preformed participant observation groups. This was easily done with the first group because it took place in Edinburgh and I already knew people who would be interested in taking part based on a previous activity at a local LGBTQ+ group. When I went to Brighton and London to carry out research it was much more difficult to find preformed groups, both because of my lack of connection with the LGBTQ+ communities in these areas, and because of scheduling limitations when I would only be present in these cities for a week, and many of my participants were in full time study or work, or a combination of the two. My long-term presence in Edinburgh allowed for much more flexibility in meeting participants. However, I still managed to pick up several interviews and a participant observation group in Brighton and London, so my research is not completely Edinburgh based, and can possibly

point to a more UK wide experience. Overall, I have completed 16 individual face-to-face interviews, and carried out four participant observation groups, one in Brighton, two in Edinburgh, and one in London. Although I planned to have people do interviews after participant observation groups, I found that my participants were very willing to discuss the programmes we viewed and their queering as a group, and often held discussions together as a group either during or after watching the programme depending on the groups preference for talking while watching. This mean that participant observations sometimes were more like group interviews, but I also had individual interviews with participants outside of the participant observation sessions. This was especially true among participants who knew each other before the viewing, but sometimes also occurred among those who had just met before the viewing. This helped me observe negotiation of queering among a group, which I had not initially expected to observe. Individual interviews usually ended up including both what we had viewed in the participant observation sessions, if they occurred afterwards, but also included other topics in queering that were more personal to the individual being interviewed.

Limitations

I should also note one of the major limitations of the study here, which also stems from challenges to the data collection. Almost all of my participants in the study were from a middle-class background. While at least two of them mentioned working multiple jobs; they still had come from middle-class background. All of them had some form of university education many of them had already graduated from university or we're currently pursuing their studies. Some participants discussed being in a job they did not enjoy and were looking for other opportunities but most of them were employed at the time.

The middle-class background of my participants meant that they had access to programming behind paywalls such as Netflix and the newly-introduced TV license that is required for online viewing whether it is live or delayed for the BBC. They Also had free time in which to participate in the consumption of not only contemporary drama but also in queering contemporary drama. So not only did they have access free time in which to take part in queering and the ability to travel at least some short distances to take part in the study they were also willing and able to do so. This means that I did not reach participants who were unable to travel to London or Brighton as at least one participant was studying at university, so they were located in London, Edinburgh, Glasgow, or Brighton for their studies when they otherwise would have been in a rural area. Drawing participants in these metropolitan areas also meant that I had reached people who were able to gain access to university studies in the first place seeing as many of my participants were students.

If my study had included working class participants, I likely would have seen different results or at least different experiences of every day queering. I also would have had trouble gaining access to these participants due to work schedules and some participants not being able to travel to where the participant observation groups took place unless I found a way to go to them. While I did do interviews as close to participants as possible, it of course would have been costlier to travel farther afield and find participants outside of metropolitan areas and who were not from a middle-class background. Coupled with that many LGBTQ+ people in more rural areas would also likely have concerns over the validity and the purpose of such studies and therefore would have been even harder to get involved with this study.

Additionally, 14 out of the 16 participants involved in this study were white. One identified as mixed race, specifically they self-identified Latinx (see glossary) and white, and

another identified as Latina. However, my participant who identified as mixed race, as made it very clear that they thought of themselves, in their own words, as having white privilege due to their fair skin tone. My participants who identified as Latina, made it clear as well, in her own words, that she was privileged by her middle-class background and access to university studies, especially as an international student.

Reflexivity and Positionality

Reflexivity is especially important for a small qualitative study like this. For this research I must also take into account my insider and outsider status as both a researcher studying something I have taken part in, and as an LGBTQ+ identifying person, doing a study focusing on LGBTQ+ people, which I found to be far more complex than I had imagined before I started data collection. [See: Ellingson, 1998; Finlay, 2002(1) Finlay, 2002(2); Pillow, 2002].

Particularly relevant is also the physical positionality and relational positionality of doing this research in Brighton. While in Brighton, I was able to meet participants in queer establishments. While England's (1994) research on gay men and lesbians in self-defined neighbourhoods is now twenty years old, I still believe it is relevant here. As a geographer, England was focused on understanding these neighbourhoods and their existence as an act of queer resistance. In my research in Brighton and to a lesser extent in London, I was able to carry out my fieldwork in queer neighbourhoods. Reflecting back this gave me a particular way of being within my research that I did not experience in Edinburgh and also did not experience to the same degree in London. Before my interviews and participant observation sessions in Brighton, I was often surrounded by queer couples, queer shops, queer owned cafes, and many of these were filled with local queer publications and

bulletins. In fact, my accommodation was in a fairly queer part of Brighton, down the street from a queer sex shop and a queer greeting card shop, with multiple queer pubs in the surrounding area. Many places had rainbow flags hanging outside. Simply observing people on the street, I saw people who took part in various queer subcultures being able to present themselves publicly and people carrying shopping bags emblazoned with logos from queer businesses. While the idea of resistance might have changed since England's 1994 paper, and also the fact that I was in the UK and not in the US, these small things still felt like major acts of resistance to me, especially in comparison to where I grew up in the Midwestern U.S., and where I have been residing for the past four years in Edinburgh. It was interesting to be surrounded by so much openness to queer identities and lives. It would be impossible for this to not affect myself and my research. Being an area that this was so accepted meant that I was able to meet participants around the city more easily and we found many places that were neutral areas to conduct interviews. Participant observations were still carried out in participants homes.

In London I found pockets of this, however I stayed in the area that was not specifically a queer neighbourhood, and felt both out of my element as I was not a local, and also that I was back in spaces where there was some expectation that there is a queer closet, especially in contrast to having been in Brighton a couple of weeks previously. I was most aware of this when people would ask me what I was doing in the area, and when I explained I was doing PhD research, this inevitably extending to asking what my research was about. I noticed my hesitance to explain what my research was about in London, whereas in Brighton I felt more open because of the queer setting, and in Edinburgh I felt more comfortable as a local and Edinburgh University PhD student. As a researcher, I did feel very much that I was getting down to business when conducting interviews either way,

but I would be naïve to think that the difference in my surroundings did not affect both myself and my participants, as they two must perceive the differences in settings and inevitably changed their behaviour according to which part of town we were in. In Edinburgh I simply felt more at home, and again this was reflected in my more local connections with participants, some of whom I knew before they agreed to take part in the study because of my membership in local LGBTQ+ groups.

While I was conducting fieldwork, I was reminded that I was not seen as anything but a random tourist walking down the street to people who would see my walking around Brighton and London which are cities that are largely unfamiliar to me. I rather unexpectedly faced street harassment on one occasion, but thankfully not before I was carrying out data collection, and only on days when I was not meeting with participants or already had and was returning to where I was staying at night. This study and PhD have also been far more emotionally intense than I was expecting. While I was expecting some emotional labour, especially when working closely with participants, I realised how unable I am to detach myself from my research, despite being warned of this issue when studying researcher reflexivity. Also because of my insider outsider status to both LGBTQ+ communities and fandom, my research became nearly inescapable as a part of my everyday life, especially since my leisure activities centre around media consumption. This became somewhat overwhelming as it felt like everything in my life revolved around this study and was very difficult to pull myself out of it. This is not uncommon for queer researchers when navigating closets as a part of your research (McDonald, 2015). I had to step back at times and look to new interests to keep from being entirely consumed by it, and it meant that I had to clearly define when my analysis was taking place and when I was "off the clock" as a researcher.

Insider/Outsider Status

Entering this research, I am both an insider and an outsider in both the LGBTQ+ community and the larger community of people who are queering media. Within in Edinburgh many of the participants already knew me or knew of me because of local groups that I have been involved in, and posting to online group pages, so my name registered with many people when I put out a call for participants. Outside of Edinburgh I had to rely on people "vouching" for me, especially when it came to the trans and non-binary communities. People would often introduce me as a "gay trans man" to gain the trust of potential participants. In this was they were presenting me as an insider of the LGBTQ+ community and therefore trustworthy enough to share information with. At the same time, I was going in as a researcher who was trying to get the facts on how people participate in queering media, so I there was still an unequal relationship between the participants and myself, because at the end of the study they know that I will analyse what they have told me as a researcher. I felt that I was in a vulnerable position, as I did not want to violate this trust, but I also must examine the data as a sociologist. In this way, I agree with Dwyer and Buckle (2009) that this is a necessary part of small qualitative studies. There are benefits and drawbacks to it, as they say I was right there with my participants, and my participants were not lost in a sea of numbers. They were each very individual and I remember them well. Many of them have maintained contact due to their continuing interest in the study, which would likely not be possible for a large quantitative study.

I have also been active in queering media and active on Tumblr for several years as a hobby, so I am an insider in that sense. I was sometimes presented as being a fan to potential participants as well in order to establish my credibility as someone who is trustworthy, in a manner that said, "he's one of us, he queers media too." For this research, I

have had to try and move outside of this insider relationship to both of these groups, but it

is not possible to do so completely, and my memberships in these groups is part of the

reason I was able to recruit participants, especially trans and non-binary participants,

because I was labelled as trustworthy by other trans and non-binary people in the

community whom I knew already, in this way I came to occupy "the space between"

researchers and queer individual in the greater community (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009).

Navigating Closets

My participants, and myself, were and are navigating multiple closets (Chambers,

2009). Chambers specifically looks at navigating closets on television shows, but it

reminded me of the closets that my participants and I are navigating in doing this very

research, which takes me back to the original idea of Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet*

(1990).

Our navigation of closets to complete this research was three-fold. First, there was

the most visible closet, that of being LGBTQ+ in a society, that has only recently allowed

same-sex marriage, and is still struggling to gain recognition for transgender and non-binary

people. Some of my participants were further stigmatised by being polysexual or in

polyamorous relationships, which are not only frowned upon by larger society, but also

within the LGBTQ+ community, who strongly adhere to heterosexist values (Warner,

1999). For this reason, it was a struggle to even reach potential participants, even when

approaching LGBTQ+ community groups, who tended to be, and rightly so, very

protective of their members. In fact, I had to choose when and when not to "out" myself

to potential participants and balance this with being credible as a researcher, which I

discussed earlier in my note on reflexivity. There is often a discussion of how much a

researcher should disclose to participants, however without this disclosure it is unlikely that at least some of my participants would have been willing to come forward.

The second closet was that of being media consumers, but not just any media consumers, ones who were purposely contesting heterosexist and patriarchal storylines (Doty, 1993, p. xi). Most media is assumed to be straight until proven otherwise, and as Chambers points out, there is a lot more leeway for being assumed straight than there is for being assumed as not straight (2009). This directly feeds into the resistance against queering media, where its assumed that all characters are straight and that no one would question that unless characters quite literally declare that they are not straight. So not only do my participants face the idea that being into media as a fan is a bit weird, though admittedly this as lessened recently as conventions have become more mainstream and some fan sites have become more mainstream, they are fans who are queering the media as well, and queering it in a specifically queer way, by challenging the cissexist and heterosexist assumptions made in modern storytelling. When my participants agreed to meet me and discuss this, often in public places, they were breaching the space of a second closet. At times this was more easily done, such as when we met in quiet queer pubs, or more explicitly when I met participants in coffee shops, whether corporate chains or local places, that were not guaranteed to be a safe space for queer people or fans. I did have a couple of situations in which we were assumed to be alone and not being overheard, mainly in university buildings where we managed to book space, but later were interrupted or found out we were being overhead in the next room. While my first response as a researcher was to ask if my participants were ok and if they wanted to continue (to which all answered in the affirmative), or if they wanted to move locations, my participants were still outing themselves publicly in this way, whether one person found out, or potentially 50 people

getting their mid-morning coffee could have overheard. In this way, they were navigating yet another closet, or at times, revisiting the first, and adding this second layer.

The third closet is more easily explained as a physical space. Most of my participants took part in queering online, through websites like Tumblr, Archive of Our Own (AO3), and FanFiction.net. Doing face-to-face interviews and participant observation required my participants to out themselves to me in both identities as being LGBTQ+ and as fans. In the participant observation groups, they were also potentially outing themselves to others they had not met prior to this study. However, my participants physically left a closet (their home) to enter a space outside this closet (a pub, a coffee shop, a café, or a university building, my home, or another person's home). This is possibly more easily visualised by returning to the ideas of backstage as explained by Goffman (1956). My participants had to leave the backstage area and specifically place themselves in public view where they had to be on stage, while talking about a personal subject matter, while being recorded as well. This is possibly further evidenced by my participants sometimes mentioning they did not want to look too nerdy or geeky, though many people came to interviews and participant observation groups with shirts or hoodies from their favourite programmes and books, badges on their bags representing their Hogwarts house or a ship they support, and tattoos that quite visibly write their queerness onto their bodies. This tells me that there is still some fear in exposing themselves to a researcher no matter how much of a fan or how queer I might be. I cannot underestimate how much work my participants did navigating these closets.

Conclusion

      This methods chapter has covered my use of purposive snowball sampling, the chosen methods or in-depth interviews and participant observation, thematic analysis carried out using open, axial, and selective coding with the aid of NVIVO and more traditional pen and paper coding, ethical concerns and their resolution, the challenges of this research and how they were overcome, research reflexivity, and a discussion of the closets that both myself and my participants had to navigate in order to complete this research. There is also a note on how the changing political climate during my research might affect replication this study in the future, or any follow up studies that I wish to pursue. I will next move onto the substantive chapters of this thesis, which draw on my findings from the data collected and analysed.

CHAPTER FOUR: QUEERING CAREER

My participants take part in what I like to think of as "queering careers" which is used to describe how they come to queering, how this becomes a regular part of their daily lives, and how this continues to be a practice or how they move away from it. This chapter will explore how people are introduced to queering and how they become part of a community of audiences who queer media and sometimes become a part of one or more fandoms. This is largely informed by Becker's idea of moral careers (1963). Becker looked into how people become marijuana users and found that they go through certain stages or learning to be deviant and define this deviancy. For these marijuana users, they had to learn the technique, learn to perceive the effects, and learn to enjoy the effects. Becker's explanation of how people come to practice deviant acts and accept the label of deviance applies to queering media for many of my participants, who initially either saw it as deviant, or perceive that others around them think of it as deviant. While many people who queer media do not out and out label it as a deviant act, they still have it in the back of their minds that many would think of it as deviant, or at least a bit odd. My participants frequently discussed how they came to learn to queer media and why they do or do not continue to do so, which also echoes Becker on how people learn to be deviant, and whether they continue and learn to enjoy it. Most of my participants even discuss joining a deviant subculture, though they would not explain it in these terms. They would point to joining a fandom, or Tumblr, as a way of connecting with others who are also queering the same media. My participants would not necessarily see this as deviant themselves, but recognise that others perceive what they are doing as odd or weird. My participants are aware that queering media in all its carnations its considered by some to be something only people on the

fringes of society tend to engage with, and are aware that as previous scholars have noted, fan culture is seen as less valuable than other leisure activities.

With Becker (1963) in mind, I look to learning to queer, joining queering communities, a generational effect of Harry Potter fandom, and continuing queering. I will then discuss the various paths that queering careers might take, as it can vary from person to person, and because of the wide array of acts that fall into the idea of queering, explain how this looks different for different audience members. These paths tend to be non-linear and vary from person to person as opposed to the very clear path that Becker seems to have laid out for those engaging in deviant acts. I also look to De Certeau's (2011) ideas of everyday practices. My participants come to see queering as an everyday practice and what they would term, a normal activity for daily life. Many of them do queer media daily, but others find it difficult to pin down exactly when they last, or next plan to, queer media, as they see it as something "just happens."

"Journey into Queerness"

Queering media is not something that is instinctive it is a learned behaviour. Most of the participants in my sample have an introduction to the idea before it becomes a regular activity for them. Almost everyone has a story about how they came to know about queering media. For some they were introduced by an older sibling, a close friend, or the stumbled upon fan fiction of fan art online and the whole world of queering media was opened to them. For some it was a happy discovery, for others it came too early and in the wrong form for them to immediately start queering as a common practice. This strongly echoes Becker's study on learning to use marijuana (1963) in that people have to learn how to do it, and they have to enjoy it to continue the practice. It is interesting that nearly

everyone I interviewed remembers the story of how this happened for them personally. For Rebecca, a nineteen-year-old aromantic woman, it was her older sister than introduced her to the practice of shipping,

> "Yes, my sister was the first person who got me into fandom. I was like 13, and one time, we were watching *Merlin*... BBC *Merlin*, and she was just like, I was looking on the internet the other day and I discovered this thing, and like, I was just thinking, do you ever think that Arthur and Merlin, should like, totally make out? And that was the first time I heard about shipping, and I was just like, oh my god, yes! [laughs]. I might have been 12 actually, but approximately 13, my sister must have been like 15, 16, I guess. Yeah, because she hadn't gone to university yet, I think she must have still been in secondary school, like the last year of secondary school, or maybe the first year of 6th form."

Rebecca's relationship with her sister was key to learning to queer and to enjoy queering.
> Eventually this became a regular practice for Rebecca and her sister,
> "Eventually it got to the point like they would be looking at each other, and me and my sister, like even though my mum was in the room, we would be like, you should kiss! Like at the TV. And it was like such a normal thing for us. That was a thing that happened."

It became quite normal for Rebecca and her sister, even though their mother, who they feared might have seen this queering as odd or deviant, was in the room. They learned to do this together as well, spending a lot of time engaged in queering when they had time off

school. When Rebecca's sister went to university, they still kept in contact to discuss their queering of shows they both watched.

