

## AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Ever since Henry Jenkins' groundbreaking *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (1992), fan studies has slowly worked its way further into mainstream academia. However, particular practices and cultures of femslash fandom, and the contribution of queer women to fandom archives and circulation, have, in many ways, been neglected. In addition, most fan studies research focuses on trends in fanfiction writing rather than on the ways in which fandom itself has become a reflection of larger systems of oppression. This paper argues that fanfiction, and specifically coalitiongirl's story *Send Up a Signal (that everything's fine)*, can be used to critique systems of oppression as reflected within fandom, mass media, and society. However, *Send Up a Signal* does not only employ the negative affective mode of paranoid critique. It also simultaneously employs more positive affects in what Eve Kosofsky Sedwick might consider a reparative practice. As a metafiction, *Send Up a Signal* transforms both the narrative within the ABC show *Once Upon a Time*, and the narrative of *Once Upon a Time*'s production in order to provide community healing and catharsis within the femslash fandom. In analyzing this fanfiction, I show the ways in which violence and trauma experienced by marginalized fans impact the fanworks they create and how these works in turn provide new tools for marginalized communities who interact with and are negatively impacted by mass media.

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Femslash Fanfiction as a Reparative Practice of Critique

by  
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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

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Colleen Johnson, Author

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To Swen

**Introduction: An Intersection of Fan Studies, Literary Studies, and Affect Theory:**

Ever since the publication of Henry Jenkins' groundbreaking *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (1992), fan studies has become more mainstream in academia. However, particular practices and cultures of femslash fandom, and the contribution of queer women to fanfiction<sup>1</sup> archives and circulation, have been in many ways left unexplored. Here, I define femslash fandom as the fan community interested in romantic relationships between female characters. Femslash fanfiction and other femslash fan production often explore the queerness within the subtext of female relationships in a fan object and create new texts in which the queerness of these female relationships is brought explicitly into the main text and explored. In their article “‘Yes, The Evil Queen is Latina!’: Racial Dynamics of Online Femslash Fandoms,” Rukmini Pande and Swati Moitra note there has been a “ghettoization” of genres within fan studies (2.3) and that as a result, “femslash has largely remained a footnote in most studies of fan culture” (2.3) due to scholars' assumptions that “femslash fandom and texts are...inherently less disruptive to patriarchal structures, as lesbian sexual performance in particular is argued to be produced almost overwhelmingly for the straight male porn viewer” (2.2). This assumption, however, ignores the fact that fanfiction writing is one of the few spaces in which lesbian texts can exist that is actually dominated by queer women, and therefore does not reproduce lesbian sexuality for male consumption. In addition, most fan studies research focuses on fan identity and trends in fanfiction writing rather than on the ways in which fandom itself has become a reflection of larger systems of oppression and the ways that violence and trauma experienced by marginalized fans impact the fanworks they create.

This thesis argues that the evolving dialogue between fandom and the cultural industry—one that has become more direct due to the rise of social media—has negatively impacted the experiences of queer women in certain fan communities that

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<sup>1</sup> While many fan studies scholars (Busse and Hellekson, Booth, De Kosnik, Driscoll, Leavenworth, Narai) use the two word designation “fan fiction,” I decided to use the single word “fanfiction” as that is the way the majority of fans refer to the works in their discussion of it in fan spaces. I will also sometimes use the abbreviation “fics” to refer to fanfictions plural.



have become more mainstream. Using textual analysis, I argue that fanfiction writing can critique systems of oppression as reflected within fandom, mass media, and society. coalitiongirl's story *Send Up a Signal (that everything's fine)* (hereafter *SUAS*), specifically, is structured as an analogue in order to perform a critique on the production of the ABC television show *Once Upon a Time (OUAT)*, on the broader cultural industry, and on American society. However, *SUAS* does not only employ the negative affective mode of paranoid critique.<sup>2</sup> It also simultaneously employs more positive affects in what Eve Kosofsky Sedwick might consider a reparative practice. As a metafiction, *SUAS* transforms both the narrative within *OUAT* and the narrative of *OUAT's* production in order to provide community healing and catharsis within the femslash fandom. In my analysis of this fanfiction, I explicate how fan works can provide new tools for marginalized communities who interact with and are negatively impacted by mass media. In other words, I show how fanfiction and other narrative-based fan productions can be used by marginalized audiences to repair their relationship with the popular culture and mass media that inundates every aspect of contemporary life and social belonging.

This thesis looks to interrogate new questions of marginality and oppression within fandom than have previously been discussed within fan studies and to demonstrate the importance of analyzing individual fanfictions as literature. Over the past three decades, fan studies has been approached from many perspectives and with many methodologies by scholars working in fields ranging from communications studies to historical studies to performance studies to digital media studies and screen studies. In the introduction to their book *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, Jonathan Gray et al. define three waves of fan studies that address different questions and issues surrounding fan identity, community, and activity. According to Gray et al., the first wave of fan studies was “primarily concerned with questions of power and representation” (2). However, the questions of power and representation, which first wave fan studies interrogated, positioned fans all together as an Othered group (Gray et al. 3), rather than examining how groups already marginalized by mainstream society

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<sup>2</sup> I use “paranoid critique” here as Eve Kosofsky Sedwick describes it in relation to the hermeneutics of suspicion in *Touching Feeling* (123-151).

also experience marginalization within fandom, as I will explore. First-wave fan scholars focused on destigmatizing fan identity and activity and “regularly turned to the very activities and practices — convention attendance, fan fiction writing, fanzine editing and collecting, letter-writing campaigns—that had been coded as pathological by critics, and attempted to redeem them as creative, thoughtful, and productive” (Gray et al. 3). Gray et al. assert, “The underlying advocacy of first-wave fan studies derived its legitimacy from fans’ assumed disempowered social position and their problematic representation in both public and academic discourses” (3). Again though, this argument was made about fans as a whole, and therefore first-wave fan studies claimed fans to be disempowered because they were *fans* and cared about representation of *fans* as the identifying factor. My project, on the other hand, lets go of “fan” as the primary identity and examines how queer women who happen to be fans and who are therefore disempowered in their daily lives and in their relationship with the cultural industry due to their *queerness* use fandom and their fan identities in order to navigate and combat the cultural industry’s negative impact on their lives as queer women.

Second-wave fan studies, according to Gray et al., was concerned mainly with Pierre Bourdieu’s hierarchy of taste and “highlighted the replication of social and cultural hierarchies within fan cultures and subcultures” (5). While this gets closer to what I am interested in, as I argue there is replication of social hierarchy and power structures of broader social hegemony in fan culture, second-wave fan studies analyzed the hierarchical value of the fan object rather than of the fans themselves. In other words, fans of high brow texts achieve higher status than fans of popular texts or low brow media. My approach, instead, interrogates the ways in which hierarchy-maintaining structures such as racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, and classism appear within the cultures of individual fandoms created around a single fan object. So the fan object’s place within the social hierarchy of Bourdieu’s cultural taste is irrelevant to an extent as popular media now attracts people of all social classes to participate in fandom.

Third-wave fan studies, according to Gray et al., “have explored the *intrapersonal* pleasures and motivations among fans, refocusing on the relationship between fans’ selves and their fan objects...resulting in... a range of psychoanalytic or

psychoanalytically inspired approaches” (7). Third-wave fan studies are interested in studying fans because “fan consumption has grown into a taken-for-granted aspect of modern communication and consumption that warrants critical analysis and investigation” and therefore sees fan studies as a way to understand society in the digital age through analyzing “how we relate to ourselves, to each other, and...how we read the mediated texts around us” (7). In other words, fandom and fan productions have become much more mainstream, and therefore reflect a larger range of social relations allowing fans and works to be analyzed as a means to understand broader society and how mainstream media and popular culture impact society and mediate social relations.

My work falls under this third wave insofar as I am analyzing how queer women’s position within society impacts their experience within fandom and how those experiences within fandom and society as a result are reflected in the fanfiction and fan works produced by queer women. However, third-wave fan studies, as described by Gray et al., is still interested in the “fan identity” as a now mainstream, popularized identity. This thesis, on the other hand, will analyze a specific work of fanfiction as circulated literature produced in the specific cultural moment of a certain fandom that speaks directly to a queer female identity and experience. This literary text then acts as another step of mediation between queer fans and cultural texts and might aid them in using and relating to mainstream cultural texts that they otherwise would feel alienated by.

Again, most fan studies have focused on the fans themselves, with the fan productions being secondarily analyzed in order to make arguments about fans as a marginalized class of people in society. However, very little work has considered fan works and fanfiction as the central object of study with its own audience. In the present cultural moment in which fan identity has become more mainstream and hegemonic, rather than Othered and marginalized, it is more productive to center the fan works in order to analyze their implications along multiple axes of marginalization. Analysis of femslash fanfiction in particular must therefore center queer female identity, rather than fan identity, as the defining category of experience for the writers and consumers of the fanfiction. The community I am invested in is first and foremost a community of queer women, who happen to have found each other through their fan activities. While it is

definitely necessary to analyze the fan community in which a fan work has emerged in order to contextualize it, I center the literary analysis of a specific fanfiction in my research for multiple reasons.

First, fanfiction can be, and often is, a written production that follows known and recognized literary structures and circulates to a large audience in the same way valued literature does. Therefore, fanfiction should be approached as a form of literature in its own right, and centering an individual fanfiction in a literary analysis is the first step in allowing fanfiction to be valued as literature. While some might argue that fanfiction should not be given the status of literature as it is “derivative” of more “original” creative work, professional novel adaptations<sup>3</sup> of well known “original” works such as Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* have already garnered academic interest and critical analysis. *Wide Sargasso Sea*, for example, is well regarded as literature in and of itself due to its critique and transformation of *Jane Eyre* that lends itself to both postcolonial and feminist analyses. According to Thomas M. Leitch in his article “Twelve Fallacies in Contemporary Adaptation Theory,” professional adaptations are motivated by a creator “seeing the artistic potential of inert source materials” (163), a motivation shared by fanfiction writers who are inspired to create something that might fulfill a story’s recognized potential in a new, different, and possibly better, way. Transformative fanfiction then has the potential to critique its fan object and society in similar ways as professional adaptations do, and should therefore be afforded similar academic interest and analysis.

Second, studying individual fanfictions specifically, rather than the people who visibly make up a fandom community at large, allows us to ask more questions about what a given fanfiction does for its audience, what a specific fanfiction says about both its fan object and about broader society, and why its genre and form as a fanfiction lends

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<sup>3</sup> I differentiate professional novel adaptations from fanfiction in that while they still blatantly borrow from previous literary work, they are published by professional publishing houses that maintain systems of gatekeeping and are sold for profit by those publishing houses. As a result, they are generally still considered literature/novels by audiences, writers, literary critics, and academics. That said, fans have discussed the similarities as shown in blvnk-art’s tumblr post and quiludos’s response.

itself to convey its message. These are all questions which are hardly addressed in fan studies due to the discipline's focus being so centered upon the people and the authors rather than the fan works themselves. In her article "Adapting and Transforming 'Cinderella': Fairy-Tale Adaptations and the Limits of Existing Adaptation Theory," Margot Blankier emphasizes the importance of an adaptation's intended audience, stating, "the process of authorial creation" for an adaptation "sees an excess of sources blended together, with importance being accorded to various sources depending on particular editorial preoccupations, such as creating a 'family-friendly' text, a comic text, and so on" (113). In other words, the adaptation achieves a specific transformation of its hypotext based on the intended audience the creator wants to address. Here, Blankier uses the term hypotext, originally coined by Gérard Genette in *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*<sup>4</sup>, to refer to an adaptation's "source text" or in terms of fanfiction, what I will call the "fan object," following Gray et al.'s use of the term in their "Introduction" to *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*. Often then, the reimagining of the hypotext in an adaptation can be seen as existing specifically to speak to an audience the hypotext may not have had in mind, be that a more modern audience, a more female audience, etc. Fanfiction writers are similarly preoccupied with the desires of their intended audience, even as they exist within the same social space as that audience and are also readers of fanfiction written in response to the same fan object that their own writing addresses.