For Jamie, a twenty-one-year-old "bisexualish" non-binary person, it was an inappropriate and unwelcome introduction to erotic fan fiction at the age of about ten by a school friend,

> "I think when I was ten, a girl I knew made me read something, which I'm decently confident... [I: They made you?] Yeah [laughs] was essentially just fan fiction to be honest, but it was like mostly original characters. [I: Oh ok] Just with a few people that were randomly thrown in from the other fandom, which they'd all made queer. ...I don't know she was my best friend at the time; we used to hang out a lot. This was her activity of the day. [I: laughs] No I remember she told me about this story, well before she successfully made me read it. And it was far too pornographic for a ten-year-old to read [I: oh lovely] so I was just sitting there, you're really weird."

After this forced introduction to fan fiction and queering it took Jamie a while to come back to the idea later on, at a more appropriate age, but it did not dissuade them from joining in completely. Queering eventually became a common practice for them. Jamie is now largely involved in collective queering via Tumblr, and is primarily interested in collective headcanons, or ones that are generally popular, in fandoms. For example, the headcanon that Steve Rogers aka Captain America is bisexual, which allowed Jamie to learn to queer in a comfortable and enjoyable way. In this way Jamie is still able to consume both media and its fan generated content. It is also important to note that Jamie found headcanons that were interesting to them personally, and related to their identity as a queer

person, which is an important part of queering for them personally, rather than being forced into reading or consuming something they did not have much interest in. For Jamie, relating to characters is key.

For some people though, appropriate fan fiction at a younger age can spark a lifelong interest in queering media. Olivia, who is a 38-year-old homoromantic, grey asexual woman, writes fan fiction and has a big following on Tumblr. In fact, it was TV fan fiction of the *Flintstones* that got her involved in queering to begin with,

> "I must have read [*Betty Loves Wilma*] when I was about 10. But it didn't really occur to me that there would be other stuff, like there was a *Flintstones* story and a *Batman* story, and other just weird things, but it didn't occur to me to look outside of the book. So it was about ten years later that I then discovered fan fiction. And that was Scully/Reyes [Two female FBI agents from the show *X-Files*]. I saw Annabeth Gish in something and I was like oh I wonder what else, oh Scully/Reyes."

As Olivia explains, she did not realise on her own that queering was something she could take part in, she found stories on the internet and did not immediately connect them to the idea that should could take part in this world online. Her attraction to an actress was key to delving into the world of fan fiction, but once involved in fan fiction, she was hooked. She was able to find other interesting pairings and characters online, which eventually led her to creating her own fan fiction, which was a product of her queering. She is now involved in writing several extensive fan fictions from various fandoms, but many for "Cabenson" or Cabet/Bensen on *Law & Order: SVU*, and has gained followers on Tumblr because of this.

Likewise, for Joshua, fan fiction was the gateway to queering,

"Probably through fan fiction, *Harry Potter* fan fiction. I read that, which was very very long, it was like a queer poly shipping, so it was like, Harry, Draco and Hermione, it was like that's never, you know people pair Harry and Draco together, but you know shipping the three of them together it was like, no that works. And then I became a massive Drarry [Draco and Harry] shipper so..."
–Joshua, 21

The idea of relationships between three people drew Joshua in, especially the idea of dynamics between people in polyamorous relationships, who may not all get along or want relationships with all parties involved. This was also something that Joshua was not getting from the canon of the books themselves, and there is usually little representation of polyamorous relationships in the media, even though strides have been made in portraying some types of queer relationships, and idea which a few of my participants brought up, even if they did not identify as being polyamorous or polysexual. Only after this idea was introduced, was Joshua able to enjoy the idea of a relationship between Harry and Draco.

For others, the Internet took the place of a sibling or friend in helping them come to the idea of queering media. For Sarah, a twenty-two-year-old pansexual woman, the Internet, and specifically Tumblr, introduced her to the idea of queering when she found the results of other people's queering activities,

"Probably through Tumblr, cause it, I don't think I'd ever considered it. Like I never kind of actively like shipped or anything like that, really, unless it was like in the canon of the TV show, and then I went on Tumblr and I saw like, gifs what I thought were two people who were boyfriends who demon hunted. Turns out they were brothers. [laughs] But, I didn't realise that until I started watching the

show and I was like oh, and then once I realised people were doing that I sort of just like, oh that's interesting, and then I started kind of making my own headcanons. And then usually it has started from like, I'll see something on Tumblr, and then I'll watch the show and I'll realise everyone in straight, but that's not how it's been portrayed to me originally, and I'm like, this is wrong. But, I'll enjoy watching the show and I'll still think it's good, but I'll be like, no these two aren't together. These two are instead, or something like that. But, I think yeah, probably, Tumblr. Tumblr is the gateway drug."

Sarah was not familiar with queering until she saw that other people had done this online. She also found shows to watch from seeing what others had queered; however, as we can see from her quote, this led to some misunderstandings. When she saw the two boyfriends who were demon hunters, she started watching Supernatural, but as it turns out, the two are not boyfriends, but brothers. However, others had queered them to be boyfriends, especially as she observed on Tumblr and this led her to the show thinking there was queer representation when there was not. Sarah also found other shows to watch this way, however as with Supernatural many of them did not have canon queer representation. Once she saw that other people had done this though, she was able to start queering media herself. So still, we see that people are learning to queer from others, whether is takes place face to face, or by seeing the results of others queering on the internet. Once introduced to these ideas, Sarah was able to carry on doing this herself in a way that she enjoyed. This also allowed her to enjoy shows even though she came to realise they did not contain the queer representation that she thought they would base on what she saw online. Now being able to queer things herself, she could change relationships in the show based on her own interpretation of characters relationships. Tumblr was especially helpful to her in

discovering new shows and finding characters and relationships that might be interesting to her.

Tumblr's previous tagging system made it easy to seek out ships and headcanons that participants wanted to read about or see once they find one that they are interested in. They could make their own posts and tag them, but also search for others' posts so they can see all the products of their queering, including fan fiction, fan art, headcanons, ships, and fan mixes (or playlists centred around a specific character or ship). From there it also branched out to specific identities for certain characters. For many people this opened up the opportunity for queering and for discussing it with other like-minded individuals. Tumblr has more recently done away with this system, but because of the nature of Tumblr, you can easily find people who are interested in similar fandoms, ships, and characters, and follow them to keep up with new fan creations.

For some people they had to face their own prejudices and internalised homophobia and biphobia before they could get into queering. For Michael, a bisexual non-binary person, it was a new group of friends at a new school that got him on the path to queering. He had just moved to the area, just started attending the school, and the group of people that he wanted to be friends with told him in no uncertain terms that homophobia would not be tolerated, which follows what Sexton (2016) found among schoolboys in New Zealand who were influenced by their friend groups, especially as they progressed through secondary school. Sexton found that gay discourse and fag discourse had different meanings within friendship groups, and that there were rules within friendships groups for joking, versus homophobic language that might be used by someone outside the group. Michael had to learn to follow the group rules in order to join the friendship group, and it also introduced him to queering,

"I started, so uh, my journey into the queerness started with uh, I think like

friends at school who were like if you're not ok with gay people and stuff, then you

can't be our friend. Because I was quite homophobic when I was 13 or 14 when I

came to that thing because of things that happened in the past, and they were like

if you're homophobic, we can't deal with, we can't be friends, and I was like ok,

and um that was interesting, but they basically introduced me to some, they just

talked about sex and stuff quite openly as 14 year olds. Um so, that kind of led me

to reading other things and then it was mostly anime that started it because yaoi

and stuff, and then um, I started watching *The L Word*, and there is like free ship

for all, because you can, because its queer!"

Michael also felt that these friends gave him permission to queer, which is

important when doing something that can still be considered somewhat deviant or a part of

fan culture. Michael knew he was not alone in taking part in something that might be seen

as deviant, especially in the area he was living in at the time.

"I think because they made like gay and other things ok, so it, I felt less shameful,

because there was like approval from outside. That is was ok. So I just sort of

started reading things. Not specifically queer but I think it kind of gave permission

in your head, just like I can ship this, that's fine."

This new group of friends allowed Michael to read into other materials that could

be queer to begin with or easily queered by Michael. Michael also found that queering was

something could be done to make up for a lack of alive and well queer characters on TV or

in books, but as GLAAD (2014) and Stonewall UK (2012) have pointed out, there is still real lack of these characters on screen.

> "[I] started with that and then since then, because when you try to specifically seek out any gay, bisexual, trans, exploring sexuality media, its, you'll always find them fucking up somehow. Like stereotyping, yeah, or making it a tragic narrative for example. They love that. Just love it. If they both died, this makes this movie great! [laughs] yay! So I think, I think you kind of go in, I ship mostly because it might never happen, but at least they didn't die, you know? "

Michael looks for queer narratives in various forms of media, but never found any that satisfied his desire for a story that was more and doom and gloom for its queer characters. Michael felt that writers still feel that queer characters have to meet a tragic demise for them to be featured in stories at all. At least when Michael queers media so that he sees the representation that he wants to see, he knows that the characters will likely not meet tragic ends because of their queer identities, even though he clearly realises that this representation will likely never make it to screen or page. Unfortunately, there seems to be a rising trend in the return of "tropes" such as "Bury Your Gays" and "Dead Lesbian Syndrome" in which queer characters are killed off, many times to protect a cisgender and heterosexual character, and also often leaving one partner in canonical queer relationships behind (Deshler, 2017; Guerrero-Pico, Establés, and Ventura, 2017). The latest GLAAD report has not been released for the 2015 -2016 television season, but it will likely include numbers for how many characters were killed off, as it seems to have been higher than usual, after a rise in queer people as main and recurring characters.

Others were driven by feeling like they were alone in their identities or exploring their identities and their involvement in queering media gave them something they could not find elsewhere whether that was in regular media consumption or just in the day to day events of adolescent life,

"This started before I even knew I was gay, I was going back through one of mine [a fan fiction] and I found this chapter where I had announced I was bisexual, so it was like an awakening I had during that period in my life, which is kind of funny. It was kind of reading something that I wasn't able to consume anywhere else, you know? Like, who knew where gay people were in fucking rural Ireland? They didn't exist! [laughs]. I guess it just spoke more to a part of me that was happening. Like when everyone else was going to the teenie bopper discos, we called it shifting, making out with boys. I just didn't get it. I didn't want to do that, like I would do it, but it didn't evoke any of the same emotions at all, whereas going home and reading fan fiction I'd be like mmm, this pleases me." –Sam, 21

Sam clearly did not feel that they had the same emotions as other people who were labelled as girls when they went out to hang out with other teens and make out with boys, like so many others did. Through queering, Sam was able to adopt a bisexual and eventually lesbian or gynosexual, an attraction strictly to women and femininity, identity while discovering queering and fan fiction online. Sam clearly felt that they were the only queer person in the area of rural Ireland where they lived and went to school. Sam preferred reading about same sex relationships in fan fiction than trying to kiss boys at the disco or find a boyfriend, which everyone else seemed to be interested in. This clearly opened or

complimented a path of self-discovery that simply was not available in every day interactions.

A Harry Potter Generation

Another important step in queering for many of my participants was reading *Harry Potter* and subsequently being involved in the *Harry Potter* fandom. This seems to be a generational effect (Gierzynski and Eddy, 2013). All of my participants were between the ages of eighteen and thirty-eight, and many of them related to being teenagers and going to school just as Harry Potter did, though they were facing a different kind of identity crisis than realising they were wizards, they were realising that their sexual orientations and gender identities did not quite fit the expected norm. Many participants were introduced to queering via *Harry Potter*, and even for those who were not, it was a recurring theme throughout interviews. *Harry Potter* was a part of their journey into queering as a common practice.

> "Yeah, *Harry Potter* was a big thing for children and adolescents, that was the main audience, although it can be enjoyed by adults too. You kind of grew up with it. So, I think that's probably, that maybe is the original gateway. Tumblr and *Harry Potter*. Like I actually got a Tumblr because *Harry Potter*. Like originally, it was like mainly a *Harry Potter* blog, but then it like dissipated, because that was before the last film came out." –Sarah, 22

> "I think it was like when I discovered fan fiction [laughs], um, and I mainly like started reading *Harry Potter* fan fiction, and I think that's when it kind of came

into my consciousness as a thing... I was like 12, 13. I was the awkward kid in school. I would never mention it to friends." – Sam, 21

Harry Potter being the phenomenon that it is, it was also a way for people to meet others who were also questioning their own identities or discovering who they were. In a way it opened up paths of connection for people in the queer community who did not know how to describe what they felt or if they could even tell anyone. This happened alongside queering *Harry Potter*,

> "About 14, 15, five or six years ago, FanFiction.net or something like that, that was the main way that was how I properly found it but like, through that I then got into more like *Harry Potter* sort of fan writing and stuff, found Harry Potter role-play sites, sort of met loads of people through that and it was just, I mean at the time this was all like before I had like sort of outed myself as queer, and I was no I'm straight, I'm a straight female, which couldn't be further from the truth [laughs]. So, then I like met these people through and found how open and queer friendly they were and found different names to describe different things." – Joshua, 21

Harry Potter also had a way of introducing people to fan theory and similar ideas, because there were usually two to three years between books that left fans wondering what would happen next. It became very popular to try and guess what would happen to certain characters, including whether they would live or die, as the author increasingly hinted that many characters would die, who would end up in relationships with whom, who would have kids, what career paths people would take, and so on. Various websites popped up

where people could post their ideas and predictions and some websites even put together books that were sold in bookstores with popular prediction and fan theories.

> "Fan theory I think, started like when the *Harry Potters* were coming out. I was really young, but I wasn't um, so I would be doing it privately by myself, and when I kind of found like online forums and things I would be like oh yeah, that would be so cool if that happened. I remember the big thing was like when everyone was trying to guess like who was going to die in the seventh book. And there was this whole thing that like Ron was going to die, or that Ron could like actually be good at divination [when canonically he was awful at the subject] and all the prophecies that were made were gonna come true [canonically rarely any prophecies come true and they are very much open to interpretation]. Some people would be like reading though, oh this could happen, this could happen, or um, like someone had this theory that Snape was actually Harry's dad [a popular fan theory based off of Snape's canonical obsession with Harry's mother Lily, but also introduced by German fans, due to confusion in the German translation of the idea that Harry has his mother's eyes], which didn't make any sense, but yeah I guess, or maybe I was like, how old was I when the last Harry Potter book came out? Was that like 2007? [A: Yeah, 2007.] God, I have to do maths, it's 2015 currently and I'm 22, so 8, so... uh... [A:14?] Thank you, Alex. Fourteen. I was fourteen." –Sarah, 22

Even for people who were slightly too young to get involved with the more social and collective fandom aspects of *Harry Potter*, such as fan meet ups and midnight releases for books and films, there was a draw to the fandom as a way to getting into queering,

partially because others became so vocal about shipping characters from that world, and also because many participants simply found it very easy to queer the characters in the books and films,

> "I was aware that Drarry was a thing and I was like, ok guys, you're a bit gay for each other. Um, but *Harry Potter* is like this weird constantly there fandom in my life that I don't know when it switched over to being a thing that was like, you're all super queer. I don't know when that happened, it just did. [laughs]" –Rebecca, 19

It seems that for this generation, *Harry Potter* became a normal part of growing up. It was something that everyone read. Some of my participants went to schools outside of the UK as children as well, and they also read these books growing up. The worldwide phenomenon of *Harry Potter* as a story of teenagers who are struggling with very real dangers alongside trying to finish school seemed to resonate with a lot of people. The idea that characters were very easy to relate to came up again and again, and also the idea that they were easy to queer. Their sexual and gender identities were one of the few aspects of many characters' identities not thoroughly explored canonically, which left them open to being easily queered by queer and questioning teens.

> "There's so many characters that you can relate too and there's so much that's unsaid in that universe, so you know, it really lends itself to it." –Sam, 21

Harry Potter seems to remain special to many participants but for some it is not above criticism, especially when it comes to queerbaiting and lack of representation, which then leads some people to queer the characters themselves,

> "Like, *Harry Potter*'s an interesting one because there are supposedly queer characters because they are not really queer... like, literally people who shag goats get better representation in Harry Potter than queer people...So, you can understand why people are shipping Harry and Draco. I mean not why them, but you know, why they've been queered". –Jamie, 21

This was also a common theme throughout, people had favourite fandoms and pairings that they liked to queer, but the source materials were not spared criticism for its lack of representation in the first place.

Continuing Queering

Once people have been introduced to queering it seems to take one of two paths for them. They either make in an everyday activity that they carry on regularly, or it is something that had to be turned on and off to fit in around life. This is where queering media tends to diverge from Becker's (1963) studies on deviance and deviant careers. For Becker's participants and informants, once people became locked into an organised deviant system they tended to remain (1963, p. 39). Though the institution remains important for my research as well. For many participants, college and university can be the point when they find themselves moving away from queering as an everyday practice, either because they have become so busy with schoolwork, or because they have decided to channel their creativity into other things. For Tom, queering was something that allowed him to explore

his creativity, taking characters he identified with in his favourite comics, and writing stories about them. For Tom, this turned into him being a writer who created his own characters and stories. So, with the fulfilment of his creative writing as something he has made a career of, he's currently finishing a Master's in creative writing, he has moved away from queering media. Likewise, Sam who is an artist has moved toward consuming fan art when participating in queering media.

"It became less and less when I started growing up and moving on with my life, I started having girlfriends and everything... and every so often I'm like oh I should go back and read that really good fan fiction that I still have saved, as kind of like a treat you know, I prefer fan art now. That's briefer to invest in than a twelve-chapter story." –Sam, 21

However, for the majority of participants, queering became a common practice and something that they have carried on throughout studying at university and moving into their professional careers. Becker again points to deviant acts being continued if they can be carried out successfully with little trouble (1963, p. 39) In fact, some of them even incorporated queering into their career. For many, queering has become an everyday thing.

"Like I go on Tumblr almost every day and every single day on Tumblr there will be something that isn't just a random meme and is related to a TV show. So, I kind of consider that like being involved in fandom, like looking at posts on Tumblr, but in terms of like shipping things it's quite often when I'm reading something new, or when I'm reading some sort of meta, or when I'm talking to someone, that's when it's like, queering everything." –Rebecca, 19

Rebecca shows here that she still consumes fan content and queering done by others on Tumblr, but also continues to queer books when reading and reading others meta-analysis on popular media. This is an everyday activity for her.

For many, queering continues to be something they engage in regularly when they don't have university work or job responsibilities and see as a way of relaxing. It is something that is enjoyable and fun to do to, if not a necessity for enjoying many forms of popular media. Some people even continue to queer media that has canonically queer characters for even more representation, or to have a character that they personally identify with. Queering was not just a passing hobby for people in adolescence. Queering is an on-going practice that has been normalised for most participants. For the few who did stop queering, they usually channelled their creativity into the work, such as Daniel's creative writing that includes queer characters, or they just have so many time constraints that they have taken a queering break but intend to pick it back up when they have time. To be clear, this is not something that is often planned. People do not tend to decide they will sit down and queer something, it happens for them as a natural part of consuming media, rather than being a separate from this consumption. The Internet has enabled this practice of queering as well. For those who wish to participate in a wider group, they can always come back to sites like Tumblr, which allows them to re engage in the culture where the practice is normalised (Becker, 1963, p. 79-80).

Queerbaiting, Compulsory Heterosexuality, and Queering

As queering has become more popular, show producers and promoters seem to have picked up on this idea and play with it, without going all the way to having queer

characters on the show. For my participants, this is often seen as a negative aspect of queering media gaining more visibility and ties into queerbaiting. There is also a backlash from queer audiences because media producers have started to pick up on these practices and have seen it as a possible way to gain queer viewers, which can be resented by queer audiences. To audiences, the show runners have found a way to pick up audiences by teasing queer people with hints of queer characters, but then never delivering them.

> "Now my relationship with [queering] is different, because I slightly resent that the media is starting to pick up on it and the queerbaiting that is happening, and I'm kind of over it a little bit. I just, I'm so low-key kind of sick, like back in the day it was really, it was really important to me, developing my sexuality, now its constant and every single male character is queered and the producers play to that with like *Sherlock* and *Supernatural*, or fucking all those shows. Which is fine, but at the same time, like, why can't they just have more gay people in the shows? Consider this." –Sam, 21

It was fairly common for my participants to say that they used to watch shows like *Supernatural* and *Sherlock*, both of which have hinted at queer relationships on the show, but at the last minute shied away from them or turned them into a joke. The constant baiting and then pulling the rug out from under them has actually driven them away from these shows, but some may carry on queering the shows via online fan activities, especially fan fiction, fan art, and manips (manipulations, usually of actors' other work digitally spliced to portray relationships between their characters in various shows or films). For many, queering earlier seasons of the shows and characterisations was preferable to continuing to watch the show itself. Brennan (2016) found queerbaiting to be a negative

term for an activity that produced positive results, namely queer readings and fan products for the shows accused of using this tactic to gain queer viewers. He also thought that queerbaiting spurred audiences into Jenkins' "textual poaching.' However, for my participants this triggered a move away from the show and toward fan works. This is also sometimes known as "apply fan fiction" within fandom communities. This seems to have become more and more common as audiences have been dissatisfied with the representations available, and sometimes reaches beyond queering alone, and to greater issues with storytelling. This can also be used in cases when the audience feels that queering is necessary to correct what they see as an error by the writer or producer or in some cases, issues with compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980). My participants see queerbaiting as more of a negative aspect of television and producers attempting to attract queer audiences. They are more in agreement with Fathallah's (2014) definition and discussion of queerbaiting, which is as something inherently harmful and negative.

A clear example of "apply fan fiction" was dissatisfaction with one of the latest Marvel Cinematic Universe films, *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, which had come out around the time that several of my interviews took place. For my participants, the canonical text of the film was largely unpopular for several reasons, including lack of queer representation and compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980), but the result for many of these people was the same, a reaction of "apply fan fiction." This was particularly clear from Jamie, who felt queering was needed to reject compulsory heterosexuality within the text of the film,

> "... unless it's intentionally queering something because it's been made so hetero
> that I can't deal with it any longer. Things like…With like Bruce Banner and Black
> Widow, just… Why? Why do that? [laughs]. Very unnecessary and very forced.
> Like it came out of nowhere, why? So, that I'm happy to forcibly make people ace

when that happens. [I: Forcibly?] Yes. Nope, this cannot be a thing. Ace,

aromantic, and they don't speak much at the time. Just in case something slips

out. Or Clint suddenly having a fucking secret wife, what the fuck is this? I don't

queer him in any other media, like in the comics or something, but he's a flake

that's why I identified with him. And I was just sat there in the cinema like, what

the fuck is this? How dare it happen? How dare this heterosexuality be thrust

upon me? It was shoved down my throat." –Jamie, 21

In several of the interviews the ideas of compulsory heterosexuality and

queerbaiting came up. For many participants this easily bled over into reasons they queer

media. Heterosexuality continues to be the assumed cultural norm, and for my queer

participants this did not leave them with a lot of representation and choice in their media

consumption, so for many they used queering to create their own representation. Many

participants also recognised compulsory heterosexuality, and for asexual participants,

compulsory sexuality of any kind, in their everyday lives as well, and felt that they could

more easily escape it in media consumption. Tied closely to the idea of compulsory

heterosexuality is queerbaiting (Brennan, 2016), which many participants brought up for a

couple of reasons, including why they stopped watching a show, but continued queering it,

and for why they started watching a show, only to feel they had been tricked into thinking

there would be queer characters.

In this way, queering can be used by the audience to reject parts of the canon that

they find unsatisfactory, but accept other bits and adapt it to fit their own needs as a media

consumer which ties back to Jenkin's [2013] work on fan creativity and the idea of textual

poachers, fans who are engaging with the material, but also going on to make it their own.

Not only did Jamie think that this instance of compulsory heterosexuality was completely

uncalled for within the context of the series, but also felt that the way it was forced on the audience without subtext to be particularly intrusive to queer audiences. Jamie used queering as way to fight a message of compulsory heterosexuality that they felt was unnecessary and gratuitous and did so through engaging with active queering.

Messy Queering Careers

It is easy to present and package data in a nice box and label it when writing about what my participants did and discussed, but this would fail to capture how messy queering actually is. Not only is it messy as a social practice in itself, but it is messy how it fits into people's lives, how it is picked up briefly, put down, picked up again, and renegotiated throughout life. Due the fact that is it not something that most people consciously label as "queering," many people think of it as being part of a fandom, going on Tumblr, or watching TV with their friends or partner(s) which is reflected that many participants simply referred to most queering activities as "shipping" without going into further detail about the various forms queering can take.

For Becker (1963) these careers tended to be more linear, especially that of the marijuana users as the practice was something that was illegal and once people put in considerable effort and were successful, they tended to continue. This seems to have been slightly less true for his study of dance musicians, though they also felt pressure from overarching structures, capitalism and family, to be gainfully employed. Queering careers often do not take a clear, lineal path. People slip in and out of the practice due to school, work, bereavement, interpersonal relationships, and all the other major life changes and experiences many of us go through. These can also affect people's reasons for queering media. We saw how when my participants were younger, they were queering because they

felt different or alone from others around them who were starting to explore heterosexual sexuality as socially expected. Some even used queering as tool to help them in coming out, as Joshua and Sam did through writing fan fiction. As Tom pointed out, he was able to move away from queering media when he gained the skills to create his own queer characters and stories.

Additionally the idea of "queering" media can take so many forms it can feel like my participants are doing vastly different activities at times, however, they are all coming back to the idea that they wanted media to relate to, it was something they enjoyed doing, and that it helped fill a gap in entertainment and in lack of representation of queer people in popular media.

Conclusion

For the majority of my participants, queering is something that they still take part in fairly regularly with interruption for particularly busy periods in their life. Their reasons for taking part in queering since they start (many as adolescents) might have changed, but most have developed and refined their queering skills as it were and used them to consume media in a way that is more entertaining and fulfilling than would otherwise be possible. Many become more selective of how and when they queer over time, and seek to do so in ethical ways, which will be explored more in depth in a later chapter. For many they have periods of disruption, some may move on from queering entirely, but for many they have break periods and then they return to it, or they find a preferred way of queering or consuming queered media and focus on that. For everyone interviewed though, they are very much aware that they are not planning to queer media when they sit down to watch or read something, it's just something that happens for them and has become a common

practice a normal part of consuming media, and for many this becomes a practice of everyday life (De Certeau, 2011).

What differentiates this study from previous studies is that it seeks to really understand why people are queering media and what they gain from it. The focus on queer audiences specifically allowed me to focus on their motivations, which for many was to fill a lack of representation as I hypothesised, but there
are also other reasons, such as finding it fun and interesting, and a way to connect with others in online and fandom communities. For some it became a hobby, especially in adolescents, when others might have filled their time with sports, or clubs, many of my participants, who were already starting to feel like outsiders due to their gender identities and sexual and or romantic orientations, found something that allowed them to identify with characters in popular media.

While previous researchers have been able to look at queering and fan creations (Green, Jenkins, & Jenkins, 1998; Jenkins, 2013; Jenkins 1988; Russo, 2009, [include more]) and others have focused on actual representation (Bierne, 2012; Himberg, 2008; Pullen, 2012; Waldowski, 2008) in addition to non-profit organisations who specifically monitor queer visibility on US and UK television (GLAAD, 2012; Stonewall, 2012), this study has been able to focus on queer audiences specifically and their reasons and processes for queering media, alongside a way of consuming popular media with a focus on interpreting these narratives as active audience members with agency.

CHAPTER FIVE: ETHICAL QUEERING

In addition to learning to queer, there are many other issues that require audience members to negotiate queering in public or community spaces. For my participants, there were ethical rules to queering media. There are not just rules for when and where in a physical setting, but also how and when it is appropriate. Many participants are aware of social inequalities and incorporate this into queering media. Throughout my individual interviews and participant observation sessions these ideas came up again and again. I will explore these ideas more in depth in this chapter and break them down into categories of pre-existing representation, negotiation in group queering, ethical queering and queering boundaries, and intersectionality. As a general rule, just as queering careers and learning to queer can take various paths and there is often spillage between paths and categories, the same is true here. These categories of "ethical queering" as I have decided to call this idea, I have conceived by carrying out this research, are not exclusive activities or events, but tend to happen concurrently while queering and are a part of the active process.

For my participants, ethical queering involves following a set of largely agreed upon ethical rules among fandom communities. Many of my participants were informed in sociology and feminist and gender studies, a reflection of my participants including a high proportion of university educated people and used their knowledge here to apply rules for ethical queering. When my participants speak of their ethics and ethical rules for doing so, they are referring to specific ideas about what they see as a kind of responsible queering, which I refer to as ethical queering. They do not usually refer to this as ethical queering; they tend to use terms like representation, diversity, and inclusion. They are doing this in various ways that I will discuss in this chapter, such as through validating present representation, negotiation of queering among other queer audiences, being mindful of

queering boundaries, and paying attention to intersectionality. It should be noted that representation in this sense points to all queer characters that are canonically queer in media, although my participants are more protective of what they consider good representation. The sociological term intersectionality is used by my participants themselves and is used in the sense of being mindful of intersecting identities, especially those of minority groups (McCall, 2005).

I argue that queer ethics in queering media is done similarly to other public spaces (Sandilands, 2001). Somewhat contradictory to the idea of the Internet being a public space, my participants also see the Internet as a private space, especially on specific websites such as AO3 and Tumblr. This has come about specifically through using pseudonyms online to disconnect one's personal identification from being traced to online interactions. Which specifically hints to the idea of the closet, where queering media largely still resides, if only out of fear of backlash (Sedgwick, 1990). This is tied to sexual shame in that their queering directly involves overlapping locations of public and private, which is currently largely only allowed by heterosexual pairings (Warner, 1999). The queerness of fandom and fan activities is immediately at odds with the idea of good, family-oriented entertainment, read as assumed nuclear, heterosexual married couple and children. Of course, everything posted online can be logged and saved via various methods, and through the use of search engines is immediately made public and can be retrieved. However, since many users choose pseudonyms, they feel they have retained some privacy by separating this part of their life from their professional life and name. However, as Warner points out this is not a binary, but more like overlapping spheres of public and private. These overlapping spheres can come together in various ways, such as posting under pseudonym but doing do in a public place such on the free Wi-Fi at a coffee shop. This would be easily traceable and is physically

located in public space, but fans feel they are doing this in a private way, via use of their own personal device and while using a pseudonym. While the internet is arguably a public space, many people feel that fandom groups are private space because they may require permission to join the group, for example a group that asks you to tell your first name and a little bit about yourself to the administrator in order to gain admission. Once, this admission is gained, it can feel quite exclusive and private, without actually being so.

The idea of boundaries when it comes to public versus private is not limited to binaries, which are further blurred by my participants own rules about how to queer media. As part of my investigation into how and when people are queering media, I also asked when they would not want to queer it. One of these ways was popular representation, or when diverse LGBTQ+ characters already exist in the text, without the need to create ones through queering processes. Sandilands (2001) also brings up the idea of popular representation. She discussed how parks are seen as family spaces and there is an effort to portray them as a place traditional heterosexual families enjoy and preserve. Sandilands points out that queer people have to work to maintain and preserve the ability to have popular representation, which is something my participants are reacting to and fighting for a space for online as well as in the canon of the texts they are queering. My participants use public space to share ideas and fan creations as part of actively queering media. While Sandilands sees queer people maintaining a queer space and presence in nature, my participants are maintaining a queer space in media and online through queering. There must be a discussion of how queer ethics ties into ethics of media consumptions overall. While as previously mentioned I will not be looking into the ethics of how my participants found foreign, mostly United States produced, media online, I will be looking into the idea that they are not just consumers but add something to the media they are

participating in queering. Bauman (2008) discusses how consumer society has changed our lives from near constants to a state of expecting constant change. My participants are a part of this culture and consumer society, of which Bauman points out, there is no escape. As Bauman argues, in liquid modern society products are made to be used for a limited amount of time and then thrown out. Media products are also intended to be used for a limited amount of time and then thrown out. Once an episode finishes, we are meant to look forward to the next episode, not dwell on the most recent one, but that is arguing exactly what fans do. We have ads telling us when our favourite programmes will be back on after a hiatus, and as our society has increasingly moved online, so have the ads and the texts. Media producers know we are consuming media online these days and make sure to place the ads there as well, but again we are reminded to move on to the next episode, the next season, and the next show. My participants and many others active in fandoms however, continue to interact and discuss past episodes and instalments for years and decades to come. As Jenkins (2013) has pointed out, people are still discussing Star Trek episodes from the 1960s.

Bauman (2008) discusses how fashion and make-up go in a cycle that makes it impossible to wear the past season's styles into the next and still be considered to be winning at the game of ostentatious consumerism. Similarly, if you dwell on a favourite show after it's cancelled you are sent signals that you are not consuming media properly. Fans are not following these ideals and continue to reinterpret and examine the text long after we have been told it should be thrown out. One way to continue to persuade us to consume is to point out that this is odd and the wrong way to consume media, which is fairly effectively done by ostracising fans and labelling them as failures by various heteronormative benchmarks, such as stable jobs, stable relationships, marriage, raising

children, and consuming family-oriented media. Drawing again from Warner's argument, fans are falling outside of the zoning of spaces that have been set up (1999), as well as falling to be heteronormative queers who seek stable relationships that include marriage and raising children.

Another note on ethics and queering that needs to be touched upon is the idea of ethical boundaries. As I discussed in the methods chapter, I did not ask participants how they come across foreign TV programming, and whether this was done through streaming websites or not. Many participants discuss using services like Netflix and All 4, but just as often do not mention where they find TV programmes when watching them via a computer. As I said, I will not be discussing this specifically as it is beyond the scope of this study, but I do want to note that it is often assumed that many fans illegally download programming or stream it online. While these practices are illegal, my participants do not see them as unethical. Their ethical guidelines deal mainly with the practices of active queering and making sure that they do not take away from minority representation that is already present in popular media, and for maintaining appropriate fan and media producer relationships, and the ethical boundaries that both parties need to follow.