Like fanfiction, literary adaptations can do similar work to transform a previously existing text and perform a type of critique or correction to that precursor's ideology (Blankier 108). Adaptation studies have shown the varying potential that literary and film adaptations have to transform a text, and because literary adaptations can do so many things it is impossible to identify a steadfast rule as to their purpose. The same can be said for fanfiction in all its varying forms, functions, and interests. Blankier introduces the issue within adaptation studies of classifying types of adaptations, or defining what various adaptations do in relation to their hypotext (111). Interestingly, fandom has had

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<sup>4</sup> Genette defines the hypotext as "an earlier text" and the hypertext as that "which is ...grafted" onto the hypotext (*Palimpsests* quoted in Leavenworth 42).

similar interest in classifying what various fanfictions do to adapt and change their fan object, and have come to much more uniform agreement than adaptation scholars. Part of this need for categorization comes from the tag-based organization of the fanfiction database *Archive of Our Own (AO3)*<sup>5</sup>, but fans also use the terms more as descriptors to summarize the fics than as rigid categories. In other words, one fanfiction could be described as fitting into multiple categories.<sup>6</sup> Many of the “taxonomies” of literary adaptation that Blankier defines (111-119) resemble similar labels used by fans to tag works that perform varying functions, demonstrating the similarities in possibility between professional literary adaptation and amateur fanfiction. The key purpose for not only writing and consuming fanfiction, but also for studying and analyzing it in an academic setting, is that fanfiction allows greater accessibility in terms of both readers/audience and in terms of who is given a voice as an author. The same structures that regulate and gatekeep what “original” literature is produced and published also regulates the publication and circulation of literary adaptations, so the work with the most radical transformative potential will not be found in professional literary adaptations, but will rather come from the freely circulated texts produced by amateur fanfiction writers.

In addition, fanfiction approaches its fidelity to its fan object from a different perspective than most literary adaptation. Leitch demonstrates that past adaptation studies has traditionally been hyper-focused on judging adaptations based on their “fidelity” to the source text, but claims this is not the most productive criterion through which adaptations should be analyzed (161-162). However, in order for an adaptation to be recognized as related to or following its source text or hypotext, there must be something

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<sup>5</sup> *AO3* is currently the most extensive fanfiction database and is run by The Organization for Transformative Works. According to their “About the OTW” page, they are a nonprofit organization established to “serve the interests of fans by providing access to and preserving the history of fanworks and fan culture in its myriad forms” (“About the OTW”).

<sup>6</sup> Fan investment in tags as useful descriptors of fanfiction’s content and function is shown in tumblr user *katy-l-wood*’s post and its responses from users *gallusrostromegalus*, *wheresquidsdare*, and *noctnoku*, and *goodboydummy*’s charts, along with the responses to them, demonstrate tags, descriptors, and categories of what fanfictions do to texts.

about the hypotext that it preserves and is faithful to. Blankier addresses this question of what is preserved in the process of adaptation, arguing for a “slippage” between adaptation and allusion, and echoes Leitch (164) in questioning the assumption that an adaptation, or what Gérard Genette terms a “hypertext,” “can ultimately be located in a single source text, or ‘hypotext’” (Blankier 109). By interpreting Genette's claim that “a hypotext can only be imitated indirectly, by ‘practicing its style in another text,’” (Genette quoted in Blankier 109) Blankier argues that an adaptation uses “a source text’s idiolect as a model in writing a new text” (109). This “style” that an adaptation practices or the “idiolect” which it models is that which a professional literary adaptation attempts to preserve or be faithful to, and this strategic repetition of “style” or “idiolect” then, according to Leitch, is more interested in preserving the voice of the person viewed as the original author or at least the ethos of the original author<sup>7</sup>, whether that is a single discrete person or a manufactured ethos based on a collection of work and its historical celebration. Fan authors, on the other hand, do not attempt to imitate the voice of the fan object’s creators. Rather they either invest in developing their own unique voice and writing style, or they, through exposure, develop a communal style and voice replicated between multiple fan authors within a small sect of fandom who all read large amounts of each other’s work. So the voice and style of Swan Queen<sup>8</sup> fanfiction in general does not replicate that of *OUAT* but is recognizable and could potentially be differentiated from fanfiction written in separate femslash or non-femslash fandoms.

In order to further examine and explain how adaptations establish “fidelity” to their hypotext, Blankier introduces Jack Zipes’s argument that, at least in the case of

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<sup>7</sup> Leitch also emphasizes this original authorial ethos as a measure of adaptation in his argument that it is more important for a film adaptation of *Great Expectations* to “invoke not only textual particulars of Dickens’s novel but more general conventions of Dickens world” or in other words, to appear “Dickensian” in some way whether or not it follows the story exactly or is influenced by more than just the original novel (164).

<sup>8</sup> Swan Queen (SQ) is the main femslash relationship (or “ship”) that this thesis addresses. While not all queer female *OUAT* fans are SQ shippers, and other femslash ships do exist within the fandom, the Swan Queen fandom is the largest and most vocal femslash fandom (and possibly ship fandom in general) within the broader *OUAT* fandom and is the fandom *SUAS* is written about and for.

adapted fairy tales, “what is being duplicated is a ‘meme’ rather than any perceived ‘original’ tale” (Blankier 114). This meme, according to Blankier, is “the essential ‘deep structure’ of a given tale which survives through its unique cultural malleability” (114). The meme that is recognized as the “essential ‘deep structure’” by professional literary adaptations, again, seems to be some kind of ethos, world of the story, or ideological lesson. However, fanfiction has fewer qualms about destroying or rejecting these elements of a story, and instead privileges the preservation of the voice and characterization of the fictional characters as the meme that is duplicated, while imposing its own style, world, and ideology onto the journey of those characters, allowing it to then take on very different issues of moral and ideological interest than what its hypotext originally grappled with. Even as “out of character” or “OOC” fanfictions might have a place and function within fanfiction, the authors of those fanfictions still regard them as less “serious” fanfictions than the “high quality” fanfictions which are elevated based upon their status as being “in character” or “having good characterization”.<sup>9</sup> In other words, fans might feel a loyalty to the characters, but not to the actual fan object’s plot, structure, or style. So, an adaptation differing from the hypotext or fan object has potential to serve the characters better, in the fans’ opinion, even as it does not replicate the “source text” accurately. This allows that adaptation to maintain the freedom to grapple with very different ideological issues and themes than the fan object while simultaneously remaining recognizable as a transformation or adaptation of that fan object. Put a different way, the characterization allows fanfiction to be recognized as inspired by its fan object, rather than the ideological themes, narrative style/voice, or world building that professional literary adaptation attempts to maintain. Fanfiction’s freedom to explore different ideological issues and themes than its fan object explores is

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<sup>9</sup> In her tumblr post “On Fanfic & Emotional Continuity” Foz Meadows provides further discussion on the ways in which “writing and reading fanfic is a masterclass in characterization” (Meadows).



another way in which fanfiction provides more opportunities for radical work that actively questions and resists hegemony.<sup>10</sup>

In order to argue for the centering of a literary analysis of specific fanfictions, rather than an analysis focused on fan identity and community, I drew attention to the similarities between fanfiction and novels and noted that if the academy values the similarly “derivative” literature of professional adaptations, it should treat fanfiction texts with the same interest, especially given fanfiction’s potential for circulation. I then emphasized the importance of the role of the audience in a fanfiction writer’s decisions and showed how academic work already uses analysis of literary adaptations to better understand their intended audiences and claimed fanfiction can be similarly analyzed. I demonstrated the differences between fanfiction and professional literary adaptation in terms of anti-hegemonic potential and argued for the inclusion of individual fanfictions alongside adaptations as important texts for literary study. The third and final reason to perform literary analysis on individual fanfictions is that it accounts for fanfiction’s impact on audience members who might not be legible or visible to an analysis of a fan community that centers the study of the fans themselves.

Fan communities are made up of many different types of contributors, not all of whom are visible or vocal within a fan space. Fans who reside within fandom communities and spaces but are not producing fan works or being publicly vocal about their fan objects by participating in public fandom discussions or commenting on fan works are often called “lurkers” and are hardly taken into account in studies of fandom communities since they do not contribute to those communities in ways that can be observed. These lurkers, however, do consume fanfiction, and benefit from the varying functions of specific fanfiction genres. By analyzing a fanfiction as a piece of literature, I may not be able to directly theorize the experience of these lurkers, but I can theorize how a larger audience, which includes these lurkers, are being spoken to through a

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<sup>10</sup> Although, as *Wide Sargasso Sea* demonstrates, this is not a necessity or rule by any means. The gatekeeping aspect of professional publication is a much larger influence on the radical potential of professional literary adaptation than the difference in definition of fidelity between fan authors and adaptation critics.

specific fanfiction text and the kinds of rhetoric and aesthetics they interact with through their consumption of fanfiction texts.

My personal experience in femslash fandom actually began with a massive consumption of femslash fanfictions long before I actually became actively involved in the fandom community. The supportive and discursive functions of the community that so many fan studies scholars analyze, while definitely still important, were not a part of my initial femslash experience, and I believe that is significant to account for. It was only once I became comfortable enough in my own sexuality, and felt like I could come out to my tumblr mutuals, that I began to actively pay attention to and participate in what would be considered the femslash fan community. So, just as many people consume literature and film without involving themselves in fan communities surrounding those works, some also consume fanfiction as literary texts without necessarily becoming vocally or visibly involved in the fandoms of either those fanfictions or their fan objects.

Fanfiction also brings to literary studies a very different kind of text through which we might understand the circulations of certain affects and discourses for the queer subject. Affect theory as applied to literature might concern itself with the affects of characters as symbolic representations of various affective phenomena in the real world that results from certain structures within society. It also might be used, as seen in Sara Ahmed's work, to examine the influence of literature on the circulation of affect through its audience. Analysis of fanfiction can potentially do both these things, but due to fanfiction's tie to a fan object that exists within mainstream popular culture, fanfiction allows a third type of analysis. This third type of analysis could examine how affect is circulated and transformed within a community in response to hegemonic mainstream popular culture when the audience of that popular culture is able to become the author and creator of a new text. This work might illuminate how this new fanfiction text then mediates the affects within this same audience community that originally interacted with the popular culture object and how the literary form of fanfiction is used to transform a community's affective response to the mainstream cultural industry.

The fan studies work that I have read that has come closest to a focused analysis of a single fanfiction from a literary perspective was an analysis of a Star Trek: Voyager

femslash fanfiction for the Janeway/Seven ship performed by Abigail De Kosnik in her book *Digital Cultural Memory and Media Fandom*. However, her analysis focused on the femslash ship as a metaphor for the transition of fandom from print to digital, rather than recognizing the implication of the ship for queer women (De Kosnik 221-226). She did choose one specific fanfiction to close read in order to argue for this metaphor; however, the entire argument left me feeling greatly unsettled as a queer woman in fandom, especially given this was the only point in the entire book in which femslash fandom was explicitly mentioned. In her analysis she takes a femslash pairing and community whose works are likely mostly written for queer women by queer women in order to address specific issues and experiences of being queer and female, and then argues that the fanfiction is actually not about queer women at all, but about how fandom as a whole, including and even centering straight fans, reacted to and experienced the transition of fandom community from a print culture to a digital culture (De Kosnik 221-226). In this way, she seemingly erased the queerness and the significance of the work for a queer community from the work much in the same way that male writers and scholars love to make female characters be symbolic representations for an unlimited supply of things other than the experiences of real women's lives. The real queer women involved in the writing of the fanfiction and the Janeway/Seven community are then included in De Kosnik's analysis as an afterthought rather than as the center of the work and community.

On the other hand, the *Transformative Works and Cultures* journal has provided a platform for more literary focused-analyses of fanfiction and for more femslash-focused analysis, especially in its special issue titled "Queer Female Fandom" in which two authors read specific femslash fanfictions in order to use literary analysis as a methodology for fan studies. Pande and Moitra's article was one of these and actually addresses the Swan Queen fandom specifically. Pande and Moitra acknowledge the transformative work and criticism performed by two fanfictions, coalitiongirl's *SUAS* (which I am also analyzing) and deemn's *Cops & Robbers*. Both fanfictions address the racism observed in *OUAT* and the fandom discourse surrounding analysis and critique of this racism that circulated within the fandom, leading to a twitter hashtag protest known as #OnceUponARaceFail. This new work in fan studies that has been given space in

*Transformative Works and Cultures* demonstrates the complexity and literary potential of fanfiction. Whereas Pande and Moitra are concerned with an analysis of fandom racial dynamics that they claim has been left unexplored by fan studies (1.3), I analyze the dynamics of sexuality and heteronormativity. Pande and Moitra's analysis of *SUAS* is also focused solely on *SUAS* as a paranoid critique which reveals the structural racism within the production and narrative of *OUAT*. While I perform a similar analysis of *SUAS*'s paranoid critique of *OUAT*'s heteronormativity, I go on to claim that coalitiongirl performs more than just the paranoid reading and explicate how fanfiction can work towards the reparation of affect rather than remain stagnant within the negative affect of paranoid critique.