Representation

As discussed previously, many of my participants chose shows that already have some queer representation. Throughout my research, participants made it clear that they did not want to lose or take away from the representation that was already present, especially if the character is well written, has interesting storylines, is a Person of Colour or BME, or has an identity other than a white cisgender male. It was not enough though, for characters to just tick boxes to meet their requirements, these characters have to have depth

and interesting storylines that do not revolve about their queer identities. This is not to say that these characters were completely off limits, but these audiences ensured that their diverse identities would not be erased in their queering practices. This sometimes took the form of pairing them with different characters on the show without changing their gender identity, sexuality, or race,

> "You know the TV show *Cucumber*, *Banana*, and *Tofu* [I: yeah, yeah] There are about queer relationships but even know I find myself shipping different people, so you know even when there is established queer relationships, I'm still not really satisfied. Still change it to my, to you know, what I think is the good idea kind of thing. So, I guess queering is just not [only] about me wanting to see more queer representation. I think it is also to do with the ownership or what you're consuming kind of thing. You've made this, but now you've given it up and it's my turn to try and choose what I want to do with it kind of thing." – Sarah, 21

Sarah points out that she shapes things to be more to what she would prefer. If she sees two characters whom she thinks would be better together, she simply queers the show to make it align with her preference. She also points out another interesting idea, the idea that the show creators have essentially put their work out there for other people to interact with, and she expresses a sense that audiences have a right to queer it as they see fit, the show creators did their bit, created the world and the characters, but the audiences now have a right to queer these texts that have been released to the public either as a printed text or on television. She goes on to say,

"I mean, I think the ownership of something kind of stops when you put it out there, because everyone is going to have a different interpretation of a certain text and they take on the meaning, the story becomes theirs, and it's kind of natural to me that once you've consumed something like that, and you've engaged with it then you are going to kind of like headcanon it. You are going to kind of make like your own ideas about what will happen in the future and stuff." –Sarah, 21

This idea was common among my participants and is also common among fandom communities as discussed by Soukup (2006). However, this goes beyond what Soukup discussed when it comes to ethical guidelines. Writers and producers might feel differently as was the case when fan assumed the identities of Mad Men characters and created new storylines and relationships between them (Jenkins, 2009). After these fans took on the personas of their favourite characters and created twitter accounts for them, they were immediately sent cease and desist letters from AMC, the channel that Mad Men aired on, which left many of them fearing their real identities would be exposed, yet another overlap between public and private spheres. Jenkins also discussed this idea in his works on convergence culture in which digital media has become ripe ground for battles over creative ownership between producers and fans; but fans tend to point out that they were not there to consume media, there would be little point in producing it in the first place. My participants were happy to consume media, but not as passive participants, they saw themselves taking a very active role in their consumption, choosing what to consume and how. This was not just apparent in them choosing what to watch, it was also apparent in the way they chose to queer media. Soukup also brings up the idea of "refusing to accept [the] dominant interpretation" of a text (2006). It did not matter to my participants if their

headcanon or ship was particularly popular, because there was no need to adhere to a dominant queering of the text. This was also often at odds with actors and producers as previously mentioned, who claimed they had the ownership of the text. My participants justified this by keeping their ideas within the fan domain.

Negotiation of Queering

My participants also negotiate their queering with others as it happened in participant observation viewings. This is not something I came across in the literature. For some, this is done online, which has been noted previously as discussed in the literature review. They might have a headcanon and then decide to go online and see what others think about the same character. They can then negotiate their position on that character and a specific headcanon and choose to agree with others or disagree. This is what Jamie did, when they had the headcanon that Steve Rogers aka Captain America is bisexual. As shown in the chapter on queering careers, once Jamie went online and saw that others headcanoned Steve Rogers as bisexual, Jamie felt validated in that headcanon and became a part of the group that accepts that headcanon as fanon, or canon according to fans.

It was common to see participants negotiate queering in participant observation sessions. This takes various forms, and it also incorporates the idea of maintaining diverse identities but also avoiding overstepping one's right to queer a certain character. For example, if someone identified as bisexual, they would have more say in queering a character that is canonically bisexual. Others somewhat deferred to them on this instance. This relates to Warner's (1999) zoning. While Warner focuses on the physical zoning of New York City by Rudy Giuliani in the 1990's to keep gay bookshops, bars, and sex shops in check, we see similar zoning done online in fandoms. Fans will carve out areas that are

maintained for specific identities. With tagging systems, especially on Tumblr, people can tag their favourite characters or headcanons as bisexual, gay, queer, trans, asexual, etc. In my participant observation sessions, this was done across various gender identities and sexualities.

People are willing to negotiate on queering with other queer identifying audience members, and among my participants this was also achieved by respecting other people's ships and headcanons. In some groups, where everyone identifies similarly, they can discuss these queered identities in groups both face-to-face and online. Overall, people seem to want to queer characters to match their own identities,

> "It's definitely like a thing that's is fairly uncommon, to come up with ace and aro headcanons, and I don't know, I do that quite a lot because if that's just the environment of me and sister watching shows. Because like a lot of the people who are like in the *Supernatural* fan group were ace and aro as well, so it became like a little thing, that we were like yes, protect them they are ours, no one else can touch these headcanons." -Rebecca, 19

As Rebecca says, there are not a lot of asexual and aromantic characters in shows and so queering characters to be ace and aro is required for many people who self-identify with these groups to feel they have representation. Rebecca also explains that these headcanons need to be protected from other members of LGBTQ+ audiences, especially those who are not asexual and/or aromantic. Rebecca and her sister joined a like-minded group, who were willing to protect the headcanons about characters on *Supernatural* being asexual and aromantic. In a way this group was a form of ethical zoning to protect these headcanons

from other interpretation that erased the asexual and aromantic headcanons and ships they had created.

"Hate Shipping"

A lot of participants expressed having various boundaries for when to queer things which we specifically arrived at when I asked them if there were things they considered to be out of bounds when it came to queering media. This also helped to understand when queering was appropriate, for many there has to be some tension between characters as a jumping off point to begin with however, hate shipping, or shipping two characters with a strong dislike for each other either explicit or implied dislike for each other, was not popular among my participants,

> "Also, don't be mean to people, like my ships are happy. I hate the idea of people who are nasty to each other. Like Will Graham and Hannibal, like I mean, my understanding is that eventually he's going to want to eat him [laughs] and that's just horrible. I don't like that either, it has to be like a balanced power dynamic. At least, when they first begin there can be a difference in the power, but by the time they are in the relationship they are like even, no I don't really like that. Especially because, then that kind of plays into like the age thing as well, again my ships are happy, and everyone is just happy forever, maybe they are sad to begin with but then they are happy like. I don't like the idea of things that are doomed to fail. Like a hate ship, I don't like that."

She goes on to include how this goes for other things like bullying or taunting as well.

"Um, again *Teen Wolf*, there's this one, there's this guy called Jackson and he's the typical like jock, bully and some people ship him with Scott or Stiles. Um, yeah, I don't like that either. I don't like it when you have characters who have been like explicitly nasty to someone, you know in the TV show they are like bullying someone, or they are going to eat them [In reference to *Hannibal* as previously discussed], and then you're like oh they are going to be in this romantic relationship, like that is too far, because to me, queering something, there is something from the source material that you have taken from it, like that's inspiration, like that's kind of contextual proof, or when you have someone who is like a hate ship, or like not even a hate ship, but who you decide actually no they are meant to be together, but there's no real reason for it other than oh, this is my ship. I don't like that. I like to have proof. Whereas if someone has only ever been mean to someone they could obviously not, ugh that really annoys me. Really annoys me." –Sarah, 21

Not only is Sarah expressing her drive for queering coming from some inspiration in the show, she also discussed how she dislikes pairing characters who show clear disdain for each other, in this case through bullying. This points to queering as being something positive for characters, rather than a form of negative queering that would take the form of having something unpleasant happen to a character via queering practices. My participants want to see positive and affirming relationships, which is part of why they dislike "hate shipping." Most of my participants discussed wanting characters to be happy and this seems to tie back to their issue with seeing unequal representation of queer characters, and stock queer characters that do not develop throughout the text. Jamie similarly is not a fan of hate shipping, and clearly points to the fact that is something they do not take any

pleasure from which is one reason they do not take part in it. When I asked Jamie specifically about shipping characters who did not seem to have a positive relationship in canon, they answered:

> "That I hate! I'm not hugely pro this thing people do where they ship two characters who despise each other. Yeah it doesn't really do anything for me. It seems like really artificial." –Jamie, 21

Jamie also uses the word artificial, which reflects back on this idea that queering more easily streams from seeing characters who have an affinity for each other on screen, and echoes what Sarah said about having characters who seem like they would fit together canonically. This also points to the idea that queer audiences might want to see authentic relationships, that are romanticised in the same way that heteronormative relationships are (Gray, 2009).

However, it is clear that many audiences do take part in hate shipping and do not have the same issues with it as my participants. It's very common to find on many fan sites, and there is a large amount of fan art and fan fiction devoted to hate ships. My participants seem to be interested in more positive relationships, but this is not to say that hate shipping is the wrong way to queer, just not the way that my participants choose to do it.

Queering Boundaries

It must also be noted that there are fans that do take part in fandom activities and produce products that include all of these topics that my participants found to be taboo, and they do this in a way that protects others from being exposed to something they might not want to be. This is largely done through content and trigger warnings, and appropriate

tagging on Tumblr and fan fiction websites like An Archive of Our Own (Dedominicis, 2016). Without the fans that are generating such content carefully safeguarding it to warn others of the material it contains, fans like my participants would be unable to avoid it. It is worth noting that fans who do engage with material and relationships that my participants see as unethical, do so in an ethical way that prevents people for being exposed to material they would rather avoid.

At first glance, it can seem like queering is an open for anything free-for-all. However, upon closer inspection there are taboo topics among my participants that are not considered appropriate for queering. Among my participants, these were most commonly headcanons and ships that involved rape, incest, paedophilia, and large age gaps (around twenty or so years). As *Harry Potter* was an especially important fandom for a lot of my participants, this meant that they were against the idea of shipping teachers with students, siblings or close relatives, and adults and younger people with large generation gaps. When looking for fan fiction online, it is common to see characters aged up in order to ship them with another character who would not otherwise be deemed age appropriate, but my participants expressed that they tend to avoid that, and the only aged up representations they were consuming tended be in which both characters were aged up, such as Harry and Ginny, or Ron and Hermione, later in life, well after they finished attending Hogwarts. In this study, real life ethics still tended to apply to fictional characters, especially when it came to protecting marginalised groups. Participants were quick to point out that they would not want to take representation away from other marginalised groups, such a racial, ethnic, and working-class groups who were receiving representation in the original text.

"Just age, that's a big thing, incest creeps me out, probably because the idea just completely repulses me. Ugh. Um, I can't really think of anything else, but that maybe because it just hasn't occurred to me that people would ship it." – Sarah, 21

Another issue that arises for my participants is that of shipping real people and sharing fan products with those involved in media production. At times, it can be difficult to separate actors or artists from their performances as certain characters. This is particularly true of TV shows and films it seems. This can commonly be seen in fan art, where the artists base their representation of a character off of the actor who plays them, this can also carry over to their descriptions in fan fiction as well, or a writer might specifically state that they are basing the character off a certain actor's performance, especially in fandoms like *Doctor Who*, *James Bond*, and the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) where main characters have been played by different actors over the years. With increased visibility of actors and show runners at conventions, fans can now more easily expose actors and creators to fan works and fan headcanons. There are debates within fandom communities as to how much of this is acceptable and how much leans too much toward inferring with celebrities' personal lives. Soukup investigated this at length and found than fans have an interest in conversations with artists, controlling the image of these celebrities, and personally identifying with them (2006). A couple of participants brought this up and they have clear boundaries when it comes to shipping real people and contacting media producers about what fans want to see in shows. While Soukup was looking into fan sites devoted to a certain celebrity, he pointed out that celebrities were not likely to see the fan sites themselves. Ten years on, many celebrities are on Twitter, so it is now easier to contact them online than ever before. When asking participants about their boundaries or off-limit areas

for queering, shipping celebrities came up and there were varying viewpoints on how much

conversation with celebrities is considered appropriate,

> "I'm uncomfortable with queering real people." – Jamie, 21

Jamie was quick to say they have no interest in queering real people, as it makes them

uncomfortable and this borders on interfering with celebrities' lives, forcing them into

fandom. Carly on the other hand brought up how fandom often collides with the media

producers.

> "A lot of time with fandom it ends up bleeding out onto actors, or writers, or
>
> producers or whatever, like it people want something from *Steven Universe*, it gets
>
> to Rebecca Sugar, or if people want something from *Supernatural*, the actors are
>
> absolutely hassled and um, I don't know, not bullied, sometimes bullied, but
>
> because like their onus to do something about it, and um because like an unfair
>
> treatment of the fans, in some cases where there is like a load of queerbaiting, I will
>
> agree, like it's a stupid thing to not go into that topic because you're afraid of it or
>
> because it won't get you as many views, which I'm not sure that's true. I don't
>
> know if the people asking that are LGBT or not, it's a thing in *Teen Wolf* as well.
>
> Strangely enough the show's producers become the villains." –Carly, 21

In this case she brings up the idea that in today's fandom community of conventions, active

presence on social networking by all types of people, it has become easier for fans to reach

the media producers. Carly specifically mentions the difference between discussing things

fans want to see on the show with media producers, but how this can also border on

harassment when fans go too far. Carly clearly points out that there is a line between legitimate criticism, such as in cases of queerbaiting, and unwarranted harassment, such as fans demanding relationships in the show that clearly make the actors uncomfortable. This diverges from Soukup's (2006) study in that direct fan and actor interaction was usually limited to quick meetings at premieres or other events, and then fans wrote about the encounters on fan sites to share with others. This also seems to be different than the idea of presumption because fans are engaging in criticism rather than producing a specific product.

From my participants we can see, there are certain boundaries to queering; these involve avoiding things that they find unethical, such as rape, incest, paedophilia, and unequal relationships. However, the themes can be further zoned online by including content warnings and triggers warnings to other fans. These warnings let fans know that a topic they might not like is going to be discussed and this further provides ethical boundaries and responsibility when queering (DeDominicis, 2016).

There is also a limit to how much contact fans can have with media producers without it becoming harassment. My participants find it acceptable to contact the media producers with questions and constructive criticism, and feedback when requested, but there is an ethical line they draw, which usually comes when contact fails to be courteous and continues when it is a clear that media producers are not comfortable with it. This diverges from previous literature from media studies that discusses fans as crazed and obsessed, which was the theme of the film *The Fan*, about a fan who becomes so obsessed with a celebrity that he wants to meet her and then kill her (The Fan, 1981). The film became even more real as it was released right after John Lennon was killed.

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Similarly, Gonzalez (2016) looked at boundary regulation in her study on fans that ship Swan Queen on the show *Once Upon a Time.* Her study not only looks at boundaries between people in that specific fandom, boundaries between fans and media producers, but also boundaries between fandoms. As my participants distance themselves from the ideas of rape, incest, and paedophilia, based on their personal ethical guidelines, Gonzalez's participants distance themselves from other fandom groups, particularly the *Twilight* fandom, as their fandom centres on a text that is considered to be bad to begin with, on ethical grounds. So again, we see another boundary between good and bad media as decided by the fan; media that is good enough to be queered and media that should be consigned to the rubbish heap.

There is also a history of negative reactions to fans which is often highlighted by discussing a 1986 skit on *Saturday Night Live,* in which William Shatner said to a group of Star Trek fans "get a life, will you people?" The skit also makes fun of fans for knowing minutiae of every episode, even about episodes that even the actors cannot recall as well as asking Shatner how many saddlebred horses he owns on his ranch, he goes on to question whether they men have ever kissed girls and says they should move out of their parents' basements (Jenkins, Green, and Ford, 2013). While this was done for comedic effect on a show that consists of mainly sketch comedy and musical guests, these stereotypes about fans and fan culture as being something that lonely people who no life experiences engage with have endured, which my participants mentioned in interviews as well, often stating that being in fan culture, along with excelling academically in school, were not popular. Similarly, Stanfill (2011) discussed how fandom is seen as a place for failed heterosexual white men. Fans are portrayed as failing in heterosexual relationships and employment and clinging to supposedly childish things like media and popular culture. Stanfill also sees this

as them failing as whites, because they have not upheld social ideals for what it means to be white, by being successful by social norms, which adds another layer of racism in fandom, or in perception of fandom.

Intersectionality

My participants use ethical queering to maintain intersectionality in the media they consume (Crenshaw, 1989). Crenshaw coined the idea of intersectionality to mean the study of looking at overlapping and intersecting social identities, which include race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, socio economic status, religion, age, nationality and any other axes of identity. Some of my participants also discussed issues or intersectionality within fandom and queering, though they did not always use this term, they sometimes simply used the term diversity or representation. They tended to see it as another issue with representation and societal oppression of non-dominant groups. They linked this to ethical consumption and fandom. They wanted to make sure that queering media did not take away minority representation from other groups. While my participants' queering largely focused on gender identity and sexual orientation, they were conscious that this was not the only way to be oppressed in society or to lack representation on television. A couple of participants in particular discussed their concerns about issues of oppression of minority groups, especially people of colour within the fandom community particularly when it comes to representation and whitewashing, and how this should be addressed. From the participants' quotes, it is clear that many of them are clearly somewhat informed in both sociological concepts and media studies.

A discussion on intersectionality in queering would not be complete without mentioning Racefail '09, which is part of the larger issue of oppression within the fan

community (Gatson and Reid, 2012). As Gatson and Reid discuss, Racefail '09 is not a one-off event that came and went in 2009 but still constantly occurring incidences of whitewashing, or replacing POC characters with white actors or racebending, similar to genderbending, changing the race of the character, from POC to white. It should be noted that racebending is not always negative. People of Colour are welcome to cosplay as canonically white characters and increased diversity in media, such as Samuel L. Jackson appearing as Nick Cage in *Iron Man* (2008), a character who has been previously portrayed as white in Marvel Comics, is seen as cause for celebration. Racebending is negative when it becomes whitewashing, which at the time of Gatson and Reid's editorial was happening with *Avatar: The Last Airbender* which was being adapted to a film, with a largely white cast. While many fans and fandoms might not be aware of Racefail '09, or might not know it by that name, it is present in the consciousness of many fans and fandoms as my participants show. My participants were careful to avoid whitewashing and sometimes specifically mentioned it as a problem with the practice of queering media.

One of my participants who was particularly vocal about this was Delfinn, who had a lot to say about racism in fandom, but also about how they as a white person had a responsibility to non-white people within in fandom and to also make sure that they were being heard within the community. This was particularly relevant with Delfinn spoke about issues of racism within the media being consumed and even fan created works relating to media being queered.

> "I don't personally go around cause as someone who is white I have no, I can't
>
> speak as someone who is white on it, but I will you know share something on it
>
> from those who are non-white. And you know have opinions and valid critiques

on it, and I sort of try and elevate those voices um the best I can… And you know

that, obviously because in fandom there's also this idea that if you don't like

something don't consume it, or interact with it, or just leave it, but again, it's

important to hold certain things into account and a separate responsibility

towards the media you are putting out there, cause you know, although its fan

created its still a media in itself, you know, and media shouldn't be passively

consumed and unquestioned, even if it is from fans and unofficial and you know

all that sort of stuff. Because it's still, it still reflects societal problems and issues.

And yeah, sort of reflects social cultural norms and things like that."

Delfinn tries to maintain an informed position on issues of representation in media and

interaction and communication between different groups of fans online. Making sure to

acknowledge and include the opinions and ideas of people of colour within fandom.

Delfinn also discussed how sometimes the idea that fandom is open and welcoming can

seem like an invitation for oppressive views to be considered acceptable in this open space.

However, Delfinn feels this should not be the case and that people should be conscious of

their racist ideas or sentiment and be held accountable for them. Even for people who are

already oppressed, in this case LGBTQ+ people, they should be socially responsible and

make sure they are not oppressing others as well. Here Delfinn explains how this might

come about within the community of fandom and queering,

"But I think it also goes from, I think it's also somewhat based in fandom wanting

to be a positive place and being supportive and uplifting for people, to be fair it

tends to be minorities, um but like I said you know, if you're being racist, it

doesn't matter if you are gay or lesbian or anything, you have to be held

accountable for that. You know, just because you are oppressed in one-way doesn't

mean you can't be held accountable for you oppressing other people in another

way. [I: yeah] But I think that there's this attitude in fandom that because we're all

sort of oppressed in one way you know, pick, you know there's something we

don't like about someone and we'll just ignore it. But that doesn't solve anything

you know. And again, it's an issue you know, and it's sort of paraded under this

disguise of fandom being a creative uplifting place for marginalised people, um but

I think sometimes misguidedly so."

Again, my participants express the idea that there are rules and regulations to queering and

fandom in general. There are ethical aspects to queering. My participants were careful not

to erase other identities that characters hold when they are queering media, especially those

of racial and ethnic minorities. It was also expressed that queering takes place in a society

that clearly places some groups as a disadvantage and this cannot be ignored when queering

media. Delfinn explains that fans still have a responsibility to point out social inequalities

and avoid using fandom and queering as an excuse to overlook them, especially since fans

are often producers of media themselves. Whether my participants realised it or not, they

tend to echo ideas of Black Feminists when they argue for intersectionality (Crenshaw,

1989). Crenshaw revisited the term intersectionality to clear up possibly confusion about it

being using by LGBT people as well, and stated, "Intersectionality is a lens through which

you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. It's not

simply that there's a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LBGTQ

problem there. Many times, that framework erases what happens to people who are subject

to all of these things" (Crenshaw, 2017). Crenshaw tells us it is not enough to focus on one

form of oppression based on one identity, but that we must look into all forms of oppression for all identities, which is exactly the idea that Delfinn echoes.

Similarly, Daniels (2012) discussed how racism is rife on the internet, especially as people cannot see each other, and tend to assume that they person they are talking to is white. Access to the internet is also still a raced and classed issue because the more privileged are wealthy are still more likely to have access to the internet in the first place. Daniels includes an example of someone emailing a racist joke, but then saying they would not have sent it had they known the recipient's race, and argued they were not racist. My participants were keen to make sure that their queering was intersectional and, in their words, diverse, to begin with to avoid making similar social faux pas. However, as Stanfill (2011) points out fandom is largely assumed to be the domain of white people, and depictions of fans in popular media are often of white cisgender men.

This also highlights the fact that not all fans are mindless consumers, they have a social consciousness that guides their fandom activity, including queering media, and as Delfinn points out, they have a social responsibility to highlight inequality where it happens, and to also make sure they are not complicit in its perpetuation in media. While other participants mention these ideas, none of them went as in depth into the topic as Delfinn did. While the majority of my participants are white, 14 out of 16 total participants, they did express that they are mindful not to take away racial and ethnic representation from media when queering, which ties into the larger idea of their ethical boundaries and responsibilities as both fans and as people who recognise that media representation, or the lack of it, has an effect on many minority groups.

Conclusion

       While the Internet is a great tool for media consumption and queering media, it also a blurring of public and private spheres. It is somewhat hidden away, unless one knows where to look, and you often have to be introduced by others or stumble upon it, as is discussed in the chapter on queering careers. This is similar to how it is still common to have queer spaces hidden away and only found by those trained to find them. Partially because society wants them hidden away, and partially as a way to be protected from heteronormative cissexist society. Sandilands (2001) discusses how public spaces for queer lives and activities must be protected and preserved. She specifically sites public parks, as they have been used as areas for casual gay sex between some gay men, and how specific parks and beaches are known among queer communities to be frequented by queer women. Just as public parks have seen an effort by neighbourhoods and councils to "morally purify public parks" there have been efforts to purify the Internet as well. We frequently see discussions of the internet as being a public place, including censoring content from children and anyone legally considered a minor, such as laws that prevent people under 21 accessing pornography in some parts of the United States, and the illegality of viewing or owning pornography more broadly around the world. The Internet is also discussed as a public place when it comes to sharing information. The Internet also goes one step further than public parks as it can connect people in rural areas as well, who Sandilands points out are often at risk if they publicly identify as queer. As can be seen from this chapter though, there are ethical guidelines employed my participants to maintain an ethical standard and protect both the community and others who might come across the products of their queering practices.

All of this is also connected to Warner's idea of sexual shame (1999) Though

queering might seem far from the area of sexual shame, many of my participants arrived at

queering on the internet or among trusted friends because they did not see representation

of LGBTQ+ lives in the media or in person, which Sandilands and Warner both point to as

being locked away from public spaces, where youths might have been able to see "normal"

LGBTQ+ people living out their day to day lives. Ethical queering allows them to see the

queer representation they have been seeking but unable to find. My participants also hope

that their queering will help younger generations who still do not have equal representation

in the media. Further many of my participants discuss how they came to queering via

Tumblr, which is a site that also contains pornography of many varieties, and was not seen

as a family-friendly website until Yahoo bought Tumblr for $1.1 billion in 2013 (BBC,

2013). To this day, Yahoo's efforts to clean up Tumblr is in a way similar to Sandilands' and

Warner's discussions of cleaning up public places. However, the attempt to clean up

Tumblr has largely been seen as a failure. Yahoo has recently reported than they have had to

write off Tumblr as nearly a full loss (Business Insider, 2016). While zoning can be

employed in ethical queering, it can still be done in places that are largely considered to be

unsavoury and hidden away. My participants also ethically zone queering so that many

people can enjoy it but also so that others can avoid it if they would prefer.

All of the ways that my participants work to queer ethically move away from past

arguments that fans are taking part in deviant and unsavoury behaviour. My participants

have a set of ethical guidelines for their activities that simply do not mesh with the previous

idea that fans are out of control and taking part in deviant activities that damage society

and create unrealistic and damaging norms for media consumption. On the contrary, my

participants seek to lift up the ethical repercussions for media consumption.

CHAPTER SIX: QUEERING AND EMOTIONS

In the history and study of fandom fans have often been portrayed as overly emotional, obsessed even with consuming what was often seen as a lower form of entertainment, as I have discussed previously in this thesis. Fans have been seen as "crazed" even in their obsession with celebrities, bands, TV shows, and cult films (Jensen, 1992). Few studies however have looked at how emotions are expressed while queering and what role they play in queering media. My participants commonly discussed emotions in queering, both in reference to their own emotions both past and present when consuming media, and how they were able to express and empathise with fictional characters through queering media in a way that was not often available to them due to underrepresentation of queer characters in media in general. At the same time, it has been documented that media is written to have emotional responses from those consuming it, which can be described as a "sentimental journey" (Gorton, 2006). So, it should not be surprising that my participants would invoke emotion in their own media consumption, even if they have to take part in queering to find the close connections they want to find in media but are not otherwise available to them in the same way they are to a more mainstream audience.

For this chapter, I am defining emotions as how my participants feel when consuming and queering media. It also looks at how my participants are taking part in emotional working during queering as well, especially when they are around others (Hochschild, 1979). This chapter also looks at how emotions are produced and shared through ritual and collective social experiences (von Scheve, 2011).

A key term that should be discussed in any chapter on fandom and queering is "feels." Feels is generally used to describe having an emotional response to something that

happens in canon of a TV show, book, or film and has been studied extensively especially in relation to Tumblr (Bourlai and Herring, 2014). Also, as Hills (2005) previously found, there is a fine line between liking TV and being in the know about popular media, and being an overinvested, obsessed fan. According to Hills, there is a fine balance that must be maintained to be considered a normal TV viewer. Since my participants already felt they were part of one outsider group, they were less concerned with not seeming "obsessed" and accepted that their queering activities might not be seen as normal. Throughout my interviews I found that participants were willing to discuss emotions and emotional processes involved in queering. Emotions were not always brought up specifically by participants. but were included in the discussion who they take part in queering, and were often expressed in other ways, such as sharing how emotions took part in their discussions of queering with others. Only once analysis began did I realise how often emotions and emotional processes were brought up by participants.

When going into this research I had an idea that emotions would be important to my participants. It seemed unlikely that they would not be emotional about something that they spent a lot of time and effort on, and something that as I have discussed can still be viewed as being somewhat deviant. This coupled with the motivation to take part in queering due to lack of representation of queer people in mass media made it seem that to take part without being emotional would be nearly impossible. However, the way my participants talked about emotions surprised me, and I realised how much emotional work queering can do for them, and also how important it is for them in working through their own issues and conflicts that are a part of daily life.

Queering, for my participants, is a highly emotional process in and of itself, especially when as I have discussed in previous chapters, they have spent a lot of time on it,

use it as a form of social interaction, and as a way of coming to terms with queer identities, and as a way of relating to media that often leaves them without the role models and relatable characters that cis white straight men can find in abundance. As we saw in earlier chapters my participants often using queering to get them through difficult periods of life, such as adolescents or university. Without explicitly mentioning emotions, my participant often hinted at them in our discussions about their queering activities. This chapter focuses on how emotions are involved in their queering, especially emotional reactions to media, emotional entrainment and social cohesion, the pleasure of consuming, and queering media, and the ritualistic nature of queering media and the emotions involved in doing so.

Emotional Reactions to Media

My participants had many emotional reactions to both consuming and queering media. Their reactions were both positive and negative to consuming media. Neutral reactions often did not lead to queering for my participants, so they have been largely left out for that reason. We saw some negative reactions discussed in previous chapters, but so far, I have not shown reactions as they happened for my participants, especially as they unfolded in participant observation sessions, which I now have a chance to do here.

As I have discussed previously, my participants often sought out or stumbled onto shows that had canonically queer characters. One example of this was *Buffy The Vampire Slayer,* which played a large part in the queer careers of a few of my participants. For Rebecca and Sarah who are both queer women, they discussed it as one of their first experiences of seeing queer women on screen, and their emotional responses to their storylines.

Here, Sarah and Rebecca were talking about the canon relationship between Tara and Willow on *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*.

Sarah: But I thought they way the did Willow and Tara was good, they were like very, non-big dealy about it kind of thing.

Rebecca: Yeah, at the start. I don't like how it ended, mostly because of the feels.

Sarah: Yeah it was sad, well again, like major spoilers but, when Tara gets shot by like the big bad of the season, and uh, then Willow, who at this point is a witch.

Rebecca: They're both witches, but Willow is like a really good witch.

Sarah: Yeah Willow is like really powerful and then she just goes, because Tara has died to goes on this really big vengeful kick and tries to end the world and stuff.

Rebecca: Which is sad.

Sarah: But um, as you do.

Rebecca: Yeah, when your girlfriend dies.

Sarah: Yeah, yeah, that's um, yeah, hmm. Yeah I can't really think of any time where the equivalent has happened but there is kind of an equal reaction to like-

Rebecca: But I think it's fair to say that Willow and Tara is like the ultimate relationship of the show.

Sarah: Yeah I agree.

There is a lot to unpack in this exchange. First, in their discussion while they mention that they like the pairing, Rebecca points out that it is upsetting for her because of "the feels," which is a way of saying in fandom jargon that she had an emotional response to it and it was a strong one. In this case she was sad that Willow's girlfriend was killed off. Then discusses how Willow responds to this, but then Sarah brings up her empathy with Willow in this situation, because Willow's girlfriend has been murdered, so Sarah and Rebecca can empathise with Willow seeking revenge.

It was really interesting to see two participants discuss this. Especially as it was two queer women who also say *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* was one of their first shows that they could relate to as it had canon queer characters. This is also an example of fans interacting with each other here that I was only able to see because of my use of participant observation, and because this was done while watching the show and discussing it directly afterward, I was able to see how these emotions and emotional processes were taking place as they happened, or in this case, somewhat as they were immediately recalled from when they first saw the show. It might seem that this is not directly part of queering because they

are talking about a canon pairing, but this came about within the process and space of queering as this research unfolded and was discussed alongside their queering of other characters and pairings on the show.

Queering also often played a role in emotional processes that helped maintain social cohesion for my participants both with interpersonal relationships and within online queering communities that they were a part of. As Rebecca discussed queering was often something she did with her sister. Dean and Harry explained how they used queering media and media consumption in general as an activity they did together. Despite working different hours, they would wait to watch shows together, mainly through streaming services like Netflix. For those who did not have a sibling or partner to share their queering practices with, many went online to connect with others who took part in queering the same books and programmes. As Jamie discussed, since they did not have a sibling, partner, or friend to queer with, they often went online and found headcanons by others that they would agree with and then reblog, or share them, on Tumblr.

These various ways of connecting with others, and my participants drive to do so clearly pointed to maintaining group cohesion for those who take part in queering media, which I will unpack more in the next section. While many of my participants took part in queering on their own, most of them made an effort to reach out to others to share in discussion and support for their queering practices. In their online communities, people took on different roles in the groups. While some people were active in creating fan art and fan fiction, others consumed these products and provided feedback to the creators to show support or thank them for representing their ship or headcanon. While its true that not all of my participants sought queering communities either in their community or online, many did, and this points to a greater need for finding a place to fit in and find validation

for their queering practices. Emotions play an important part in queering for multiple

reasons, my participant observation sessions expanded upon this when it came to group

queering and social identity and group cohesions, which will be discussed next.

Emotional Entrainment and Group Queering

While carrying out this study I observed incidences of emotional entrainment, as

outlined by von Scheve, et al., a reference to Durkheim's collective emotional feelings while

studying ritual (2014). While observing participants during my participant observation

sessions, I was struck by how ritualistic people can be about queering media. People have

different rituals for their media viewing, which has been extensively researched, usually in

relation to families and television consumption. David Morley's (1986) study on families

and their interactions around watching television is still indispensable to the field, and

clearly outlines how the television is a central part of domestic life. Morley focused on

family dynamics and television, but my participants could be observed negotiating

dynamics when queering media.

Similar to this, emotions run high when queering, which also points to emotional

entrainment similar to what has been studied around sports and the rituals of being a

sports fan, especially as von Scheve, et al. (2014) found when looking at the World Cup and

national identity. While my participants did not often express strong national identity, they

would identity with fandoms and ships in a similar way. Instead of identifying themselves

with their nationality, they would instead say, "I am part of x fandom," as a way of defining

themselves. Not only is this a part of identity but it then ties into rituals as Durkheim

(1912) outlined in relation to ritual and religion as a part of group membership. Emotions

also run high in fandom similarly to sports and religion. As my participants have previously

discussed, they would be upset about canon events in TV shows and books and use queering to process these emotions. Many of them would then seek out others either in person or online in a process of social cohesion and shared group identity centring about their queering.

The clearest example of this from my research is that I met several participants via an organised group that focused on queering popular fiction. This group formed a subgroup of an LGBT student organisation at a university. The group began meeting on Saturdays to discuss a variety of topics relating to queering. The numbers went up and down in this group, but eventually it developed a core group of people that met up every Saturday to discuss queering media and media consumption in general. They made up my first participant observation group and continued to express how invested they were in queering through subsequent meetings with them while this project has been ongoing. I have been invited to watch TV and queer media with them on multiple occasions and while some people have graduated and moved on, the group is still intact via social media. While some shows have ended, new ones have started and taken the place of the old ones, not unlike line-up changes in sports. Just as in sports people remain loyal to their club or national team, this group has maintained a form of loyalty to each other even when people are not involved in the same ships or fandoms long term. There might be more overlap in this sense, between fandoms and ships, than there would be between sports teams. None the less the parallels are there.

Similar again to sports, there are clear insider and outsider boundaries to groups or teams, which are part of the ritual of queering TV. This also tied into being aware of whose presence you were in when consuming media and queering, and when and when not to display emotion. Sarah brought up the idea of knowing your boundaries and which group

you were with when watching TV and queering media, where she discusses who she discloses information about the ritual to;

> "I think its common within like a certain group of people sort of thing. Like I've had to explain it to my sister, who is only 18 months older than me. So it's not an age thing, it's a different kind of social groups, kind of thing. When I explained it to her she was like yeah that's like super logical, and she kind of got where I was sort of coming from. But, and I asked her do you not sort of have and sort of counter ships from what the author has kind of stated and she said, I don't think so, but I think that you're right that you should do it. Like, that's where like the authorship ends, once they've finished it and put it out and then it becomes other people's, so even though it's not that common a practice, I don't think it's that strange an idea, even if you're not."