This thesis is split into two interrelated chapters. The first chapter identifies the ways in which heterosexist and homophobic oppression manifests within this context of online fan communities and is experienced by queer women in femslash fandom both at large and specifically within the *OUAT* fandom. Chapter One argues that queer women in femslash fandoms, and in the Swan Queen fandom specifically, experience varying degrees and instances of trauma as a result of existing as openly queer in the online fandom space. This trauma then provides the necessity for transformative and reparative work to be created that speaks to, inspires, and resonates with this femslash community. Chapter One also describes the healing potential of fantasy and narrative through catharsis and demonstrates that the anti-capitalist potential of online amateur fanfiction writing is in fact what provides the opportunity for the most anti-hegemonic radical creative writing to be generated. Fanfiction is therefore shown to be the medium through which reparative and transformative work is most effectively generated and also allows for the level of circulation of radical transformative ideas that is necessary to measurably impact a community in a positive way.

Chapter Two provides a close reading of coalitiongirl's fanfiction, *SUAS*, to explicate from multiple perspectives the ways in which critique and reparative practice are achieved within the fanfiction. I first discuss how *SUAS* acknowledges and performs the same critiques of *OUAT* that were well circulated elsewhere within the SQ fandom on multiple social media platforms. This includes identification of initial expectations of

*OUAT* as a self-proclaimed feminist project and reflection on how the show failed to satisfy these expectations as well as a more focused analysis of coalitiongirl's use of metafiction to critique the cultural industry and process through which mainstream stories are produced and shared that privileges heteronormativity and compulsory heterosexuality. I then outline the ways in which *SUAS* transforms the narrative of both the heteronormative *OUAT* plot and the heteronormative production of *OUAT* into a narrative in which the work and protests of queer people within both the fandom and the cultural industry allows for negotiation with and navigation of the heteronormative and sexist system in order to change the story that is then circulated within mainstream network television and demonstrate how this transformation of the narrative provides catharsis to the Swan Queen fandom. Put simply, the fanfiction repairs the queer fandom's negative affective response to *OUAT* that was born out of feelings of frustration and alienation by providing a transformed resolution to their struggle. Last, this chapter identifies the ways in which specific fandom references included in *SUAS* allow the femslash fans to feel like insiders, rather than outsiders, and therefore works to strengthen feelings of community bonding and social belonging to reaffirm queer fans right to take up space within online fandom, which also works in a reparative way.

### **Chapter 1: The Necessity for Healing: Oppression and Trauma within Fan Spaces**

Especially given the rise of the Internet, literacy and knowledge of mass media and popular culture is increasingly important for participation in and inclusion in society and community at large. Due to the saturation of mass media in our everyday lives, it would take an enormous effort to not consume mass media and to not be impacted by it. As a result, the heteronormativity that mass media privileges inundates the queer community whether they invest in it or not. This inundation of heteronormative narratives fosters feelings of isolation and worthlessness in self-aware queer people while forcefully elongating the time in which others are unaware of their own queerness due to hegemonic compulsory heterosexuality that is greatly reinforced by the oversaturation of heteronormative narratives.<sup>11</sup>

Fanfiction then fulfills two main purposes in transforming the queer experience and interaction with popular culture and mainstream media. First, femslash fanfiction refuses to allow queer people to be isolated and excluded from the influential cultural objects of the time. Many argue that if queer people want to see themselves represented in narrative they should just create their own media. Or even more prevalent in fandom communities, many heterosexist fans argue “don’t like, don’t watch,” meaning, if queer people dislike the narratives presented in mass media so much, they should just stop consuming it. Or in the case of *OUAT*, the question becomes, “if the femslash fans hate the show so much, why do they still participate in the fandom?” While it might be possible, with a great amount of effort, to remove oneself from the influence of mass media and to purposefully only consume queer-produced content, all this truly achieves is a separatism and isolation of the queer community in which the dominant

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<sup>11</sup> In their study “The Influence of Media Role Models on Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Identity,” Gomillion and Giuliano show that positive media role models are “contextual factors” which influence queer “developmental events such as coming out” and that the media “may influence important psychological domains, including individuals’ self-perceptions” (331). Participants in the study stated that identifying with GLB characters “influenced their realization that they were GLB” (Gomillion and Giuliano 336). It might therefore be inferred that lack of queer role models in both media and in life would prevent the opportunity to identify with a queer role model and therefore also prevent that self-realization from taking place.

heteronormative cultural industry is then never held accountable for the ways in which it actively excludes queer stories.

At the same time, access to indie and non-mainstream publications and media is often very low. The cost of producing even just a webseries with queer content, let alone a television show equivalent to *OUAT*, would be very high and be difficult to recuperate given the narrowness of the audience. Meanwhile, queer content's exclusion from free publicly accessible platforms like over-the-air television means there is a higher cost to the consumer as well that blocks accessibility. There is also the difficulty of the circulation of that media. It may exist, but the ability for queer people in various places and with varying levels of access to resources and community to actually find and consume that media is low. Therefore the community that can form around the consumption of that media would be quite small and also difficult to find. The separation of consumers of queer media from consumers of mainstream media also further encourages the isolation and separation of queer people from society at large, which becomes problematic when considering the minority status of queer people and the difficulty many have in accessing queer community even outside of the realm of media consumption. By choosing to abstain from consuming all heteronormative mainstream media, the queer person then surrenders that ground to the heteronormative imperative and participates in their own exclusion from society.

Fanfiction, on the other hand, provides the opportunity for the queer subject to force themselves back into the narrative of mainstream media and popular culture. It creates an avenue through which queer people can interact with and consume popular culture without giving into the heteronormative imperative. In that way, fanfiction can repair their relationship with mainstream media while still allowing them to critique that media and use it for their own benefit in ways that the original authors never intended it to be used. This process asserts queer peoples' claim to space within the consumption of popular culture and allows them to visibly participate in the mainstream culture from which they would otherwise be excluded. Of course this is not a substitute for the need of queer-produced media and literature; however, femslash fanfiction fills a different need

and is still a worthwhile endeavor for queer people living in the current digital media saturated society.

Fanfiction's second purpose in transforming mainstream heteronormative media is to create a contact zone between out queer people and those who do not yet know they are queer or who are questioning but are afraid to pursue more specifically queer interests. As previously mentioned, queer literature and media is difficult to find, and many queer people are so fully in denial of their own identities due to compulsory heterosexuality that they would not actively seek queer narratives. Femslash fanfiction, however, forces a contact zone between mainstream heteronormative media and queer community in a way that makes visible the lives and experiences of queer characters and queer fans to those who may be questioning their own identities, or are so far in the closet they aren't even questioning yet. While this accessibility to queer community by the "straight" mainstream does make femslash fandom more vulnerable to online harassment and abuse, it is necessary for people who do not have access to queer community in their real lives, or are afraid to explore queer community and queer media because they are not ready to admit, even to themselves, that they might not be straight. The existence of femslash fandom as a visible queer community that forces contact with a heteronormative community through its interactions with and use of mainstream popular culture allows for those deeply closeted and/or questioning people to covertly enter into conversation with the community or observe the community through less incriminating channels and with less imperative to admit to one's own queerness or commit to a queer identity.

My own coming out experience, which was much like the experiences of many of my queer fandom friends, was very reliant on this secret, low-stakes access to queer content and community. At the time I started my tumblr blog, I was very much in denial of my queerness, and would never have considered physically going to a Pride event or searching for original lesfic. However, it was very easy for me to begin following femslash blogs without fully admitting to what it meant. It was easier to have the excuse that I and the out lesbian I just followed both like the same television show and are similarly invested in the main female characters. I could see that the femslash blogs rooted for romantic relationships between the two women, and I could tell myself that I



didn't see the romance and did not ship it, but that I was an equal opportunity fan and still enjoyed reading all of their meta and analysis of my favorite female characters.

The transition from this state of denial but unspoken interest to one of self-reflection and coming out was then much more smooth, as I was able to slowly increase my investment in the femslash community without explicitly coming out and was able to learn from both the fanfiction I now had easy access to and the lives of the other femslash fans I followed about queer identity and the experiences of queer women. Access to these experiences is then what allowed me to reflect on my own life and understand why I was so drawn to the femslash fandom to begin with and begin to recognize my own queerness. None of this coming out process, however, would be possible if the queer community isolated itself from the mainstream, and if the queer community refused to interact with mainstream media due to its heteronormativity, it would only make access to queer narratives and community more scarce. In these ways, femslash fanfiction serves a very different function to that of original queer literature. It functions to bridge the gap between mainstream popular culture and the queer community and to both provide access to queer narratives to those who would otherwise lack that access and to repair the relationship and interactions that queer people have with mainstream media, allowing them a space to critique that media and hold it accountable for its heteronormativity while also creating a positive affirming community surrounding these interactions with media that repairs the queer person's affect associated with both critique of media and consumption of media.

The reparation of the affect associated with the critique of a fan object and the reparation of a marginalized community's relationship with hegemonic cultural objects is something unique to fanfiction, and might tell us something new about affect theory and the circulation of affects in marginalized communities. Through analyzing *SUAS* and its critique and reparative transformation of the narrative of both *OUAT* and *OUAT*'s production, I look to demonstrate how this transformation and repair of affect is achieved and analyze how the circulation of positive affects through fanfiction as literary texts allows for more productive critique than paranoid alone and in so doing builds stronger more positive community bonds through the creative process of writing and literature.

The premise of the television show *Once Upon a Time* is that Regina Mills, the Evil Queen, has placed a curse upon her kingdom to transport them all to a land without magic in which there are no happy endings. Her son Henry becomes suspicious of the way time seems to be frozen in the cursed town of Storybrooke, Maine, and upon receiving a book of fairytales, discovers the truth and sets out to find Emma Swan, the Savior who, according to prophesy, will break the Evil Queen's curse. Emma also happens to be Henry's birthmother, having given him up for adoption ten years previously. coalitiongirl's fanfiction *Send Up a Signal (that everything's fine)* functions as both a critique and a reparative practice in its use of metafiction which positions Emma and Regina as marginalized individuals within the cultural industry who function as metonyms for the Swan Queen fandom. In the fanfiction, rather than Regina and Emma actually being the Evil Queen and the Savior, respectively, they are actors playing those characters on a fanfictional<sup>12</sup> television show called *Happily Ever After (HEA)* that parallels the *OUAT* canon storyline. coalitiongirl creates an allegory in which fanfictional Regina and Emma embody the desires of the real Swan Queen fandom. The fandom of the fanfictional show, *HEA*, also allegorically represents the real-life fandom of *OUAT*, and the main tension within the fanfiction stems from the *HEA* producers, represented by the *OUAT* villains Cora, Gold, and Leopold, becoming aware of the fanfictional femslash fandom that performs a queer reading of Emma and Regina's character's relationship. The fanfictional producers decide that this reading of *HEA* must be shut down, and the extremely vocal Victory Rose<sup>13</sup> femslash fandom must be shut up. However, fanfictional Emma and Regina are able to use their positions as the stars of *HEA* to negotiate with the producers and change the narrative to be more inclusive and resist heteronormativity by

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<sup>12</sup> I will use the adjective "fanfictional" to indicate when I am speaking of elements and characters in the fanfiction rather than speaking of the real-life actors and production of *OUAT* or the *OUAT* versions of the characters. For example, the *OUAT* actors who play the femslash pairing are real life actresses Lana Parrilla and Jennifer Morrison (portraying Regina Mills and Emma Swan respectively on *OUAT*). Whereas the fanfictional actors who play the femslash pairing on the fanfictional television show are Regina Mills and Emma Swan (portraying Victoria Stone and Rose Turner on *HEA*).

<sup>13</sup> In keeping with the above, Victory Rose is the fanfictional ship that represents, but must also be distinguishable from, the *OUAT* Swan Queen ship.

making explicit the queer love story that the femslash fandom had recognized in the subtext (coalitiongirl 1-21). coalitiongirl's transformation of both the narrative of *OUAT* and the narrative of *OUAT*'s production provides a transformation of affect for the reader, and this journey from a negative affect to a positive affect is what I claim makes *SUAS* a reparative practice.