Sarah and her sister have a clear insider outsider relationship difference when it comes to queering, and as Sarah pointed out it's not an age different at all, as they are very close in age. The groups form around shared interests in queering. Sarah also discussed being aware of self-censoring among outsiders,

> "Yeah, I think it depends like, it depends on the group I'm with as well. I probably, if I was like sitting with my grandma and my mum, I wouldn't be like gaaay. –laughs- [Interviewer: so you're not usually queering with your mom and your grandma.] No, definitely not! But like, I would with my

sisters. But not with uh, my uh, not with anyone who is related to me and is

of an older generation, no. No. Although I did introduce my grandma to

the idea of shipping and then she was like, so Elizabeth Bennett and Mr.

Darcy, they're a ship, and I was like yes they are! –laughs- And now she'll

just say all these random things, like, they're a ship."

Sarah was aware of her sisters being a group that she could reveal the idea of queering to

and explain that she is involved in it but she also discusses avoiding being explicit about

actively queering when she is watching TV with her mum and her grandmother, however

as can be seen here, her grandmother was open to the idea of learning about shipping and

was able to comprehend it through looking at a canon relationship in *Pride and Prejudice.*

Also, by including her grandmother in the jargon that is used in queering, Sarah invited her

in, even marginally, to take part and understand something that Sarah finds important,

even if her grandmother did not quite understand it completely.

While my participants might not have had the World Cup to meet up and show

support for their country, they have other large-scale events that bring thousands of people

together at fan conventions. While many of my participants found social groups online or

with a few friends who are located nearby, others found social cohesion in conventions, that

allowed room for queering. Steve, who is most active in role playing groups in the Marvel

fandom, has become heavily involved in charity cosplay at conventions. The emotional

dedication to this cannot be understated. Steve discussed feeling distress when a part of his

costume needed last minute repairs and he had to run to a shop to find a specific type of

tape. While Steve did not specifically mention how much emotional work it takes, it's clear

that he is dedicated to both cosplay and queering, and also to a charity cause that helps raise money for sick children.

It might not seem that people are claiming identities and social groupings while queering media, and many do not explicitly state that they are. However, it was interesting to note that most of my participants did do this in one way or another, whether is was claiming to be a part of a specific fandom or ship, or more rigidly defined community group that meet regularly to discuss media and queering. The group meetings and fan conventions have several ritual components, such as going to the same conventions every year, or meeting with the same group of people, at the same place, every Saturday afternoon. This also points to their enjoyment of media consumption and queering media that they will return to it again and again.

Pleasures of Queering Media

My participants clearly enjoy queering media, even when most of them have expressed doing so out of frustration as discussed in previous chapters. Even negative emotions still play a part in queering media. As Jamie discussed they would queer out of annoyance at canon relationships that they felt were forced on the audience, especially heterosexual relationships that seemed to come out of nowhere in ongoing series of films, but negative reactions were not the only reason for taking part in queering. My participants had fun queering, and saw it as a leisure activity, as TV is most traditionally seen.

Queering was also part of taking part in other things that my participants got pleasure from doing, such as smoking marijuana and eating take away. Joshua and Harry are in a relationship and agreed to be interviewed together. They take part in queering

together and watch new shows and just see who they feel would make a good ship and Harry explained,

> "We get stoned often, we order some food in, nothing we enjoy more than just sitting and watching a TV series, and say you know what we're just going to binge watch this and kind of see who we get, like who would like who, *Orange is the New Black* is always a good one. That is the highlight. I don't really enjoy going out often. I can't stand human interaction in the slightest. So, I like nothing more than just chilling at home, getting stoned, and just putting on a TV show we haven't seen."

They also discussed how they have limited free time that they can spend together, and they still choose consuming and queering media as their way to leisure activity of choice. They are involved in binging TV in particular. This was not uncommon among my participants and the way of consuming media, on platforms like Netflix and Amazon, and any other on demand streaming services, they were able to do so with ease. Harry and Joshua discussed how it also fit their schedule to do so.

> Harry: We don't have enough time to properly, to sit down and do something.

> Joshua: Yeah, we're both so busy.

> Interviewer: Yeah, it sounds like your work schedule moves around a lot.

Joshua: Yeah and then we do the voluntary groups as well.

Harry: If one of us is busy and then also my other relationship, it's trying to fit in-

Joshua: And when I was in another relationship as well it made it even more complicated.

Harry: So, we just go, you know what, were not going out this weekend. Let's order food, we'll decide during the week what we're going to watch. We need to do a quick Game of Thrones catch up. Just the last series.

Joshua: We wait ten weeks and the just watch it all in one go.

Harry: Because I physically cannot stand waiting.

Joshua: With BBC3 going online...

Interviewer: Oh, are they going to release them all at once.

Joshua: That's what we're saying we're hoping they will do.

In my participant observation groups, food was also usually consumed as part of watching shows. Since, I was expecting people to spend anywhere from two to four hours

watching TV, I brought snacks in advance, but others often did as well. Some groups would order food to be delivered for the viewing. While many studies focusing on health seem to point to the negatives of eating food while watching television (Gore, et al, 2003; Vik, et al. 2013), for my participants it was part of the social experience of queering in a group. Also, my participants were mostly students, which likely had an effect on their eating habits. Though most of my participants, like Harry and Joshua, did say that ordering food was something part of their TV bingeing habits.

Ritualistic TV Viewing

Closely linked to binging TV is the ritual of watching TV. This study confirms what numerous other studies have already found, TV viewing is a ritual in our society (Rubin, 1984; Fiske 1987). While I held four participant observation sessions with different groups, they are mimicked each other with little deviation. Though the participant observation sessions took place in different locations, they all had a remarkably similar pattern. Instead of a television, the viewing took place on a laptop, which might reflect the fact that my participants were all between the ages of eighteen and thirty-eight.

Each group also took time at the beginning to lay out ground rules for group viewing. One of the main issues was whether people were going to talk while the show was playing or after each episode finished. This was done by consensus and I had group that were happy to talk while watching and other groups that wanted everyone to wait to talk until the episode ended. I did not notice a difference in the amount of data generated when it came to these two different sets of rules. The groups that did not talk while the show was running tended to get through more episodes in the same amount of time than those who talked during the show, because when people were talking, we sometimes has to pause the

show so something could be explained and discussed, and sometimes had to rewind if people were talking over the show itself.

Of course, the rituals in these groups are defined by the demographics of the participants. Everyone had a laptop, but few people had televisions. Most people mentioned preferring Netflix and other online streaming services over using BBC iPlayer. Netflix original series were favoured for releasing all of the episodes of their shows at once, so people could binge them at their convenience, rather than waiting for a show to be released weekly. Netflix was the platform used for three out of four of my participant observation groups. Bingeing was also the preferred method for both my participants' individual viewing habits and the participant observation sessions. Once the group chose a show, we watched multiple episodes in a row, and some people had favourite episodes they would return to, in fact re-watching was common among my participants, as other studies have found previously (Bentley and Murray, 2016). Only one group changed programming once they started a show, and this was because it was revealed one person in the group, Michael, had never seen *Star Trek*, which was also based on an emotional response from the group, at which point the group took it on themselves to show Michael *Star Trek* for the first time, which again pointed to the idea of forming social cohesion within a group.

In future studies, it would be interesting to look at who is talking more in both of the situations within the groups. Another study would also be useful for examining whether these preferences reflected on how people expressed emotions when consuming media. My recording included set up, choosing a show, and setting ground rules, and through the shows playing, even for groups that had agreed not to talk about their reactions until the episode had finished. A study that also included filming participants would be

useful for picking up non-vocal expressions as well. As a single researcher, I was not able to focus on both the show and taking part in the participant observation and keep tabs on all of the non-verbal reactions of my participants. For the groups that did not speak during the episodes, they did have other clear emotional responses such as laughing, sighing, and gasping, which I was able to pick up on.

Why We Should Care About Emotional Fans

      The stereotype about fans as being over emotional deviants might be starting to wane, especially as being involved in fan activities has become more mainstream, though there are still marked divides in what is considered acceptable fandom, like going to conventions, collecting high value items, and reselling them for profit, versus parts of fandom that are seen as valueless or even predatory against media producers, such as creating fan art or fan fiction, making manips (see glossary) online, or running fan role play twitter accounts, as discussed earlier in this thesis. There is also a clear gender divide in these activities, with conventions and collecting and selling high value items being seen as men's activities and writing fan art and fic fiction as being seen as women's activities. It comes as no shock that those activities seen as being in the male domain are valued more highly and seen as more acceptable. Sports are another example of this, because sports fandom, which is strongly associated with men, is seen as mainstream and acceptable (Mendelsohn, 2017). Within these divides we can see varied emotional responses, which should interest us as social scientists. Are some reactions seen as acceptable whereas others are not? I am specifically interested in reactions to wanting to create more content for others who enjoy consuming stories and art about specific characters and shows.

Additionally, within fandoms we still see marginalisation of specific groups, and the move to fandom taking place largely online means it is easier than ever to access fandom, but its also easier for marginalised groups to be further stigmatised, and even harassed online. This means there are also negative emotions involved in fandom and queering media. Even for my participants who did not feel directly affected by marginalisation in fandom, they still expressed being upset by it taking place. The clearest example of this is when in 2014, after some people criticised misogyny in video gaming culture, online "anti-feminist activists" (Massanari, 2017) sent threats to those who made comments against the depictions of women in video games, which made it to the pages of *The New York Times* and other large newspapers, because of the severity of the threats (Wingfield, 2014). This has now been covered by academics as well. The events have come to be known as #GamerGate or simply, "gamergate." Massanari, specifically looked at Reddit and how "geek masculinity" provide a fertile ground for this kind of anti-feminist discourse in online communities. Further drawing parallels to sport and fandom, Mortensen (2016) has also looked at how the events of #GamerGate are similar to hooliganism is football. Mortensen also points out however that much of this might also stem from the fact that games have not been taken seriously as a form of culture.

It cannot be discounted that LGBTQ audiences are still doing a lot of emotional work to find media that they find engaging and positive. At the very least, it is of interest that people can have such different reactions in fandoms, but sociology will be most interested by the gender and race divides than can be seen unfolding, as well as the study of digital societies and cultures, and how there is seemingly a blossoming of space for anti-feminist and anti-LGBT rhetoric, while at the same time, a space for those who are interested in queering media as my participants do, which they largely see as positive and

useful in their everyday lives. As my study focused specifically on how LGBTQ people are queering media, it points to yet another divide, that between cis and straight audiences, who are largely well served with a variety of characters and storylines versus LGBTQ audiences which are still trying to eek out space for themselves, despite making gains over the last hundred years in media, especially in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, but as my participants point out, representation is still lagging behind.

While there has been some focus on fandom as a positive experience for audiences, there has yet to be much focus on LGBTQ audience's emotions outside of annual studies focusing on how far representation has progressed. While GLAAD (2015; 2016; 2017) often touched on why killing off characters can be a negative experience for LGBTQ audiences, the scope of the emotional effect on LGBTQ audiences and fans has not been explored as thoroughly as it could be, particularly after a television year (2016 -2017) that was deadly for LGBTQ characters, especially queer women.

Fandom studies has steered social science away from the stereotype of crazed fans, who are social awkward and do not contribute to society. It is vital that this be expanded upon by looking at marginalised groups, including LGBTQ audiences, but also racial and ethnic minorities as well, who have been facing another range of issues within the intersection of fandom studies and online societies, such as whitewashing of POC characters. It appears that sociology is starting to care about emotions and media consumption as it pertains to queering, but currently it is focused on negative emotions, and fear and anger surrounding feminist criticism of media.

Conclusion

Emotions play a large part in queering media, for multiple reasons, but as I have focused on here, emotional reactions, emotional entrainment and group cohesion, the pleasure of queering media, and taking part in ritual were key topics breached in my study. Emotional responses would be expected to be key to queering media, there must be some motivation for queering, and as this study has reiterated in previous chapters as well as this one, fans are seeking more from their media, and when they are not provided with it, they will actively do their own work to make media amenable to their needs, whether that be to find relatable characters and relationships, or diversify the types of characters, stories, and lives they see on their screens.

There is also clearly a role for social cohesion in media consumption as my participants discussed how they interact with and relate to others within fandom itself. Some took a more active approach than others, but even those who were content to allow others to generate content, still made an effort to log on and share this content on their social media, thereby identifying themselves with a particular fandom or ship. There were even points when my participants attempted to build connections with outsiders as they allowed them a peak into something that interests them, even when the outsiders did not completely understand it.

My participants also continue to take part in queering media because they take pleasure from doing so. They also often combine this with other things they take pleasure in, such as eating take away or snack foods, and smoking marijuana. This was common across my participants and reflects previous studies that show that people take pleasure in consuming media. This also feeds into the ritual of watching TV. My participants had clear rituals for watching TV and these rituals were often part of dealing with the outside world

and issues at work or school. Even when my participants had limited time, most of them still made time for queering as it played a part in maintaining their emotional balance, such as queering being used as a way to escape bothersome emotions, especially stress and emotional fatigue from other parts of their life. In studies going forward, I expect this might be explored further, especially as we are starting to see backlash against the progress that has recently been made in the way of LGBTQ rights, such as a backtrack on a proposed gender recognition law in the UK. Since my participants expressed this as being important to them, and not something they always had the benefit of as children. I expect we'll continue to see emotions play an important role in queering, and possibly organised activism to resist the marginalisation we have seen with events like #GamerGate and the anti-feminist backlash that researchers have studied on websites like Reddit.

It has become clear for all of these reasons that we as sociologists should care about queering media, and the emotions involved. While it is becoming clear that we need to focus on this to truly understand both fandom studies, and why fandom plays such an important role in people's lives, especially those from marginalised groups. While this study does present fans as emotional, it does challenge stereotypes of hyper emotional fans and points out that they exhibit a range of emotions, and these emotions play an important function in their daily lives.

CHAPTER SEVEN: EXPANDED DIMENSIONS OF QUEERING

My participants discussed how they used queering to expand upon the representation that was already present. Throughout data collection my participants continued to say that they thought current representation in the media was a good start, a stepping-stone on the way to full and equal representation in media, which they see as including a wide range of queer identities and queer people in all walks of life, but that we still have a long way to go. My participants were grateful for the representation that is currently present in the media, even more so when these included intersections of identities, including race, class, ability, and other groups that are often underrepresented in media. My participants' consensus was that representation today is still not good enough, and partially leads to their practices of queering. My participants align with many of the findings from GLAAD (2016), which has recently expanded their findings in their annual report *Where We Are on TV* to include representations on streaming services such as Netflix, Hulu and Amazon Prime. In their 2016- 2017 report, LGBTQ+ characters still only make up 4.8% of all characters on broadcast television, which includes shows that many of my participants are consuming. Outside of my participants' streaming service consumption, which now boasts the highest numbers for LGBTQ+ representation, and notably, the best numbers for representations of queer women, lesbian and bisexual women make up 63% of all LGBTQ characters on streaming services; the overall numbers are still low for representation of queer women. Additionally, as my research was being collected, we witnessed one of the deadliest years for lesbian and bisexual women on television,

"Of the platforms tracked in GLAAD's report, broadcast was the deadliest

for lesbian and bisexual women this year with at least 12 characters killed

since the beginning of 2016. The number of female characters forecast for

the 2016-17 season as compared to last year make it clear that broadcast

networks have not done enough to recover."

This still comes at a time when lesbians make up only 17% of queer characters on broadcast

TV, with bisexual women making up only 23%, the vast majority (49%) are still gay men.

All of this happened while as the same time breaking records for black LGBTQ+

characters, especially men on broadcast television this year, which has black characters

making up 20% of LGBTQ+ series regulars (GLAAD, 2016). Women overall, still

remained underrepresented on broadcast television making up only 44% of LGBTQ+ plus

characters present. My participants had a lot to say about these underrepresented groups

within the queer umbrella and how they have used queering to expand representation.

This chapter looks at who is represented, expanding upon that representation, and

queering friendships, which my participants found to be particularly lacking.

Which Queers Are Represented?

As GLAAD points out, with the inclusion of streaming services in their data

collection, representation of LGBTQ+ characters has gone up, especially on Netflix

(GLAAD, 2016). Representations of lesbian and bisexual women on broadcast and cable

TV are still low. Streaming is actually where lesbians dominate representation among

LGBTQ+ identities making up 43% of queer characters present. Streaming services are also

leading the way in trans representation, though transgender men are still largely absent,

there were only four in this year's programming across formats, compared to twelve trans

women. So while representation is going up on streaming services and slightly improving

on broadcast and cable TV in many categories, there is still a way to go to have more expansive representation of queer identities. For my participants, this would include a larger variety of queer identities, and people with intersectional identities.

With all of these ups and downs in representation in mind, my participants discussed how queer representation still tends to be limited, mainly to gay, white, cis men. While we are seeing increasing representation of the full spectrum of queer identities it is still likely lower than the actual proportion of queer people in our society, and for my participants, we still need more. My participants still felt that what we were seeing were still mostly stereotyped or one-sided ideas of queer identities. Some of my participants brought up queering as a way to expand upon the available representations. They did this not only for themselves but usually shared this queering with others, mostly through online channels.

My participants had various interesting ways that they queered media to see more representation of themselves. One of my participants in particular, Sam a non-binary lesbian, discusses "butching" characters, or allowing for butch lesbian representations, which they saw as less present than femme representations, with the current main exception being Big Boo on *Orange is the New Black* (Netflix, 2014). Sam would sometimes queer characters as lesbians, but would further "butch" them as well, so expand the allowed identities of queer women.

> "What I really like to do is to butch characters. That's something I really
> like to do. I just really hate that whole idea of being feminine is
> empowering, put them in those high heels, you know, kill men with your

winged eyeliner, I'm like I'm over that, put them in combat boots, shave

their heads, get them to beat people up that's also amazing and sexy."

This is tied to Sam's preference for strong female characters in the TV shows they consume, moving away from queerbaiting, and shows focusing on male leads. Sam discusses their change in viewing habits within the past couple of years,

> "I am kind of actively avoiding the shows like *Sherlock* and *Supernatural*
>
> and stuff, I'm just over the dude bros are coded as being they might do this,
>
> it's just so, you know it's boring, it's not just because I'm tired of
>
> queerbaiting, it's just bad writing at this stage, um so I've, my watching
>
> habits have changed. If anything has like any hints of a really cool female
>
> character, I'm like hmmm I will be here. "

Like other participants, Sam is dissatisfied with what seems like an increase in queerbaiting on TV shows, without actually delivering canonically queer characters. Or canonically queer characters are introduced, but as mentioned by GLAAD (2016) in their latest report, one of them is killed off.

> "Another show that kind of low key queerbaited in a different way was *The*
>
> *Walking Dead*, which I'm a huge fan of um, there was a lesbian
>
> relationship in it, but I think they did it so they could broadcast the fact
>
> that they had lesbians in because it was killed off in like one episode, and
>
> then one of the characters stayed, and like, they never even kissed. And now

there's one of them kept on and started hanging out with Rick's gang. Like

I haven't watched it in a while, but I'm pretty sure that's what happened, I

was like lesbians! Oh wait, no, no she's dead."

Sam was interested in the prospect for canonically lesbian characters, but one was killed off

almost immediately as a plot device. It is interesting to note, that the surviving queer female

character on *The Walking Dead* goes on to form another relationship with a woman, and

that women was killed off just this past season and is included in GLAAD's report

discussing this year's high mortality rate for lesbians and bisexual women on TV. She was

also killed to further to the plot of a white cisgender male character on the show, in fact

replacing his character's death in the comic books upon which the show is based. Many of

my participants were aware of the TV tropes of "Dead Lesbian Syndrome" and "Bury Your

Gays", harkening back to the days when the only representation for queer people was when

they were either punished, killed, or both as was common when we first started seeing queer

representation in TV and films (Epstein and Friedman, 1995).

There were also interesting omissions in my data. While ten of my participants

(62.5%) identified under the trans umbrella, and knew that I am transgender as well, trans

representation did not come up nearly as often as I would have expected. There were

comments that it was good to see trans actors finally filling trans roles, but many of my

participants did not discuss seeking out specifically trans characters or representation. This

might be due to the fact that there is still limited representation, six per cent of all

LGBTQ+ people on broadcast, cable, and streaming services combined (GLAAD, 2016),

but also that a lot of it was not seen as being particularly good representation, and therefore

word of mouth did not encourage trans, non-binary, and genderqueer people to seek out

these programmes. For example, several of my participants brought up the show *Orphan Black* (Space/BBC America, 2013), which revolves around a set of clones, who are all portrayed by the female lead. This show was particularly irksome to many of my trans and non-binary participants for its inclusion of a clone called Tony, who is the only trans man in a set of female clones. Tony appeared in one episode in season two, mentioned being trans and taking testosterone, and quickly disappeared again, so for my participants it felt like a bit of a gimmick rather than real representation. It remains to be seen if this character will be revisited in the upcoming final season of the show.

At the time of my research, Sophia Burset, portrayed by Laverne Cox, on *Orange is the New Black* (Netflix, 2014) was still the most visible trans person on television to my participants, most of whom do not own televisions and rely on streaming services to see television shows. It should be noted however that many of my participants who fall under the trans umbrella, identify more toward the trans masculine side of the spectrum or were assigned female at birth, so for the majority of them, they had seen no representations of themselves outside of films like *Boys Don't Cry* (1999) and *The L Word* (2009), for those that had watched it when it originally aired or shortly thereafter. As GLAAD's report includes all shows airing for the 2016-2017 season, most of the shows with representation of trans masculine and trans men had not yet aired, so they were not brought up during my data collection period.

There were some specific characters who were brought up as being queered as trans or who my participants related to because they some similarities between their own lives and the lives of the characters. Steve, a 34-year-old gay trans man, pointed out how he had adapted storylines to fit his own trans history and personal transition goals,

"I've wound up sort of using the Super Soldier Serum thing, as, it's kind of in my head as its sort of like a metaphor for getting, getting T (testosterone). Um so, I think from that perspective that's sort of why I'm super into Bucky and Captain America, cause they've got that Super Soldier Serum thing going for them. It just really hit me as being something that was kind of fit with how I feel."

Steve clearly identifies with the story of Steve Rogers aka Captain America going through a huge physical transformation in his storyline, as well as his partner Bucky Barnes, who later goes through a similar process. Also, around the time of the interview, Steve performed a cosplay, short for costume play in which the fan takes on the persona and mannerisms of the character they dress as, as Bucky Barnes at a local comic convention. Steve Rogers and Bucky Barnes are also a popular pairing to ship as a male/male couple as well among some of my other participants. Another trans masculine participant, Charlie (34, non-binary and asexual) also ships these two characters as being romantically involved. And, as we will see later in this chapter, they remain one of the more easily accessible pairings to queer in the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

However, as none of my participants identified as solely heterosexual, all of my trans and non-binary participants were queering media to fit other identities they hold, such as their sexual and romantic orientations as well. So those that did not mention trans identity did not strike me as odd, because their queering practices still focused on other identities that they hold, and while they might not have focused on trans identities in interviews, many of them at least mentioned it as being a part of their overall queering

practices. At times, this could be as simple as just queering a character as having a trans history, which Jamie pointed out in our interview;

> Jamie: Um, I also ship Sulu and Chekov, but I like Sulu to be ace if possible. And I also like Chekov to be trans. That's, that's the shortest way of explaining that.
>
> Interviewer: Any particular identity within the trans umbrella?
>
> Jamie: Either just as non-binary or as a trans guy, it suits how small he is.

This was particularly telling as part of Jamie's queering as well, because as Jamie stated, they queer everyone Star Trek. However, we can see that Jamie has picked up on Chekov's size and stature, to queer him as having a trans history. So while my participants were queering for trans identities, they also made it clear they were queering for other representation, both of their other identities and other queer identities in general.

These instances of queering seemed particularly important because they clearly were filling a gap in media representation. There are also other ways of expanding on representation that my participants took part in it, largely through producing fan art and fiction, which I will not look at more closely.

Fan Fiction and Fan Art as Expanding Representation

Many of my participants were involved in creating fan fiction and fan art as part of their queering practices, either in the past or currently. The majority of them have seen this wane as they have moved on to university or careers as discussed in the Queering Careers

chapter. However, it was still an integral part of expanding representation to them, especially representation for identities within the LGBTQ+ communities that are often still marginalised, such as polyamorous, asexual, and aromantic people. Unfortunately, even within queer communities there are still people who feel unwelcome or at the fringes of society, and at the fringes of queer society as well. It is telling when GLAAD, one of the main organisations tracking media representation annually, does not include numbers for polyamorous, asexual, or aromantic people. Even if they were not included on TV, it would be expected to see a note in their reports explaining they there is minimal to no representation of these identities. Even as they have included subsections on Black, Latino or Latinx (see glossary), Asian Pacific Islander, and disabled LGBTQ+ people, not including these other identities seems all the more out of place. None of this would seem to come as a shock to my aromantic, asexual, or polyamorous participants, who still felt that they are marginalised within queer communities.

Scott, McDonnell, and Dawson (2016) actually describe coming to asexual identities as a process of "non-becoming" and "non-events" as many of the events that are considered milestones in our lives are of little or no interest to many people on the asexual spectrum. They saw developing an asexual identity as more of a series of negations. This fits with the lack of representation that my participants find in media, though not identifying with the broader heteronormative and heterosexist culture norms that are often present and repeated in media, they are again going through a process of negation, and seeing that they do not fit the definition of how you are meant to be social and sexual in our society. Queering is yet another way that asexual people have carved out space for themselves. In this way, it is almost not surprising that asexual and aromantic people are finding representation in fan fiction and fan art, rather than through canonical characters in media.

The fact that this is also found online, as opposed to through physical printed books and broadcast television shows, as seems like a non-becoming, and a non-event in a way. As others have pointed out fan studies, being a fan, and participating in fan culture is often seen as less valid than consuming highbrow entertainment, in a similar way to being asexual or aromantic is seen as being less valid in a largely monosexual world with romantically and sexually driven life goals.

Two of my participants, Joshua and Harry, who are in a long term romantic and sexual relationship and identify as polyamorous similarly discussed discovering this through stumbling on fan fiction that involved people having multiple partners. For them, it was finding a *Harry Potter* fan fiction that included Harry Potter, Draco Malfoy, and Hermione Granger as partners in various pairings, and finding that they found the dynamic was interesting and worked. They certainly would not have found polyamorous relationships in the *Harry Potter* books, and while there are no official numbers from GLAAD as I mentioned, any representation that is present, is likely very minimal.

Though, none of my other participants identified as polyamorous, a couple did bring up the point that there is little to no representation available, because they remained focused not only on representation for themselves but expanding representation for a variety of queer identities. Mark, a gay man, even asked me if I could think of any characters who are polyamorous off the top of my head, because he could not think of any, other than one background character in *Parks and Recreation* (2009- 2015), which includes a main character whose boyfriend has another male partner. We struggled to find any other recent representations in popular media without more research. While this is little representation on television, the subject of polyamory does come in in books (Antalffy, 2011).

Some of my participants have moved on from queering as a way of expanding representation, to creating their own representative works. As Sam mentioned, they have moved away from a lot of their viewing practices, however, this is because they now focus more on their own art, which allows queer expression. Sam did write fan fiction as a teen and saw this a stepping stone to seeing more representation in media, through queering characters, and borrowing these characters to make up original stories for them, to then finally creating their own art and going to art school to build on this. The practice of "butching up" characters provided an outlet for artistic expression as well as helping Sam feel that there was representation to be found in mainstream media. Now Sam hopes to increase representation of queer lives through their own work.

Tom, who is a writer and just recently finished his Master's in creative writing, talks about fan fiction as a stepping stone to launching his own career as a writer,

> "I just started writing my own stuff, it all started out as fan fiction, like in
> my teens when I was really into comic books in my teenage years, and then I
> just started writing my own things after that, that's why I stopped [reading
> a lot of fan fiction online]. So I wrote fan fiction and stuff. I was a big
> *X-Men* fan. *X-Men* was like, my jam."

Tom mentioned that his main ship was "white, blond Americans" which summed up what he said was the available diversity in the comics, the main diversity being that they were mutants. He also drew inspiration from comic book competitions that encouraged people to write their own character,

"So, I would just make a character and like jam it in, that kind of world. But

that's what kick started it off."

Tom clearly feels this launched him into his writing career, and it encouraged him to write

his own characters.

Another participant, Steve, is very active in a role-playing community online, with

people he has met in real life and all who relate to a various character from *The Avengers*

(2012). His group meets on Skype to carry out their role-playing game, which is almost like

a live fan fiction writing session between the members of the group. While this clearly falls

under fan creations, I did not include it as expanding representation outside of Steve's

role-play group. They do not share it anywhere else other than with each other when they

meet over Skype, however it is a creative practice that is still important to mention as part of

my research. It might not expand representation for those outside of Jamie's group, but

Jamie pointed out that everyone in the group sort of relates to the character they have

chosen to role play, and for them, the character is important to queering. Steve portrays

Bucky Barnes in the role-play group, as he has in cosplay and in his queering practices as

mentioned earlier in the chapter. Steve also mentioned something quickly, that actually

seems very important, that the group has been an outlet for people to explore their

identities and come out as well,

"It's actually kind of funny, it started out with two trans men, and now a

third has come out as agender. So, it's actually quite a queer group."

So while the group, might not be available to others, it has provided value to those in it.

For my participants who were artists and writers, fan fiction and fan art were a stepping-stone for them to move on to their own original work. Sam might have started with "butching" female characters from TV and comic books but is now attending art school. Olivia wrote fem slash, but it now also working independently as an author creating original works, as are Tom and Luke who are both pursuing Master's in creative writing. Queering was an inherently creative process for them and helped them develop their skills as writers and artists. They all hope to produce work that will increase the lexicon of available and representative queer characters in popular media. They point out that are not doing this solely to negate the need for queering media, but so that there are also available representations for media consumer who do not participate in queering, either as an active practice or through consumption of queering products.

For my participants who were more involved with consuming fan art and fan fiction, this would not have been possible without the fans who were creating such content. This allowed for more inclusive queer representation from their favourite books, TV shows, and films. They are still actively seeking out queer representation in their shows, but as Mark, a gay male participant pointed out, a show that had clear queer representation, *Looking* (2014-2015), was cancelled after only two seasons. Another show that was exploring the idea of messing with assumed heteronormativity, *Agent Carter* (2015- 2016) was cancelled after its second season. So while GLAAD (2016) shows in their most recent report, representation is increasing, we are still seeing the cancellation of shows that are specifically directed toward queer audiences.

Queering Friendships

The topic of friendships as came up among my participants, because they all felt that the stereotypes that men and women cannot be friends and that men cannot be close intimate friends were still present in popular media. For my participants, who hold queer identities, this heteronormative social stereotype is particularly puzzling. Friendship is still under researched in sociology. However, Weeks, Heaphy, and Donovan (2001) carried out a large qualitative study with non-heterosexual identifying men and women, which shed light on queer friendships, and they found that "friendship is key to understanding non-heterosexual ways of life" (p.51). My participants echoed their findings that cross gender friendships are normal, and often a part of chosen families. This might reveal why friendships seem more important to queer identifying people. My study comes nearly two decades after Weeks, Heaphy, and Donovan, but during a time when queer people still fear rejection from biological family members and chose to remain in chosen families with extended networks of couples of close friends. Even when my participants might be discussing queering as far as romantic and sexual relationships, they still expressed wanting to see more queer friendships, and a move away from the stereotypes that two men cannot be friends, or that men and women cannot be friends. Sam mentioned this specifically when talking about *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*;

> "I don't know if this is going on a tangent but this Poe and Finn thing, it
> would be great if that was a gay relationship in the movies, that would be
> fucking fantastic but at the same time, wouldn't it be great if you have a
> male-male friendship that wasn't a bromance for once and that was just
> platonic but they were able to be emotionally intimate and vulnerable with

each other. That would be equally great, you know? Yeah and I would also love it if no one dated and the just kept the relationship between Finn and Rey because male-female friendships are also great, and they need to be produced more."

While Sam wants to see an increase in representation, they also want to see a breakdown of classic stereotypes about gender roles and how these restrict platonic relationships between different gender characters and same gender, especially male, characters. This again hints to queering not just platonic relationships, but also aromantic relationships and asexual relationships, which we still see very limited representations of.

Roseneil (2004) also found that cross gender relationships are important for developing support networks. She points out that although *Friends* was one of the most popular shows of the 90's, we often neglect to see the importance of friendships when it comes to studying interpersonal relationships with particular look to care in her study (p. 410). Similarly, Rumen (2012) found that work friendships between gay and bisexual men and straight women to often be important, especially for straight women who had broken up with their partners or were contemplating it. These friendships cross gender friendships are also clearly important to be participants as they saw a need to include them in their queering practices. As Sam mentioned, it would be great if the main trio from *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* remained friends and, in that way, each other's support network.

My first participant observation group included discussions of queering friendships as well, queer chosen families, and asexual and aromantic representation in relation to our viewing of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997 – 2003). The group chose the show as two had seen it before and two had not, but all agreed to watch it. Sarah, who had seen the show

before was quick to bring up the idea of cross gender friendship between Xander and Willow, Buffy's two friends,

> "Oh well obviously she's a girl, he's a boy, they must want to be with each other. And it's kind of ugh. Because their friendships are so much better, like the three of those as friends, it's so good compared to when they like try to have romantic entanglements between each other."

Sarah felt that they were all better as friends without trying to pair them up with each other, but then also points out how this chosen family continues once characters develop romantic relationships with others,

> "They do have this kind of unconventional family where Willow and Tara are together and then they're like both equally good friends with Buffy. And they are all just like this little happy family."

Rebecca, who was also in the group agreed with Sarah, that Willow and Buffy have a special relationship,

> Rebecca: They were just like made to be like, platonic life partners. [Buffy and Willow]

> Sarah: I know. They're just so sweet.

They continued that line of reasoning later in the discussion as well, and it even extended to a parenting relationship,

> Rebecca: I think basically like Buffy and Willow and Tara when she's later brought in, they're like this little unconventional family.

> Sarah: Yeah.

> Rebecca: They live in the same house and then were all like equally mum to Dawn. It's just beautiful.

> Sarah: yeah, it's really nice.

This is not dissimilar to the real-life relationships and family structures that Weeks, Heaphy, and Donovan found in their interviews with non-heterosexuals, who expressed that families were less defined by birth and marriage, and more by groups of close friends, former and current romantic and/or sexual partners, and sometimes children, grandparents, biological donor parents, and so on (2001). They called this "doing family" drawing from Butler's "doing gender." They also found in their study, that friendships can be just as important and sometimes more important than families of origin especially when it comes to times of struggle in life, which I argue is also evidence in my participants' queering activities, in that they actively work to queer friendships in an attempt to expand representation, thereby showing that this is an important part of day to day queer life. This again echoes Roseneil's findings (2004), and also provides further evidence to the

important of friendships for people in non-heterosexual relationships or non-traditional family configurations as discussed by Budgeon (2006).