To define what I consider "reparative practice" I turn to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's work in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. In chapter four, Sedgwick asks "what does knowledge *do*" (124) in terms of the hermeneutics of suspicion. She is interested in what can be done once suspicion has been performed and knowledge of injustice can be explicated and asks if the knowing in and of itself is the only goal. In answer to these questions, Sedgwick discusses the ways in which hermeneutics of suspicion and paranoia are performed through a negative affect and in this recognition asserts that "it seems ... a great loss when paranoid inquiry comes to seem entirely coextensive with critical theoretical inquiry rather than being viewed as one kind of cognitive/affective theoretical practice among other, alternative kinds" (126). In other words, Sedgwick advocates for the use of alternative theoretical methods in order to allow for a range of affective work, rather than rely on the trend of privileging the paranoid methodology and its associated negative affect above all else. In order to theorize an alternative to the paranoid, Sedgwick examines Melanie Klein's concept of positions, in which there is "flexible to-and-fro movement" between the paranoid position of "alertness to the dangers posed by the hateful and envious part-objects that one defensively projects into, carves out of, and ingests from the world around one" and the depressive position as "an anxiety-mitigating achievement" that can be briefly inhabited and from which one can "use one's own resources to assemble or 'repair'" the offending part-object (Sedgwick 128). Sedgwick argues for a similar flexibility to exist between what she defines as paranoid versus reparative critical practices, so that they are not separate "theoretical ideologies," but rather are "changing and heterogeneous relational stances" (Sedgwick 128). If the paranoid reading is based upon a project of exposure and the "unveiling of hidden violences," (Sedgwick 139-140) then a reparative mode is a project oriented towards pleasure and hope that is additive rather than deconstructive in

order to assemble something new through intertextual discourse (Sedgwick 144-150). Many scholars approach reparative reading as work of recovery that analyzes texts previously excluded from academic literary canon, or as an analytical strategy performed in opposition to or replacing a paranoid critique previously performed on the text of interest.<sup>14</sup> In both cases the reparative practice is performed as an analytical practice rather than a creative practice. *SUAS*, on the other hand, demonstrates that the creative practice of writing fanfiction can also perform a reparative practice for which Sedgwick advocates. *SUAS* achieves reparative practice through the acknowledgment and validation of the criticisms that femslash fans have made of *OUAT*. The fanfiction continues its reparation through the transformation of those criticism into a new narrative in which the act of critique leads to real change in the cultural industry. Finally, *SUAS* performs reparative practice by fostering a sense of community and hope, as it names collectively experienced traumas and provides healing and catharsis through the narrative resolution of trauma.<sup>15</sup> In order to demonstrate the ways in which fanfiction, and *SUAS* specifically, can achieve such a reparative practice, I will first discuss the use of fantasy and narrative in catharsis and then argue for fanfiction as a mode in which radical narratives can be published and circulated as texts around which queer communities can form.

In her essay “One True Pairing,” Catherine Driscoll claims that because fanfiction often exists at an intersection between realism and fantasy, fans judge it as good based on either how believably it fits into the world of the canon or how realistically relatable the characters are to the reader. As a result, fans “often present fan fiction as a fantasy life

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<sup>14</sup> See Frischherz, Hawthorne, Valovirta, and Jurecic.

<sup>15</sup> Julia Emberley argues for a similar creative narrative based use of reparative practice in Indigenous storytelling, claiming that “Indigenous forms of creative transformation, in particular, how Indigenous writer attend to the traces of desire that circulate in the aftermath of the traumatic implosion of experience” (5) function as “part of a multiplicity of *reparative practices*” (7). Tammy Clewell similarly argues that Alison Bechdel’s *Are You My Mother?* lends itself to reparative reading by a text of lived experience. Clewell states, the “comic affords special opportunities to convey individual experience in a way that transcend the artist’s self, permitting readers to see their affective histories in the pages of a book”(65), and demonstrates the ways in which Bechdel “engage[s] readers in the communal work of recognizing, working through, and repairing the ‘mom problem’” (65-66).

with direct cathartic or exploratory benefits for their ‘real’ lives” (Driscoll 88). In the case of *SUAS* the cathartic and exploratory benefits also happen to be directly related to the femslash fans’ trauma experienced within their fan activities and as a result of their consumption of popular culture and mainstream media. In her essay “From *Angel* to *Much Ado*: Cross-Textual Catharsis, Kinesthetic Empathy and Whedonverse Fandom,” Tanya R. Cochran also argues for the cathartic benefits of fiction and fantasy for fans specifically. Citing Dictionary.com, Cochran first defines catharsis as “the purging of the emotions or relieving of emotional tension especially through certain kinds of art” (“Catharsis” quoted in Cochran 155). Cochran elaborates to define the goal of catharsis within the context of psychotherapy as “to bring repressed, typically harmful emotions to the surface, address them and purge them...to bring about emotional healing and, therefore, health” (155). Catharsis, according to Cochran, can be achieved through engaging with art, as art provides “an opportunity to acknowledge buried emotions, express them and attain restored emotional balance” (155) by creating characters and narratives that evoke the expression of “the pain of the real-world” by both actors and spectators (Cochran 155). Expression of this pain then leads to “emotional equilibrium” (Cochran 155).

While Cochran analyzes fan engagement with the Whedonverse as a fan object and source text for fan production, femslash fans of *OUAT* who read *SUAS* are also reading as fans of *SUAS* and are just as capable of experiencing catharsis through the characters presented in the fanfictional world as they are through the original iterations of the characters in *OUAT*. In fact, *SUAS* has, I argue, even greater cathartic potential given it purposefully addresses emotions and experiences that the femslash fans already have and share as a community. *coalitiongirl* designs the characters to embody the emotions and affect of the femslash fandom during specific moments within the run of *OUAT* and in response to specific interactions with the real *OUAT* producers. However, she then changes the resolution of these emotions to give the characters closure that the real fans never attained. This ultimately allows the real fans catharsis when they become readers of the fanfiction. According to Cochran, catharsis through narrative fiction is possible due to what Reynolds and Reason call “kinesthetic empathy,” which is a “sensation of

movement and position” (Reynolds and Reason 18 quoted in Cochran 156), “that evoke in spectators a sense of feeling what the fictional character or filmic or televisual mind and body are feeling (Cochran 156). Therefore, the Swan Queen fans reading *SUAS* in a sense re-experience their own affects and emotions through kinesthetic empathy with the fanfictional characters’ feelings and movements as they go through similar experiences to the real life fans. However, as previously noted, the outcome of these traumatic experiences of homophobia are transformed and changed for the characters in the fanfiction compared to what actually happened in the real world. The alternate conclusion then allows for closure after emotional trauma rather than continuation of emotional turmoil. This process of experiencing closure through kinesthetic empathy with the fanfictional characters gives the real fans as fanfiction readers catharsis and resolution to the emotional trauma they previously experienced since it is the same trauma the fanfictional characters experience and for which they gain closure.

This work of healing and catharsis for a queer femslash fandom, however, is only possible because fanfiction, as a form of cultural production, allows for anti-hegemonic works to circulate widely and be resistive as work produced both for and by oppressed and marginalized communities. While other genres of queer and indie film and literature do exist and have potential to do this kind of reparative narrative work, they do not possess the same level of circulation, accessibility, and connection to relevant popular culture necessary to reach the people who need them. As previously mentioned, the saturation of popular culture and its heteronormativity necessitates a productive response and engagement with popular culture, which fanfiction provides. In addition, fanfiction’s attachment to popular culture increases its circulation potential and, as previously argued, bridges the gap between mainstream media and queer community in a way that original queer and indie film and literature do not. The difference then between catharsis performed in original queer fiction and the reparative practice that utilizes catharsis as a tool is in the function of reparative practice as a response to an already existing and circulating text that the reparative work then transforms in a radical and anti-hegemonic way.

In her book *Rogue Archives: Digital Cultural Memory and Media Fandom*, Abigail De Kosnik examines the ways that Internet fandom has created room for the curation of archives by marginalized individuals, and specifically, queer women. These new archives of literary work which she terms “rogue archives” position the identities and experiences of queer women and other marginalized people at the center of history, and create the opportunity for the stories of these communities to carve their own space into history, rather than having to “lobby... traditional memory institutions for recognition and admission of their cultural materials” (10). De Kosnik argues that fanfiction writers have historically been predominantly self-identified as female and queer and that queer and female fans perform resistance to the white heterosexist patriarchal hegemony by critically engaging with social justice and performing activism through their use of fandom.

However, as Paul Booth argues in his book *Playing Fans: Negotiating Fandom and Media in the Digital Age*, media content creators now participate in more of a dialogue with their fandoms through social media platforms such as Tumblr, Facebook, and Twitter, and as a result have brought fandom practices more into the mainstream (1-2). This participation in fandom practice by television writers, creators, and producers has in many ways taken away some of the stigma that was once attached to fandom due to its queerness and femaleness, and therefore has attracted a new demographic of fandom participants. In order to contextualize the new and changing conceptions of fans and fandom, Booth explains that “traditionally, scholars have tended to understand fandom either as identity (fans are people who have an emotional attachment to a media text) or as a practice (fans are people who produce their own meanings and texts)” (3). However, Booth complicates this binary by asserting that there is always an “underlying affective connection between identity and activity” (4). Therefore, in attempting to centralize my analysis of a specific fanfiction, which is the product of fandom as practice, I must still take into account the identity of fans in relation to the cultural industry in order to contextualize the works produced.

Other scholars have attempted to understand fandom along the lines of the type of work fandom does, splitting fandom into two types of spaces, affirmative and

transformational. De Kosnik summarizes fan studies' distinction between these two types of fannish spaces and asserts that "affirmative fannish spaces" are spaces in which "fans assemble trivia or facts, discuss minutiae pertaining to the source text, and otherwise investigate what the source text offers without seeking to alter or contradict it, [and] are 'often...majority male'" (De Kosnik 146), whereas "transformational fannish spaces" are "fan fiction and fanvid communities and archives, in which fans collectively rewrite and revise the source texts, [and] 'are more likely to be majority-female, and overtly queer or queer friendly'" (DeKosnik 146). I argue that while transformative fan practices are not necessarily critical and resistive, and affirmative fan practices still do have the potential to be so, affirmative fandom's sole interest in the media's official "canon"<sup>16</sup> leads to practices that are more likely to seek the approval of media producers who co-opt fan labor for promotion of their work, whereas transformative fandom, as focused on rewriting stories in new and unique ways, may be more likely to perform critique that leads to resistance of cultural norms through the writing of stories that are usually excluded from the mainstream cultural industry.

Booth further addresses the ways in which the "specific audience category of 'fan' is already hybridized" as that which is both "a practice of resistance to media hegemony and an identity of consumer complicity within that same hegemonic state" (3). Booth, however, emphasizes that the label of "resistive" or "complicit" cannot be ascribed to a single individual fan as a kind of identity, but rather to specific fan works or fan activities and practices. Booth states

The identity of fandom often derives unconstrained pleasure from the symbiotic relationship between fans and the media industry. Although many specific fan practices can be resistant, transformative, and critical of media practices, the underlying affective connection between identity and activity marks fans as in an always liminal state between resistant and complicit in institutional contexts. Media fans embody and project multiple identities, practices, and performances at once. (Booth 3-4)

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<sup>16</sup> Canon in the context of fandom refers to the officially accepted story that appears in-text, i.e. what explicitly happens in the book, film, or television show that is the fan object. A fan object composed of an entire franchise like *Star Trek* or *Marvel* may have many texts in multiple media that are officially recognized as canon.



In other words, Booth asserts that fans cannot completely separate themselves from being complicit in the industry as the creators of even the most transformative fan works are still invested in what DeKosnik might call “lobbying” the cultural industry for representation of their stories in the mainstream. The saturation of mass media in our current society, however, creates an environment in which it is impossible for anyone to escape the stories told in the mainstream and therefore, while it may make fans complicit with the industry, the work of fandom advocating for representation in the mainstream is still a worthwhile project, especially as it is done simultaneously with the practice of creating transformative works that provide alternative narratives to the hegemonic mainstream cultural industry.

Not only is mass media inescapable, but it is also a strong enforcer of heteronormativity and compulsory heterosexuality. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed defines compulsory heterosexuality as “the accumulative effect of the repetition of the narrative of heterosexuality as an ideal coupling” (145). She claims that “bodies take the shape of norms that are repeated over time and with force,” and asserts “compulsory heterosexuality shapes which bodies one can legitimately approach as would-be lovers and which one cannot” (*The Cultural Politics* 145). Mass media works as a force of repetition of the heterosexual norm and the idealization and romanticization of heterosexual relationships.

According to GLAAD’s annual *Where We Are on TV* report, in the 2016-2017 television season there were only 43 LGBT characters (4.8%) who were regular characters, compared to the 854 straight characters that made up 95.4% of all series regular characters on primetime scripted broadcast television. Within the percentage of LGBT series regulars, there were only 12 lesbian characters and 16 bisexual female characters (1.3% and 1.8% respectively out of all primetime scripted broadcast television series regular characters) (“Where We Are on TV” 4,6). The report also states that from the beginning of 2016 to June 2017 “more than 25 female queer characters had died on scripted television and streaming series” (“Where we Are on TV” 3). So, for queer viewers, the heterosexual ideal was repeated 854 times, while at the same time the small amounts of queer representation opposing that repetition resulted in another repetition of

death for queer women. All two characters of opposite sex need to do for the audience to recognize the potential for an ideal romantic heterosexual outcome, is exist in the same vicinity and possibly interact positively at least once. Interaction between two female characters, however, never leads to the same assumption from the general audience. I argue that this is a result of compulsory heterosexuality working, as Ahmed asserts, as a “straightening device, which rereads signs of queer desire as deviations from the straight line” (*Queer Phenomenology* 23). In other words, most audience members expect the “straight line” and most writers only intend to follow that expectation. So when femslash shippers vocally read the text differently and provide resistance to that forced straightening, they are seen as deviating from the “correct” interpretations intended by the writers, and therefore the writers and fans still ruled by the heterosexual imperative attempt to “straighten” them out by claiming a correct or intended interpretation exists.