The idea of queer friendships was also brought up by my asexual and aromantic participants who have to actively seek out representation in media, usually through books, or works published online. Distressingly, GLAAD does not even include aromantic or asexual characters in their annual reports. Even without official numbers, I know from my asexual and aromantic participants that they have struggled to find representation on television and have mainly used queering to find representations of themselves in media.

One of my asexual participants in particular, Olivia, actually preferred the ambiguity of some portrayals on screen, especially when left unsaid by the show producers and when it left out physical intimacy,

> "I think they've really struck gold with Captain America, because it's all so gay, and it's also a bit ambiguous, which I prefer, especially being ace, and it doesn't have to be in your face, I think that's what a lot of people miss. I'm not saying it has to be in your face all the time; I don't really want to see people at it, as it were. I just would like things to be more open and just I think in the next movie [*Captain America: Civil War* (2016)], it's like, it seems they are going to be shoving a cis het woman romance at Steve Rogers. Just because. I think they are going to shove Sharon Carter at him, which is just so creepy because Steve seems to have very little interest in her, and they had like very little screen time together. I myself would need to see a lot more build up just for me to ever swallow that. He had so much more chemistry with The Falcon on screen, it was just so much flirting even with,

what was the character, with Natasha it was like, it was a good friendship. I

loved that it was platonic and they didn't just shove like a female character

at him."

Leaving these situations, characters, and relationships more ambiguous allowed for asexual

and aromantic queering to take place. Also, as she mentioned, not having physical intimacy

allows sex-repulsed asexuals to still enjoy shows and relationships on them without feeling

like they are having sexuality thrown in their faces. As Olivia also points out, she is not

completely opposed but would like more build up to the relationships rather than them

being assumed as we normally see with heteronormativity in the media. She also states that

she would like to see more of the male- female friendship between Steve and Natasha that

was featured in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (2014), and she appreciated that they

were not automatically paired up for a sexual and/or romantic relationship.

So in what representation there is, and what room for representation there is, there

is more room for queering of cross gender friendships and aromantic and asexual

relationships. My participants felt that these areas were particularly left out of

representation, along with queer women in general. As participants mentioned in other

chapters as well, especially Rebecca and Jamie, they will make characters asexual and

aromantic, but they often are left to do this in opposition to canonical cisgender

heterosexual relationships, rather than being allowed the room to do so themselves,

without it being a reaction to what the producers and writers have included.

Conclusion

It is also of interest that Weeks, Heaphy, and Donovan (2001) found that much progress in being able to live a non-heterosexual life is a reaction to something negative happening, such as the AIDS crisis in the 1980s and early 90s, and Section 28 at the same time, and an unequal age of consent that persisted until the 2000s. It was only after these events pushed many to fight back, or as one of their participants said "not taking it anymore" that we are able to see positive changes, such as free distribution of condoms, allowing queer people to adopt, and same sex marriage. Similarly, my participants have been able to draw something positive out of something negative, namely lack of queer representation in media. Even as media consumption is seen as a negative or at the very least lowbrow entertainment, and that fan culture and queering are at times still considered deviant acts, or something to be embarrassed by, my participants have created positives through sharing identity and expanding representation through fan creations that have led to other queer people finding solace in a heteronormative society.

Also, for my participants who are artists and writers, their practices in queering have also allowed them an outlet to discover their skills and realise that they want to be a more widely socially acceptable contribution to expanding representation through their art and writing, from their own original characters and storylines. Hopefully, their works will add to the growing body of popular media that include representations of a variety queer identities, and looking to Weeks, Heaphy, and Donovan, that include doing family and indeed all interpersonal relationships in different ways.

The current trend seems like it will continue as GLAAD as shown over the past several years in their annual reports that we are seeing a slow and steady overall increase in representation in television, and hopefully future GLAAD reports will show the continued

expansion of representation in the media. My participants still want more of what they would consider "good" representation in the media, but it seems things are moving in the right direction. However, it is clear, queer audiences will continue to queer media whether representation is present or not. As is clear from my participants continuing to queer over the past few years as we have seen representation go up. My participants also outright said that they would continue to queer media as they saw fit to make it more relatable to their own lives and the lives of their friends. Time and again, my participants pointed out that they want to see queer people of all walks of life, all race, all economic statuses, all genders, and in all kinds of careers in order to have more complete representation in the media. If it is not there, they will continue to expand upon this themselves, however, as they stated, even if it is there, they will always see ways to improve upon this. In this way, in the next study on queering by queer audiences, what my participants are doing, may even be seen to become inadequate, just as they felt the same about previous studies on queering media, which did not include queer perspectives. However, it is clear, that varied and diverse representations are an important part of queering media and expanding queering for my participants.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

This conclusion will summarise my findings about queering practices as discussed in the four substantive chapters of this thesis, set out the contributions and limitations of this study and what this teaches us about queering practices, and then consider what needs further research within this field of study. Finally, I assess my contribution to the literature and the existing debates around queering media and media consumption in sociology and media studies.

Summary of Findings

This study has explored everyday practices of queering among LGBTQ+ audiences, which previous studies have not examined in situ with participants. This adds a valuable contribution to the literature on fan creativity and how LGBTQ+ audiences interact with media. I looked to previous literature in the fields of sociology, media studies, fan studies, and queer studies, on queering media and fan consumption of media to inform this research project and fill a gap in the literature. My study adds to the literature by broadening this by aiming understand why queering is important to my participants, and how they do this. I also looked at studies looking at fan space and LGBTQ+ spaces, as well as relationships among LGBTQ+ people. I looked to queer theory and feminist theory to inform my theory and methods for this research. I then turned to my methods chapter to explain my use of purposive snowball sampling, interviews, and participants observations to find participants and collect data for this project.

In my first findings chapter, I covered queering careers to look at how audiences are finding their way to queering media in the first place. As I discussed, this often takes the form of a friend or siblings inviting them into the world of fandom and queering practices,

either through sharing fan works, or through participatory queering and consumption of media. Of course, some individuals stumbled on this world on their own, but many had one or two people who showed them the doors to these practices, and while many have moved away from queering with these important individuals or first shows or books or interest, they have continued on with new interests. For some this is something they fall back on when they have a lull in school or work priorities and while it is a leisure activity, many of my participants see it as an important one. While other studies have followed how people followed bands or artists on tour or reflected on the production of fan zines before moving to digital formats, my study looks at how queering careers are something that change along the life course, but how it remains relevant for many of my participants at different times in their lives.

Next, I looked at ethical queering. While fandom and queering has been seen as a deviant activity, my participants laid out clear boundaries for queering. They chose to stick to fictional characters and not involved actors portraying characters in their favourite TV shows and films. They also veered away from topics that they found to be unethical in their everyday lives and according to their own moral codes, including the subjects of rape, incest, paedophilia, and insensitivity to issues of class and race when it comes to media representation; they were careful to avoid "white washing" canon POC or BME characters. Some participants also drew parallels between their queering to their everyday activism and attempts to maintain an intersectional approach to their daily activities, both in leisure and at work and school. It was of note, that participants used the term intersectional on the own, and with no prompting from me. Which is likely due to the fact that my sample skewed toward university educated people in their 20s and 30s. This finding veer away from previous research that that portrayed fans as being crazed and irrational when it comes

to their consumption and prosumption of media. My participants present their activities as level headed and methodical.

Following ethical queering, I looked at queering and emotions, which also adds to the argument that fans are not just crazed and over emotional about their fandoms. Emotions played a large role in queering for most of my participants, but it was a range of emotions. Not only did this include emotions related to their own position as LGBTQ+ individuals and their relationships and connections to fictional characters, but also relationships among friends and family. For most they said they came to queering as a way of exploring and processing their place in society and on a smaller scale, their schools, friend groups, and families as LGBTQ+ individuals, and also a place to feel less isolated in their identity, mainly also discussed the continuing role of emotions and feelings of social cohesion that they linked with queering. For some it was taking part in consuming and queering media with their partners, and for others it was coming together as a group with other LGBTQ+ identified people and discussing their favourite fan theories, headcanons, and relationships in their favourite programmes. These emotional displays might be more nuanced than some previous studies have suggested.

Finally, I looked at expanded dimensions of queering. This is also tied ot their ethical and emotional queering processes. For my participants, queering was a response to a lack of media representation, which was discussed through this thesis. However, this went even further for more marginalised identities with the umbrella of LGBTQ+, and did so through using their own ethical guidelines, including not erasing representation for other marginalised groups, but also using emotional processes that generally revolved around their frustration with a lack of representation. For people who are often relegated to the plus in the acronym, this was even more important. For my asexual and aromantic

participants, they often lacked representation on television as all, as I discussed when looking to Stonewall UK and GLAAD media reports. While representation for LGB people has been on the rise over the past twenty to thirty years, and with increasing representation of Trans people in the past decade, we still see very little representation of asexual and aromantic people. For these participants, they were often left with no option but to queer media to find representations of people like themselves. This included adding queer platonic friendships, non-romantic sexual partners in long-term relationships, and non-sexual relationships. For them, this was the only way to see representations of themselves on screen.

Many of my participants, not just those who are asexual or aromantic, wanted to see more representations of the diversity that can be found under the LGBTQ+ umbrella, especially seeing chosen families, and extended friend networks that banded together to act as families in times of crisis. As discussed, these neo-familiar arrangements were more important during the AIDS crisis, my participants still felt a need for them today and would like to see them represented in media. This was a final point on why LGBTQ+ audiences continue to queer media, even when representation is expanding in many forms of media.

As I have noted previously, the political climate changed drastically while carrying out this research project and this will likely have affected my research. Participants might have been more likely to bring up ideas about representations and equality than they would have been more likely to in the past, but it remains to be seen if this trend will continue. It might be more or less difficult to find participants depending on how LGBTQ+ protections change in the near future.

This research contributes to the existing literature on fan activities, queering, and media representation. While previous studies (Lewis, 1992; Jenkins, 1988) have focused on the products of fan consumption, and others focused on the meaning of being a fan and the value of their fan knowledge (Hills, 2002; 2012), this study has focused on the active process of queering media, as opposed to look at the products of queering, such as fan art and fan fiction than can be found on Tumblr, and sites like fanfiction.net and AO3 or archiveofourown.org. This study actually observed fans as they watched programmes and their active processes to fill this gap in the literature.

There has been an increasing focus on lack of representation of LGBTQ+ people in the media for the past twenty years, but this study allowed my participants to include how they have managed to get around this issue on their own, without direct action with media producers. While my participants expressed that they would like to see expanded representation in media, they would still be active in queering media even with more representation available. This study is one of the first to discuss this idea and this is an important finding. While I have found a link between queering and representation, this study points that they might both be important in their own right, and queering is not only used as a solution for a lack of representation.

In summation, why are LGBTQ+ audiences are queering contemporary drama? They are responding to a lack of diverse representation of themselves on screen and in books. How are LGBTQ+ audiences queering contemporary drama? They are doing this over queering careers, using their own ethical guidelines, and through emotional processes, and they are expanding it beyond what show producers are currently including when it comes to LGBTQ+ representation.

Limitations of the Study

This study is not without its limitations. This study was based in the UK, and my participants were drawn from the cities of London, Brighton, and Edinburgh, so it largely reflects the experiences of urban individuals. While some of my participants did grow up in more rural parts of Wales and Ireland, they have attended university of worked in cities. There were some foreign nationals in my study, but all of them had been living full-time in the UK for a number of years and were fully immersed in UK society. The majority of my participants attended university, and did so at urban universities in the UK. My participants were easily reached by contacting LGBTQ+ university societies and community groups. They also volunteered to take part in the study, many of them enthusiastically, which means I am missing participants who did not wish to discuss their queering activities or take part in research associated with a university.

Additionally, 14 out of 16 participants identified as white, and two identified as being from a mixed background. My participants were all also between the ages of 19 and 38, and though I searched for older participants for the study, I was unable to find any willing to take part.

This study was also limited by the normal time and budget constraints of a PhD. Future studies would likely be able to collect more longitudinal research or have longer data collection window allowing them to find more participants from varied backgrounds, including people residing outside the UK. Even within the UK, this research could be expanded to other cities, and is likely missing important data from Wales and Northern Ireland, that might differ from the data collected in south England and east central Scotland.

Recommendations for Future Research

Following this study, future research should expand upon understanding queering across more diverse samples of LGBTQ+ audiences, including looking to groups that were not present in my sample, including, people over 40, people of differing education levels, POC or BME audiences, and larger samples of aromantic and asexual people who are one of the most underrepresented groups among LGBTQ+ people.

If media representation continues to improve, it will be worth revisiting the research questions of this thesis, to see if LGBTQ+ audiences are still involved in queering media in the same ways or if they have changed their queering practices or dropped them altogether. While fan studies have tracked the evolution of fan activities since the 1960s, it's a natural continuation of this research. As technologies change, queering and how this is done with other people will likely change as well, and this will be worth examining to update and expand upon this study and others.

APPENDIX ONE: GLOSSARY

A Note on Terminology

In this thesis, I use the participants' own terms to describe their gender identities, sexual and romantic orientations, and any other terms they use to describe or label themselves. I use sex and gender as separate definitions in the traditional sociological sense and did not ask my participants what sexual identity, biological or otherwise, they personally identified with, as it was not relevant to this project.

Many terms will be familiar to most readers. However, many people use the same words to mean different things. Some people will use the terms bisexual and pansexual interchangeably, and mean they are attracted to two or more genders. Others will use bisexual to mean they are attracted to two genders, sometimes including non-binary, genderqueer, genderfluid, and agender people, in addition to men and women. Others with use the term pansexual, to include all of these gender identities in addition to men and women. Still some others use bisexual within the binary framework of gender, meaning men and women. To complicate this further, many people will include both cis and binary trans men under the umbrella term, men, and likewise with the term, women.

Glossary of Queer Identities

AFAB – Assigned female at birth.

AMAB – Assigned male at birth.

Agender – identifying as not having a gender.

Aromantic (often shortened to aro)– not feeling romantic attraction to anyone.

Asexual (often shortened to ace)– Not feeling sexual attraction to anyone.

Bisexual – Being attracted to two or more genders (used interchangeably with pansexual by some people).

CAFAB – Usually used only by intersex individuals, coercively assigned female at birth.

CAMAB – Usually used only by intersex individuals, coercively assigned male at birth.

Cisgender (often shortened to cis) – identifying with the gender you were assigned at birth.

Genderfluid – having a gender or genders that change over time.

Genderqueer – someone who doesn't identify with a binary gender. Used as a term of self identification, and usually placed under the larger trans umbrella.

Grey asexual – Someone who identifies as asexual but might have a sexual attraction to or relationships with someone if certain conditions are met.

Grey homosexual – Someone who identifies as homosexual but might have sexual attraction to or relationships with someone or another gender if certain conditions are met.

Intersex – A medical descriptor designated at birth by a medical professional, usually by observing genitalia that is not obviously "male" or "female" within the standards of a binary medical framework.

Latinx - A term used by activists within the community previously referred to as Latino, to move away from the gendered ending on the words Latino and Latina. Used by gender non-conforming and non-binary individuals as well as being used as a non-gendered noun. The x is pronounced as in English. It should be noted that since the start of this study, some activists are now moving away from this term as the x is anglicised. However, I use it here as it was preferred by my participant, and they self-defined as such.

Non-Binary – an umbrella term for someone who does not identify with either binary identities of man or woman.

Omnisexual – Similar to pansexual, someone who is attracted to multiple genders.

Pansexual – Someone who is attracted to multiple genders.

Polysexual – Someone who is attracted to multiple genders, similar to pansexual and omnisexual.

Polyamorous – Someone who has romantic feelings and romantic relationships with more than one person at a time.

Trans man – someone designated female at birth who identifies as a man, may or may not seek medical intervention, such as hormones and surgeries. Formerly known as female to male.

Trans woman – someone designated male at birth who identifies as a woman, may or may not seek medical intervention, such as hormones and surgeries. Formerly known as male to female.

Trans feminine – Often someone who was designated male at birth but more closely identifies with or socially presents as being more feminine than masculine as traditionally accepted as normal within the binary sex and gender system. Used mainly by non-binary people.

Transgender (often shortened to trans) – identifying with a gender other than the one you were assigned at birth.

Trans masculine - Often someone who was designated female at birth but more closely identifies with or socially presents as being more masculine than feminine as traditionally accepted as normal within the binary sex and gender system. Used mainly by non-binary people.

Glossary of a fandom terminology

Apply Fan Fiction – A rejection of canon by the audience, who then chose to write their own version of the story presented through queering and other fan practices. Can refer to literally writing fan fiction, reading someone else's, or uses headcanons to resolve or replace parts of the text that were disliked by the fan.

Canon – Storylines, characters, and settings as described by the original creator/author/director in the media text.

Fanon – A popular headcanon within a fandom that is often taken as canon by many in the fandom. (Example: Steve Rogers is bisexual, while it is not explicitly written that he is, a large part of the Marvel Cinematic Universe fandom considers to be a verified fact as evidenced by their interpretation of his relationships with both male and female characters in the text).

Headcanon- A fan supported theory about a character, universe, or relationship that is not clearly stated in media canon, but that a fan believes to be true. These can be held individually or more popular ones can be collectively held by many fans. Some become so popular that they are eventually accepted as "fanon", e.g. Steve Rogers as discussed in the fanon entry.

Manips – Short for manipulations. Usually used to refer to fan generated media that splices clips of actors' work and recombines them to show relationships between two or more characters that the participant supports or likes. This takes the forms of video clips, GIF sets, and digitally created fan art.

Ship (Shipping) – Shortened version of relationship. Usually used when pairing two or more characters romantically or sexually. Can also be used to describe platonic friends who are seen as having an extremely strong connection.

Spoilers – Usually used in context to avoid spoiling the canonical content of newly released media to another fan.

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