However, “rogue archives” provide queer fans with the ability to both speak back to the cultural industry and resist the “straightening device” of compulsory heterosexuality. Queer fans can demand recognition within the cultural industry while also creating the most radical work themselves due to the ways in which fandom’s “rogue archiving” escapes the motivations of capitalism and neoliberalism. In other words, fans’ more radical transformative fandom practices and production—that do not give into capitalist motivations which uphold social hegemony— and their simultaneous lobbying of the cultural industry for more representation—which may be less radical and uphold the cultural industry’s power— are both necessary in order to create more queer friendly space and cultural production. De Kosnik further explains these seemingly contradictory practices when she emphasizes the fact that “fannish participation on social networks, often constitute a type of free labor that increases in value of the networks themselves...for the generation and maintenance of audience interest in, and the spread of ‘buzz’ or ‘hype’ around their commodities and platforms” (13) and argues that in this way, fan labor is co-opted by the cultural industry. However, she also argues for the ways in which fandom and the internet are used as support groups for LGBTQ youth and claims there are still plenty of fandom spaces existing on platforms that are not corporately owned that “explicitly position themselves as friendly and open to female and

queer makers and users, especially for the making and use of cultural texts that pertain to female and queer affect and sexuality” (De Kosnik 16). Even though these supportive fandom groups exist in a virtual space, I consider queer women gathering together in specific spaces of the Internet to perform the same kind of activism that Sara Ahmed claims occurs when “queer bodies ‘gather’ in spaces, through the pleasure of opening up to other bodies” (*The Cultural Politics* 165). According to Ahmed, “queer gatherings” are a way of “claiming back the streets” (*The Cultural Politics* 165) or in this case, claiming back the Internet and fandom and provide the opportunity for queer virtual bodies to come into contact with each other in ways that would usually be impossible due to limitations of geography, economic status, religious culture, and other structures and institutions that prevent queer communities from forming. Attempts to exclude queer fans and fanwork from the general fandom space and homophobic attacks on queer fans, then, appear to be in part a result of the heterosexual fans’ assumption that they own the fandom space by default, and any queer gathering in that space is then viewed as a threatening invasion. However, since all fan production is amateur and unofficial in terms of the source text’s production, there is little action homophobic fans can take to actually shut down queer gatherings in fan spaces like *Archive of Our Own*. De Kosnik, therefore, defines “rogue archives” as

Internet sites that can be accessed by all online users, with no paywalls or institutional barriers; that allow all content to be streamed or downloaded in full; that do not delete, hide, or edit content based on copyright holders’ allegations of legal infringement or any other reason; that are committed to the persistent publication and long-term preservation of all content they store; that have search-and-retrieval features so that users can locate specific texts; and that have either weak ties or no affiliation with traditional memory institutions such as government archives, university libraries, and brick-and-mortar museums. (De Kosnik 18)

In other words, “rogue archives” still exist in fandom and are explicitly anti-capitalist and anti-hegemonic in nature and are created specifically to host resistive and transformative fan works and labor.

My emphasis on the importance of a non-profit creative space for resistive textual production is also supported by Carolyn Dinshaw’s argument for the importance of

amateur writing over professional writing. In the introduction to her book *How Soon Is Now?: Medieval Texts, Amateur Readers, and the Queerness of Time*, Dinshaw theorizes non-linear temporalities as queer and examines the queer potential of a “temporally multiple world” (5). She argues for the radical anti-hegemonic opportunity created when works of amateurs are acknowledged, and defines a relationship between the queer and the amateur in comparison with the heteronormative professional. Dinshaw states,

Professionals are paid for their work, and their expert time can be seen to share characteristics with money: it is abstract, objective, and countable. Professional work time is clock-bound and calendrical, regulated abstractly and independently of individuals, and the lives of professionals conform to this [linear] temporality. (21)

If linear temporality is heteronormative and non-linear temporality is queer, then, according to Dinshaw, the amateurs who are “fans and lovers laboring in the off-hours” (5) operate outside of “measured temporality” (5) and the “out of synch” (4) uses of time are queer and establish “Queer, amateur” as “mutually reinforcing terms” (5). Dinshaw claims that “shifting the boundaries of knowledge production” to include amateurism provides the potential for “different ways of knowing and sources of knowledge” that would otherwise be “foreclosed” (24). She specifically uses fanfiction as an example of amateur work that resists heteronormativity, and claims that fan cultures and fan labor exist outside of linear time, and in fact function within a queer temporality (21-23). She emphasizes the fact that fans and amateurs are not paid for their work, as professionals are, and therefore are not bound to the same hegemonic expectations, which allows them to create anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchal, and anti-racist work.

Returning to Booth’s assertion that fandom is becoming mainstream, a tension inherently based in homophobia, racism, and sexism, has developed between fans who are invested in “rogue archiving” and the production of transformative work, on one side, and those who just want to enjoy the media and participate in affirmative fandom practices rather than critique on the other. The relationship between the *OUAT* creators and the fandom, especially from 2011 through 2016, greatly impacted the fandom environment and in fact perpetuated the toxicity and violence that occurred within the fandom and targeted the queer women. While homophobia is often present within

fandoms with large numbers of vocal femslash fans, due to the way that affirmative fandom practice was privileged by the production team and their social media as the more valid fandom practice, homophobic fans felt legitimated in their abuse and intimidation of femslash fans and used statements from *OUAT* writers, producers and actors that either promoted fan practices celebrating canon or condemned fan practices critiquing canon as ammunition against the femslash fans.

Although heteronormativity and homophobia were clearly the root of much of the toxicity and friction within the fandom, there were multiple other factors which prevented even well-intentioned fans with differing views on a variety of issues from having any kind of successful dialogue and in fact exacerbated feelings of hostility existing between queer and heteronormative fans.<sup>17</sup> One such factor that contributed to the friction between different sects of fans was that queer fans and heteronormative fans were not only interpreting the fan object differently, but were also, in a sense, reading completely different texts without realizing it. It is common in fandom disagreements for people to wonder if their opponent is even watching the same show due to their complete inability to understand the other's interpretation.

I argue that actually, no, they are not watching the same show. This is due to the fact that no single viewer reads the television show through the exact same set of paratexts; however, it is more likely that two queer viewers in the same fandom will have a larger number of shared paratexts than a queer viewer and a heteronormative viewer will. According to Gerard Genette in *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, paratexts are “a certain number of verbal or other productions” that accompany a text (1). He claims that paratexts surround and extend the text to “ensure the text's presence in the world, it's 'reception' and consumption” (*Paratexts* 1) and argues, “the paratext is...a

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<sup>17</sup> Here I differentiate between queer and heteronormative fans not to identify the fan as queer or straight, but to indicate the lens through which they view the show. There are many examples of fans who might identify as queer but still read the show heteronormatively, just as there are a few examples of fans who identify as straight, but are still able to resist heteronormative assumptions and acknowledge the queer subtext within the show. My descriptors then define the way that fans are watching the show, rather than their actual sexual orientations.

*threshold*, or...a ‘vestibule’” through which the reader enters the text as well as “a zone not only of transition but also of *transaction*: a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public...[that] is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it” (*Paratexts* 2). In other words, paratexts are all productions, verbal or otherwise, that accompany a text and influence how that text is received, read, and interpreted. In *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts*, Jonathan Gray expands this definition to account for new types of textual productions that have emerged in the digital age and argues that paratexts are not merely thresholds that are secondary to the text itself, as Genette suggests, but rather “paratext constructs, lives in, and can affect the running of the text” (Gray 6). Gray argues, therefore, that paratexts are actually part of the text being consumed, not separate or secondary from it, and therefore one cannot conflate the “film” or television “program” with “text” (7).

The two paratexts that most cause opposing interpretations between femslash fans and heteronormative fans are what Kristina Busse and Karen Hellekson call the “fantext” (Busse and Hellekson 7) and what Eve Ng calls “queer contextuality” (Ng 1.3). Busse and Hellekson define the “fantext” as “the entirety of stories and critical commentary written in a fandom (or even in a pairing or genre), [that] offers an ever-growing, ever-expanding version of the characters” (7). Therefore a fantext for a Swan Queen fan will differ to that of an *OUAT* fan invested in the heterosexual ships and the kinds of fanfictions and criticism of the show that circulate in the different sects of the *OUAT* fandom will define the “version” of the characters that each sect of the fandom is most familiar with. Busse and Hellekson go on to argue that

fans’ understanding of the source is always already filtered through the interpretation and characterizations existing in the fantext. In other words, the community of fans creates a communal (albeit contentious and contradictory) interpretation in which a large number of potential meanings, directions, and outcomes co-reside. (Busse and Hellekson 7)

As the fantexts of the various sects of the *OUAT* fandom began to diverge, fans’ interpretations of the fan object itself also began to diverge and through this symbiotic process where the fantext feeds the reading of the show and new episodes of the show

prompt new discussions, criticism, and fan productions in each separate area of the fandom, the complete text which femslash fans read and interpret becomes a different text than that which the heteronormative fans consume since the fantext is a paratext which regulates each group's reception of the show itself.

The influence of the fantext on the fan's reading of the fan object makes it difficult for femslash fans to enjoy heteronormative storylines because these storylines will always conflict with their queered fantext and therefore seem vastly out of character for the characters in whom they are invested. Meanwhile, heteronormative fans read a different text in which heteronormativity makes sense and is more in character than any queer interpretation. These heteronormative viewers then cannot "see" the queerness of the female characters' interactions. However, without realizing just how much the total fantext influences each group's reading of the show, neither fan can understand where the other's reading is coming from and heteronormative fans' refusal to see or acknowledge the queer potential is experienced as an act of implicit or blatant homophobia. In fact, this recognition of differing texts does not prevent this refusal from being homophobic. It only provides an explanation as to why it happens so frequently and how even well-intentioned fans might appear extremely close-minded.

Queer contextuality is defined by Eve Ng in her article "Between text, paratext, and context: Queerbaiting and the contemporary media landscape" as the "current and previous landscapes of LGBT media narrative"(1.3) that takes into account the "cumulative representational deficit across the time period that many viewers have been consuming media" as well as the continual negative representation of female queerness and the Bury Your Gays trope which Ng claims to be "a residue of the Hays Code's stipulation that homosexuality could be depicted only in an unappealing or negative fashion" (2.7). While Ng makes a distinction between queer contextuality and "official paratexts," I consider both to function as paratexts in that they both act as thresholds through which the audience views the television show, and they are also both equally influential in how a queer audience will receive and interpret a show. Queer contextuality changes the way in which a queer audience receives a text due to queer audience's desperation for representation alongside a history where queerness in television and film

was always coded in the subtext as it was not legal for it to appear explicitly in the text. As a result of this history, many queer viewers have learned queer reading practices that allow them to see queer coding in the subtext that heteronormative viewers do not. These queer readings then inspire fanfiction writing, such as *SUAS*, that explicates the queer coding.

Similarly, Cornel Sandvoss, in his essay “The Death of the Reader? Literary Theory and the Study of Texts in Popular Culture,” claims that gaps in a text allow readers to “normalize” the text to their own life experience in that they “reconcile their object of fandom with their expectations, beliefs, and sense of self” (29-30) and therefore they “exclude those textual elements that impeded the normalization of the text and fail to correspond with their horizon of expectation” (30). In “Twelve Fallacies,” Leitch claims that due to its lack of more explicitly presented thoughts and internal psychologies of characters, “non-novelistic media” or, in the case of *OUAT*, television, might extend more of an “invitation...to audiences to infer what characters are thinking on the basis of their speech and behavior” (158). Leitch, like Sandvoss, claims that “the very basis of [a story’s] appeal,” then is the presence of what Wolfgang Iser calls “gaps” or “blanks” in which “audiences are invited to make inferences about what characters are feeling or planning” (Leitch 158). This process of interpreting implicit queues and filling in gaps in order to infer characters’ thoughts and feelings allows the audience to be more active in their consumption of the story and also creates “a sense of intimacy with fictional characters that makes them more memorable than most real people and assures that the fictional field at hand comprises a world more satisfyingly coherent than the world outside” (Leitch 159). In other words, audiences can connect more to a story which leaves gaps because it allows for more individual based interpretations and more space for the audience members’ own life experiences to be reflected and responded to through the fictional characters. This occurs in the way heteronormative fans ignore queer coding and queer subtext, but also in the ways that femslash fans choose which parts of the text to emphasize in their readings and ignore the logic of the heterosexual ships. In this way, both groups create a different fantext, and the femslash shippers fantext is greatly influenced by queer contextuality. Sandvoss states, “fandom as a mode of reading...



constitutes a particular form of engagement with the text that presupposes familiarity and in which our expectations are more rigid, our determination to construct meaning in reference to the function of fandom greater than in other processes of reading” (31). In other words, the accusation that femslash fans “project” their own experiences onto the fan object and then create meaning based on that projection is maybe not completely false; however, Sandvoss’s claim shows that this process of reading also occurs with the heteronormative fans, who then also project their own heteronormative expectations and life experiences onto the text in order to create the interpretation and text that feels familiar and comfortable to them and best feeds their fan production.

All this is to say that neither reading of the text, queer or heteronormative, is “correct” or “incorrect” but that they are bound to be different just by the fact that the paratexts consumed alongside the source text, and therefore the entire text that is read, is different for the queer fan compared to the heteronormative fan, and this experience of “watching a different show” creates friction between these two groups of fans with competing interpretations because they will never be able to view identical texts and therefore struggle to understand how each other’s interpretations are reached. However, the two readings of the text are never treated equally, and the straightening work of compulsory heterosexuality gives heteronormative viewers and producers the illusion that their reading is the “correct” reading and queer viewers are merely “projecting” their own desires onto the text rather than viewing the text in an unbiased manner.

Given this argument for the importance of gaps and blanks in stories, it could be said that a weakness of long form television shows is the propensity to retroactively fill in gaps and blanks left in earlier episodes in the later seasons. This can create a disruption in the viewing experience for many audiences, especially the queer audience, as initial interpretations might be “proven wrong” in later episodes, providing a “canon” interpretation that then can be used to police and override those previous interpretations. Queer interpretations are then continuously invalidated by both professionals in the cultural industry and heteronormative fans, and the illusion of a correct interpretation of a text is continually used as an excuse to attack queer fans with veiled and open

homophobia.<sup>18</sup> For example, after two years of Swan Queen fans reading subtextual romantic and sexual tension within the gaps and blanks of Emma and Regina's canon relationship, the *OUAT* writers introduced the character of Robin Hood and, through the flashback ridden form of the show, retroactively created a history for Robin and Regina's relationship in which Regina, as a young woman, learns that Robin is her fated "soul mate".<sup>19</sup> The designation of Robin and Regina's relationship as "soul mates" in canon provided extremely effective ammunition to heteronormative fans who then argued that the previous queer readings of Emma and Regina were wrong. In the eyes of these heteronormative fans, Emma and Regina could never end up together romantically since Robin was canonically Regina's soul mate, and, therefore, in order for Regina to get a happy ending, she must end up with Robin. The retroactive continuity of Robin's status as Regina's "soul mate" lead to targeted anonymous hate mail sent to Swan Queen fans. One such message informs SQ fans that "it's clearer than ever" that there is no SQ romance because *OUAT* canon "had mention[ed] true love in connection with OQ 8 times" and therefore "SQ romance is a no"<sup>20</sup>. Other such messages accuse SQ fans of "living in delusion,"<sup>21</sup> call them "bitter bitch[es]"<sup>22</sup> and tell the SQ fan "lesbos" to "fuck off".<sup>23</sup> Fanfiction, on the other hand, provides queer fans with a much-needed space in which their interpretations can be validated. Part of the pleasure of fanfiction for the

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<sup>18</sup> The sqreceipts Tumblr blog began archiving homophobic harassment of Swan Queen fans in 2014 and was active in doing so through 2016, during which time *SUAS* was being written and published weekly. Given the recent 2018 and 2019 changes to the Tumblr blogging platform, the sqreceipts moderator has archived this "repository" onto both Wordpress and The Wayback Machine. As of March 2019 examples of homophobic harassment of Swan Queen fans archived by sqreceipts can still be viewed on all three platforms.

<sup>19</sup> This storyline was introduced in *OUAT* season 3 episode 3 titled "Quite a Common Fairy" (Horowitz and Kitsis).

<sup>20</sup> Quoted from an anonymous message sent to a SQ fan, which is archived on the sqreceipts blog as [squarescripts.tumblr.com/post/122669727734](https://squarescripts.tumblr.com/post/122669727734). OQ here stands for Outlaw Queen, the Robin/Regina ship name.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. /post/121132803020.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. /post/122668664904.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. /post/125250724299.

queer audience is the creation of a new text that privileges a queer interpretation and makes explicit the characters thoughts and feelings as they were interpreted by viewers with similar queer perspectives and experiences who would therefore have filled in the original gaps and blanks in similar ways. Fanfiction then gives validation to the viewer who otherwise might feel alone in their interpretation due to lack of access to other queer people and queer perspectives in their real life.

However, the privileging of the heteronormative interpretation by producers and fans alike is not the only source of friction within the fandom. Friction also manifests as a result of television writers and producers' privileging of affirmative fandom practices over transformative. In claiming this emphasis on affirmative fandom practice to be inherently oppressive, I link the friction within the fandom to fan disagreement and misunderstanding regarding what it means to enjoy a piece of media. I rely here on Ahmed's analysis of concepts of happiness and the "feminist killjoy." In her book *The Promise of Happiness*, Ahmed analyzes hegemonic concepts of happiness and the cultural obsession with obtaining happiness and supposed fundamental human desire for happiness (54-59). She argues that this mandatory desire for a certain normative definition of happiness is used to justify oppression and enforce outsider status on the marginalized who might live with differing definitions of happiness or differing desires and life purpose than reaching happiness (*Promise of Happiness* 59-61). She defines communities of feminist killjoys, unhappy queers, and melancholy migrants as examples of communities relegated to living outside of happy communities (*Promise of Happiness* 65-69, 88-106, 138-148). Femslash fans in many ways function like feminist killjoys in comparison to the more mainstream, and "affirmative" areas of the *OUAT* fandom. Femslash fans consider the critique of the media consumed to be part of the enjoyment and in fact the thing that allows them to enjoy the media at all, whereas heteronormative fans not engaging in transformative works often consider the critique of media to create a negative fandom experience and environment, and therefore attempt to police the ways in which femslash fans engage with the media so that "everyone can just get along" and "have fun." The negative affect then assigned to femslash fandom by other areas of fandom and by the cultural industry becomes detrimental to queer fans as it is also used

as an excuse for the blatant and veiled homophobia sent to femslash fans on social media platforms.

I argue, however, that fanfiction can be used as a rhetorical mode to combat negative affect assigned to femslash fandoms and to rewrite the narrative in a way that allows queer women to control their own affective associations with their fandom experience, their fan works, and the original media content with which they are interacting. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Ahmed analyzes the impact of naming emotions within a text, and the way that doing so “often involves differentiating between the subject and object of feeling” (13). She argues that the circulation of texts and emotions named within texts that are attached to “figures” by metonymy and metaphor impacts a culture’s affective associations with words and can enforce “figures of hate” (13). Her argument focuses on the ways in which the naming of emotions in texts can be used oppressively as negative emotions become stuck to certain groups of marginalized people, and therefore are irrationally used to justify their oppression. However, I argue the reverse can also be true and, in fact, is in the case of fanfiction where queer women are given control of the texts and emotions named within texts that are circulated within their community. For example, fanfiction like *SUAS* assigns the positive affect of hope, enthusiasm, and creativity to queer fandom, which opposes the negative affect that heteronormative fandom assigns to femslash fans by insisting they are killjoys, haters, and complainers.

In this way, the naming of emotions within the fanfictions allows different feelings to stick to queer identity than those which hegemonic culture would attribute to queer communities. Ahmed’s discussion of “the nation” as being assigned various emotions within texts that circulate and cause people to feel a variety of emotions on behalf of “the nation” becomes useful in terms of the *OUAT* fandom because in a strange way, the construction of nationhood is similar to that of fandom community, and in fact femslash fans within the *OUAT* fandom who ship SQ refer to themselves as the Swan Queen Nation (often abbreviated as Swen). The circulation of fanfiction, and *SUAS* specifically, reassigns emotions to the Swan Queen Nation that then individual femslash

fans feel on behalf of their “nation” which can perhaps override other feelings that the broader fandom has assigned to the femslash fans.

Given its use of metafiction, *SUAS* is able to lead its metonymic representations of the real femslash fandom through various affective states, ultimately ending on a hopeful and positive affective experience that as a result allows the reader to both feel empowered in their fan practices and to associate a more positive affect with their interactions with *OUAT* and the broader cultural industry. Reparative practice is achieved through the journey that coalitiongirl leads her readers on from a negative to a positive affect. While reading *SUAS*, an SQ fan transitions from the negative affect assigned to the SQ fandom by affirmative fans to a negative, yet productive, affect associated with paranoid critique as *SUAS* reveals the mechanisms of heteronormativity and acknowledges their impact. Through a transformation of the narrative, which I will analyze in Chapter Two, the fanfiction reader is then led to assign a positive affect of hope to the fanfictional femslash fandom within *SUAS*. This positive affect of hope is felt by that reader on behalf of the fanfictional fans who simultaneously represent the real SQ fans, resulting in this positive hopeful affect being assigned to all of Swen and being felt by the real SQ fans reading the fanfiction. Thus, *SUAS* achieves a reparative practice.

**Chapter 2:**  
**A Case Study of Critique and Reparative Practice in *Send Up A Signal***

In chapter one, I established the context of femslash fandom and queer community as they exist within and alongside mainstream fandom, and I outlined the need for resistive and transformative fan works that can provide healing and catharsis to the marginalized community of femslash fans through a reparative practice. I will now examine how exactly coalitiongirl's *Send Up a Signal (that everything's fine) (SUAS)*, as a case study, demonstrates both critique and reparative practice as a resistive and transformative fan work. One of the main issues with *OUAT* that coalitiongirl critiques is the way that the show set up expectations within its first season to be a feminist "modern fairytale" and then, in later seasons, did not deliver on this expectation.

coalitiongirl directly references this expectation for feminist storytelling by paraphrasing something *OUAT* writer Jane Espenson said in an interview about the show around the time of the first season's premier. In the article containing the interview, *Advocate* writer Neal Boverman introduces Espenson as a television writer who "isn't gay, [but]...just writes that way" and asks Espenson about her decisions writing in the science-fiction genre (Boverman). Espenson responds, "if we can't write diversity into sci-fi, then what's the point? You don't create new worlds to give them all the same limits of the old ones" (Espenson quoted in Boverman). This interview was released three days after the *OUAT* series premier, and as a result, this quote has been circulated around the fandom for years as representative of the ideal and hopeful expectation that the queer fandom had for the show. In *SUAS*, this promise of progressive media is made by the *OUAT* villain, Cora, as *HEA*'s producer who tells Emma "You see, this is a feminist show. We're writing about women, for women...This is our Avengers, women who can be heroes and evil and something more complex. And if we can't write diversity into our fantasy, what's the purpose of fantasy at all?" (coalitiongirl1.5). Real femslash fans' expectations of *OUAT* as a feminist show and their discussions about how the promised "modern fairytale" might be defined quickly turned from hopeful predictions to continuous critiques of the show as it failed spectacularly to deliver on this promise in the later seasons and essentially wasted all the potential it established in season one. The fans

expected a feminist twist on fairytales after season one since it set up three female characters as the true leads on the show, and other than Snow White, did not allow their storylines to center around men or heterosexual romance.<sup>24</sup> However, as the seasons evolved, so much screen time went to the male love interests (Killian Jones and Robin Hood) that it seemed as though the lead female characters were sidelined in their own stories while being forced into frustratingly misogynistic romances.<sup>25</sup>

coalitiongirl furthers her critique of *OUAT* by drawing attention to the heteronormativity of the writing and overall attitude of the production team and actors while, at the same time, explicating the queer subtext which was clearly recognizable to the queer audience. She first recognizes the queerness of the initial premise of the show through an interaction between the fanfictional actress Emma and some set visitors who ask about her and Regina's characters (named Rose and Victoria respectively). The fan asks "So you're...like...the mayor's ex?" to which "Emma nearly chokes" before responding "No! No, definitely not. Victoria and Rose are not dating" (coalitiongirl 2.2). This exchange demonstrates the ways in which the establishment of the two parent family dynamic between two women who share a child easily lent itself to a queer reading. Emma's obliviousness to the queer reading represents that of the real actors and production, and is further demonstrated later in that same chapter of the fanfiction when "her Twitter follower number grows, and now there are people tagging her in photos and calling for *Victory Rose!* And she's touched and emboldened by their support" (coalitiongirl 2.5). Emma's response to seeing "Victory Rose" in the tweets is to assume

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<sup>24</sup> In order to demonstrate the types of discourse and conversations that circulated widely in the Swan Queen fandom, I created an archive of over 1000 Tumblr posts sorted into various categories by subject using Tumblr's tagging system. Given my personal involvement in the fandom long before this project took shape, it is impossible to cite every single Tumblr post I have ever read that might have influenced my reading of *OUAT* or *SUAS*, but I hope, in including this archive, to provide a sample of some of the most relevant arguments that circulated throughout the fandom. Examples of posts discussing *OUAT*'s promise for a "modern fairytale" can therefore be found at <https://femslashrhetoricarchive.tumblr.com/tagged/modern-fairytale>.

<sup>25</sup> Examples of these complaints and critiques can be found at <https://femslashrhetoricarchive.tumblr.com/tagged/cs-critique> and <https://femslashrhetoricarchive.tumblr.com/tagged/oq-critique>.

the fans are calling for Rose to win in her battle against Victoria, not realizing that it is rather the name fans had ascribed to the romantic pairing of Rose and Victoria. Regina, on the other hand, is not as oblivious (which is ironic considering Emma is the known Gay™ in the fanfiction, but Regina has past experience with fandom). In the scene that follows, Emma interrupts Regina's date with a well-known television producer because she assumes it is a business meeting and that Regina is considering leaving *HEA*. She confronts Regina, and in an attempt to maintain her image, Regina drags her out of the public eye into the restaurant bathroom to continue their argument. Emma accuses Regina of being angry because the fans are rooting for her character, Rose, over Regina's and says "You're the one jumping networks the moment the show finds its legs! Was this just a game for you?...Is it because of the Victory Rose thing?" (coalitiongirl 2.5). Regina, however, seems to know that Victory Rose does not mean what Emma thinks it means, and responds "Miss Swan, you really are frighteningly stupid" (coalitiongirl 2.5). Emma's obliviousness to the queer potential of Victory Rose and to the possibility of a queer audience demonstrates the strength of heteronormativity within the cultural industry and the engrained and automatic nature of heteronormative reading practices.

Fanfictional Regina's awareness of the queer reading and femslash shipping happening within the fandom is more clearly revealed to the fanfiction reader when she and Emma conclude their argument and she tells Emma to wait before leaving the bathroom, further explaining that "We can't be seen leaving this bathroom together...Maybe you think you can handle sordid lesbian scandal rumors, but I have better taste than to be associated with *you*" (coalitiongirl 2.5). It is unclear at this time if Regina's issue is with the fact that her image is being linked romantically with a woman or if it is still just that she has a problem with Emma specifically, but given that coalitiongirl has hinted Emma's attraction to Regina throughout the first two chapters of the fanfiction, Emma has a visceral reaction to this statement, "her brain goes fuzzy for a moment...her heart pounding like she's just run a marathon" (coalitiongirl 2.5). The in-text acknowledgement of Emma's queerness positions her to be a character with whom the queer reader can identify, and therefore sets her up as an analogue for the queer reader who participates in femslash fandom.



This scene also provides another criticism of Hollywood, when Regina corrects Emma's assumption that she was in a business meeting with the older television executive by informing her, "I'm not leaving the show, you imbecile. I'm on a *date*" (coalitiongirl 2.5). Emma is in disbelief as "Regina is half the exec's age at the very least, and she hadn't looked like she'd wanted to be there at all in a non-professional sense" (coalitiongirl 2.5). It is later revealed that Regina only went on these dates because her mother, Cora, has been pressuring her about her love life. She tells Emma "if you want something from my mother, you have to give her something in return" (coalitiongirl 2.5). Emma responds "Your mother wants you to date rich old men. Solid plan," (coalitiongirl 2.5) clearly critiquing the trend that is repeatedly seen in Hollywood both in film and in real life, of young actresses being paired romantically with older than middle-aged men.

Later, Emma does start to recognize the queer subtext between Victoria and Rose in a scene that coalitiongirl references directly from episode 21 of *OUAT* season one. Emma comments to Regina in rehearsal that Victoria's dream about Rose "kind of sounds like the start of a porno" (3.3). By showing Emma and Regina's recognition of the queer subtext, and by continually hinting at Emma's attraction to Regina, coalitiongirl changes the narrative of the production of that scene. By rewriting the narrative of the *OUAT*'s production so that fanfictional Emma and Regina, as actors, are both queer and perceive the queer subtext within exactly referenced scenes from *OUAT* that appear in their *HEA* scripts, coalitiongirl validates the femslash fans' interpretations of these scenes and allows her readers to imagine and temporarily live in a world in which the actors involved in the production of the show also recognize the validity of the queer reading and are not so heteronormative as to refuse to even consider that there could be a romance between the two female lead characters. Giving the femslash fandom the opportunity to experience this alternate narrative essentially performs a reparative practice.

coalitiongirl further acknowledges the queer premise of the show and critiques the *OUAT* writers' imposition of heteronormativity onto such a premise in her depiction of the ways in which the first season of *OUAT* put forth a narrative of supremacy of the biological family and the ramifications of such a narrative. One of the key attractions of

Swan Queen for queer women (and possibly even the initial reason many recognized the romantic potential of the relationship) was that Emma and Regina share a son and throughout the series function as a family unit that real families with two mothers could identify with and see themselves represented in. As Sara Ahmed notes in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, “the family” is “evoked...as the origin of love, community and support” (*The Cultural Politics* 144), and queer women looked towards this family unit as a rare validation of the constructions of their own potential families. Ahmed interrogates the role of heteronormativity in the normative ideal of the family, and argues that the construction of the family, in turn, is a mechanism used to continue the supremacy of white heterosexist society. She states,

the reproduction of life itself, where life is conflated with a social idea (‘life as we know it’) is often represented as threatened by the existence of others: immigrants, queers, other others... [and] the reproduction of life — in the form of future generation — becomes bound up with the reproduction of culture through the stabilization of specific arrangements for living (‘the family’). (*The Cultural Politics* 144)

The family therefore functions as a “script” of compulsory heterosexuality that queer people continually fail to follow (147). Ahmed argues that “the everydayness of compulsory heterosexuality is also its affectiveness, wrapped up as it is with moments of ceremony... which bind families together, and with ongoing investment in the sentimentality of friendship and romance” (147). This, however, is exactly why queer women seek out representation of queer families in media. It gives opportunity to temporarily escape reminders of the ways in which one fails to follow the normative script, and allows one to witness moments of positive affect and sentimentality occurring within a non-normative family structure, which is, in short, what the Swan-Mills Family on *OUAT* provides.

Ahmed further argues that the idealized family is not only based on “the heterosexual union,” but also on “procreation and the biological tie,” which a queer family “interrupts” (153). This definition of queerness as an interruption to the assumption of family as biologically dependent is another way in which the Swan-Mills family unit is already queered even in the *OUAT* canon and a reason many queer fans

identified with it. Swan Queen's existence as "found family" rather than family by blood, was relatable to the queer audience since, as Ahmed points out, many queer people use the term "family" to identify their non-normative "significant bonds" (154). So, whether Emma and Regina are viewed as a romantic couple or not, they canonically identify each other as family due to their co-parenting of Henry and close friendship formed around mutual protection and survival. In this way, *OUAT* itself challenges heteronormativity through Regina and Henry's relationship as family without blood relation that disrupts the idealized family Ahmed discusses as based upon "procreation and the biological tie" (153).

In *SUAS*, coalitiongirl takes interest in these questions regarding the definition of family and of biological reproduction as reproduction of heteronormative society, as well as normative culture's privileging of biological relationships above all others. She attempts to grapple with some of the complexity of the relationship dynamics in season one of *OUAT*, while also re-performing some of the social critique that *OUAT* itself makes about supremacy of blood relations. In the fanfiction, the *HEA* character Victoria Stone is played by fanfictional Regina Mills, and both she and the fanfictional actress are representations of *OUAT* Regina. In order to achieve this double representation, fanfictional actress Regina has an adopted son named Henry (who represents *OUAT* Henry) and the *HEA* character Victoria Stone has an adopted son named Jamie who is played by a fanfictional child actor named Jamaal (who is not at all related to fanfictional Regina). In *HEA*, Victoria and Jamie's relationship development and storylines directly mirror those of *OUAT* Regina and Henry until the *HEA* storyline as a whole eventually diverges from the canon *OUAT* storyline. Meanwhile, fanfictional Regina and Henry are having their own relationship conflict that is similar to that of Victoria and Jamie, but lacking the magical elements. In chapter 2.1 of the fanfiction, Victoria Stone's position as Jamie's mother is not only questioned within the *HEA* narrative by the valorization of Rose's character but also in behind the scenes discussion. Fanfictional Regina takes it very personally when she does not get to pose with Jamaal in the promo shoots and Emma does. She states that she's "playing his *mother*... There must have been a mistake" when she is told that a photo op with her and Jamaal was not "on the list" (2.1). In the

fanfiction, this critique of anti-adoption narrative and biological relationship supremacy is two-fold: it explores both fanfictional Regina's relationship with her son Henry and Victoria's relationship with her son Jamie. Both relationships pull reference from the *OUAT* relationship between Regina and Henry, and critiques of *OUAT*'s writing of it, especially in season one, are addressed in both versions.

Later, when Victoria and Rose must attempt to work together in the mine, Regina is still furious about the relationship Rose is allowed to have with Jamie, and Emma observes that Regina “hates [Rose] and it shows onscreen and off, the loathing even stronger than her hatred of Emma herself, and every moment Rose spends with Jamie is a source of more and more frustration for her” (2.2). This visceral reaction that Regina has to the Rose/Jamie storyline, of the birth mother showing up after 10 years and having an “instant” connection with the child while forcing her way into his life against his adoptive mother's wishes, shows the ways in which *OUAT*'s portrayal of Emma's relationship with Henry devalued Regina's relationship with Henry on the grounds of blood relation alone, and in so doing contributed to the narrative of biological relationship supremacy that continues to hurt both adopted children and their parents. The fanfiction places Regina in the position of both being a mother who has adopted a son and critiquing the *HEA* storyline that mirrors the actual *OUAT* storyline in order to give voice to the fans of the show who brought forth similar critiques due to personal experience with adoption.

The narrative of biological relationship supremacy in the definition of family also greatly impacts queer femslash community as the only families that queer women who are in long term relationships with women have been historically able to imagine are chosen families with adopted children. While it is true that medical advances now allow for lesbians to conceive through artificial insemination, valuing chosen family and deconstructing the heteronormative necessity of biological progeny is already deeply embedded in queer culture, making this storyline personal for many queer women even as it pits Emma and Regina against each other.

In order to keep Emma, Regina, and Henry in character, and in order to be faithful to Henry's role in changing and encouraging Emma and Regina's relationship, *SUAS* does establish a fast connection between Henry and Emma (2.3), but coalitiongirl chooses

not to have Henry be Emma's biological child. Fanfictional Emma does, however, still have a past where "She'd been eighteen when she'd had to give up her own baby because she'd been incapable of raising him" (1.1) and coalitiongirl uses this as both part of Emma's connection to the character of Rose and as the source of her inability to critique Rose's storyline. In the fanfiction, Henry becomes a kind of stand in for the child Emma had had to give up even though he is not actually that child. Emma reflects that she "isn't in the habit of making friends with ten-year-olds, but Henry Mills is nothing if not determined. He's just a year or so older than her own son would have been and it's...bittersweet" (2.4). In this way, coalitiongirl is able to write the relationship between Emma and Henry and provide Emma's emotional connection to him in a way that is still very true to *OUAT* canon, without making it be about an instant connection due to biological relation. Fanfictional Emma's position as a birth mother without a child and fanfictional Regina's position as a mother who never gave birth allow coalitiongirl to explore important perspectives and experiences in both disagreements and supportive conversations between Emma and Regina while also ensuring that Emma's position as a biological mother never places her above Regina in terms of validity of status of motherhood.

Fanfictional Henry also increases the stakes of fanfictional Regina's critique on the adoption storyline in *HEA* as he struggles to come to terms with the knowledge of his own adoption at the same time that Jamie does in *HEA* and as *OUAT* Henry did in *OUAT* season one. It becomes clear to both fanfictional Emma and the reader that the way Henry is able to view his relationship with Regina is greatly influenced by what he observes in society and in media, and Emma realizes how the supremacy of Rose as Jamie's biological mother influences Henry's actual relationship with Regina. Through this construction, coalitiongirl argues for the ways in which the stories that are privileged in mainstream media have real world consequences.

The representation of Victoria and Jamie's relationship, as it turns out, is also the reason fanfictional Regina wanted to be involved with *HEA* in the first place (2.3). Perhaps she hoped she could influence the way the story was told, or she had hope that it would provide a positive representation of adoption for her son. This becomes more clear

when fanfictional Emma and Regina discuss the issue in a later scene. Regina states that in the final battle between Victoria and Rose she thinks “Victoria’s son should be left out of it...whatever’s written next, Victoria and Jamie are family” (3.4) and Emma concedes to the reader that “Regina plays [Victoria] with so much love for Jamie that it’s impossible to believe that Rose is justified in threatening to take him away,” and that she “desperately wants Regina to get the story with her son that she deserves” (3.4). When Henry watches the season finale with the cast, he is already rooting for Rose, as if Rose saving Jamie with True Love’s Kiss is proof of the biological supremacy of their relationship, and proof that he is right in his anger toward Regina as his adoptive mother, proof that there is some “better” mother out there somewhere who just needs to find him (4.1). The way *HEA* treats Jamie’s adoption does not cause the rift between Henry and Regina, but it does not help them either; it gives Henry validation for all the negative things he thinks to be true about his relationship with Regina. That is, until Victoria’s next lines, “*No matter what you think, ... No matter what anyone tells you, I do love you*” (4.1). These lines are taken word for word directly from the *OUAT* season one finale, and the way Regina is described to perform them, convincing Henry, maybe not to change his mind, but at least to question his reading of the story, is also directly based on Lana Parrilla's actual performance in *OUAT*. The humanity she brought to the *OUAT* version of Regina in her interactions with Henry, and especially in the season finale, is what allowed viewers to see the possibility of Regina’s redemption and to see her capability for love and good. This being such an important moment for Swan Queen fans makes the scene in the fanfiction even more poignant and impactful. The reader can understand how just that one line would have caught fanfictional Henry’s attention.

While season one of *OUAT* was highly problematic in its treatment of the Henry, Regina, and Emma conflict, one thing the series did get right was correcting the issue. In later seasons, Henry and Regina's relationship as mother and son is arguably the strongest and most important relationship in *OUAT*. Due to its further development, *coalitiongirl* does critique the first season in the fanfiction, but also recognizes the importance and positive impact that *OUAT*'s further development had. The fanfiction’s narrator states, “Victoria is Regina's love letter to Henry... Henry's only beginning to understand it..., and

he's awestruck and overwhelmed with the knowledge of it" (4.1). This statement recognizes the potential for change and development in the relationship even as it argues for the necessity of that change. The following evolution of the Victoria/Jamie relationship in *HEA* becomes part of fanfictional Regina and Henry's process to mend their own relationship. Their journey, as a result, demonstrates the ways in which media can impact the real life and the importance of media that disrupts the hegemonic narrative for non-normative audiences by allowing them to see themselves represented and validated in their own non-normative existence.

Although many of the critiques coalitiongirl makes are of the content of *OUAT* itself, there are also just as many critiques about the production of the show and the ways in which the *OUAT* producers, writers, and actors interacted with the fandom and treated the femslash fans. Throughout season one on the real *OUAT*, the cast and writers both reacted to fans' questions or comments about the potential sexual tension between Emma and Regina with surprise, shock, and disbelief before assuring the public that any subtextual tension was unintentional and a romance was not the direction the show was going with those characters. Even when these reactions were not blatantly homophobic, e.g. reaction of disgust or anger, the fact that there was such disbelief that anyone might read the dynamic between their two lead characters as romantic and the complete disregard for that romance being a possible avenue for the show, reflected the ways in which the writers and actors were already approaching the work from a highly heteronormative perspective. However, after season one and once the initial shock of having queer fans vocally performing queer readings had worn off, Lana Parrilla and Jennifer Morrison appeared to make some attempts to support the Swan Queen fandom. However, this support was unpredictable at best and they definitely privileged catering to the canon heterosexual ships and the fandom of those ships in very uncritical ways, making femslash fans wonder if they truly agreed with all that was being written, or if they were required to say specific things for PR reasons.

coalitiongirl uses the fanfictional cast and producers' use of social media and fan conventions promoting *HEA* as a way to represent and reference the interactions that the real *OUAT* fandom had with the *OUAT* production (including actors, writers, producers,

etc.) and also fan speculation that actors often do not have complete freedom over what they post on social media or what they say at conventions and in interviews.<sup>26</sup> This fan speculation manifests in *SUAS*'s portrayal of Emma as being constantly frustrated by the restrictions and requirements of her social media use. coalitiongirl introduces this concept in chapter two when Mary Margaret informs Emma that "Gold's going to give you a proper speech about [social media]" (2.1). Emma is at first confused as to why she would need a speech about it since she already uses Twitter, but Mary Margaret informs her that "Gold has some very severe restrictions on what we do and don't tweet" (2.1). In a later chapter Emma reflects on the fact that she had not been allowed to do much press for the first season of *HEA* because "Gold had pronounced her 'too wet behind the ears for any publicity,' which had mostly meant that she'd spoken her mind too much for his liking" (4.4). In other words, he judged her too likely to go off script or say something controversial during press that might upset the audience that he valued (i.e. advertisers and others interested in stories that uphold the white hetero-patriarchal values).

The speculation that actors do not have control over their own public discussion of their characters is a means to consider the ways in which different levels of privilege and oppression intersect within the group viewed by fans to be in power, and the ways in which people who hold certain positions of power (like actors) might at the same time be silenced along different lines of oppression. This consideration of intersectionality ties into the fanfiction's broader critique of the white hetero-patriarchy in that it argues that actors are only able to gain leading roles or powerful positions within television shows because they are able to pass to some extent, either by staying in the closet if they are queer, or assimilating enough to pass as white in various ways if they are actors of color. If we accept this speculation, then these actors would be unable to critique their own show if they disagreed with the way a storyline or character was being handled, because that would disrupt their ability to pass. They would therefore be unable to answer fans truthfully if a fan brought a certain critique of the show to their attention in a con panel, interview question, or social media interaction. Problems, however, occur when other

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<sup>26</sup> Examples of fan speculation regarding *OUAT* PR strategy and actors' participation can be found at [femslashrhetoricarchive.tumblr.com/tagged/PR-Speculation](https://femslashrhetoricarchive.tumblr.com/tagged/PR-Speculation).



fans, who seek to uphold the white hetero-patriarchy, use actors' PR statements as ammunition and proof that certain views about the show are correct, citing that if actors of color on the show have not spoken out about a racist storyline being racist, then the storyline must not be racist at all. Or that if an actor has not come out publicly, even if they have never claimed to be straight, they must be straight and any speculation otherwise is both wrong and offensive. Along with that argument, homophobic fans argue that writing queer ships for characters of straight actors is also creepy and offensive. But, because the actors are unable to publicly discuss these issues or must only give approved PR answers, the bigots within the fandom feel they have proof or vindication that they are correct. Meanwhile, femslash fandom, fans of color, and otherwise marginalized fans wonder if the actors' public stances are truly what they believe.

*HEA* continues to reflect the heteronormativity that femslash fans so strongly critiqued in *OUAT* when the character of Captain Hook is introduced and Gold informs Emma that "we're selling new power couples," and tells her to "talk about those new relationships [and] talk about Rose...[but] don't talk about Victory Rose" (7.1). Gold's ban on Emma interacting with Victory Rose and her feeling that she must stay closeted in order to keep her job or have future jobs in the industry continue to hurt her on into chapter 8.3 as she watches the fan poll drama play out and Victory Rose fans beg for acknowledgment of their win. When she cannot comment, they assume that her choice to ignore it all is based in homophobia and is an erasure of a large segment of her fandom. However, it is clear to the fanfiction reader that Emma feels trapped, knowing that no matter what she does, she cannot win in this situation. So instead she just "laughs and laughs and laughs until there are tears leaking from her eyes and she's curled up on the couch in her trailer, crying silent tears" (8.3). This reaction demonstrates how important the Victory Rose fandom is to her, and shows her being with the fans in their longing to be represented and acknowledged in mainstream media and popular culture. Emma's position of authority as an actor allows her own pain, in the face of heteronormativity and longing for Victory Rose, to be a source catharsis and validation for the real SQ fans reading the fanfiction. Much of SQ fans' pain and frustration comes from the *OUAT* actors and producers' failure to understand and complete dismissal of their feelings, so

Emma, as a fanfictional actor standing in for the real *OUAT* actors, provides a reparative experience.

Some might argue that *SUAS* also, at some points, critiques the behavior of Swan Queen fans and the ways in which the fandom dealt with the increased interaction with the cast via social media and fan conventions by showing the negative impact certain types of social media interaction had on Emma (3.5, 4.2, 7.1). However, I argue that the inclusion of these interactions is actually working in a reparative way by creating an alternate narrative/explanation for the way that the cast and writers of *OUAT* interacted with Swen. In *SUAS* chapter 4.4, at the fanfictional SDCC panel for the second season of *HEA*, Emma “cringes” at the first audience question about Victory Rose because she has no idea how to answer it and “sometimes she does forget where she ends and Rose begins and it's all too instinctive around Regina” so she can't explain her acting choices in the specified scene. Her facial expressions, as a result, are over analyzed by the Victory Rose fandom. Similarly, in the same SDCC panel scene, the final question asks if the queer subtext is intentional and if they are possibly “writing Disney's first queer fairytale” (4.4). coalitiongirl describes the reactions of multiple members of the panel, beginning with Regina’s “pained face that fandom will eventually determine is *hostile*” (4.4), “Emma chokes on her water and turns bright red and Ruby fucking *laughs*” (4.4). Each of these reactions, while maybe not exact descriptions of the real life *OUAT* actors and producers’ reactions to SQ questions, do represent the range of reactions that Swen got in the first few years of the show. And like the Victory Rose fandom, the Swan Queen fandom interpreted them as homophobic. In this scene, coalitiongirl critiques both the production and the fandom in showing that yes, some of those reactions were definitely homophobic, but Emma and Regina's reactions were motivated by other personal feelings. coalitiongirl makes it clear that her use of *OUAT* characters as actors, producers, and writers on *HEA* is in no way a speculation on what happened in real life behind the scenes of the production (7.AN), so, while she provides motivations and/or misunderstandings for Emma and Regina that function as alternative causes of the perceived homophobia than actual homophobia, she is not making excuses for the real *OUAT* production's treatment of its queer fans, and most who read the fanfiction would even say there is little to no

possibility that the actions perceived by the fandom as homophobic or heterosexist were not those things. This alternative explanation, however, allows fans to, at least temporarily, live in a world where there ARE explanations other than homophobia for the way the *OUAT* production as a whole reacted to Swen. In the real world, speculating these alternative narratives is pointless because even if the homophobia and heterosexism was unintentional, it still had measurable impacts on the queer fandom, and really set the tone for the kind of cultural landscape that would continue to exist in the *OUAT* fandom as a whole, and gave permission to the homophobic areas of the fandom to attack Swen.<sup>27</sup> But, within the fanfiction, it is healing to allow oneself to imagine a different story and experience events from the other side but still through a queer perspective.

coalitiongirl weaves reparative reimaginings of the narrative through fanfictional Emma and Regina's characters with her critique of the real *OUAT* production. In *SUAS*, during the fanfictional San Diego Comic Con panel, the *HEA* producers Cora, Leopold, and Gold make the same claim about Victory Rose subtext being "unintentional" that the real-life *OUAT* writers made about Swan Queen subtext throughout the run of the show. The difference, however, is that the fanfiction provides Emma's internal reactions to these answers and allows femslash fans, once again, to be validated in their disappointment and frustration with the comments (4.4). coalitiongirl's critique references the resistance to queer readings that real-life femslash fans encountered in their interactions with both other fans and the *OUAT* production on the basis of *OUAT* being a "family show". Fanfictional Leopold states in response to a question about Victoria and Rose that "This *is* eight o'clock on Sundays" (4.2) which is an argument used against femslash fans by heteronormative fans as well as a reference to a real tweet posted by actress Ginnifer Goodwin in response to a fan's question about Emma and Regina that stated "Unfortunately ABC did not pick up the pilot of Once Upon A Time In My Pants. Check cable?" (47scissorhands). This tweet was perceived by most femslash fans as extremely homophobic, and the tweet was deleted soon after due to the backlash. Through the process of referencing specific homophobia experienced by the real

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<sup>27</sup> Examples of the impact of *OUAT* PR and interactions with fandom here <https://femslashrhetoricarchive.tumblr.com/tagged/implications-of-pr>.

femslash fans and then giving their emotional reactions validity through the reactions of Emma and Regina, coalitiongirl is able to simultaneously perform both critique and reparative practice and ultimately, allow the fanfictional femslash fandom to succeed in lobbying the cultural industry in a way that the real femslash fandom could not, into writing the queer subtext between Victoria and Rose into the main text of *HEA*, while also writing the love story between fanfictional Emma and Regina as the characters that the real Swan Queen fans are invested in (coalitiongirl 20-21). coalitiongirl's transformation of the narrative of the show's production allows fans in the real-life femslash fandom to have a reparative and cathartic experience through the fanfiction's specific references to their real trauma and its resolution. In this way, the fanfiction does not separate a reparative practice focused on a positive affect from the negative affect of paranoid reading, as Sedgwick might advocate for, but rather allows a more positive affect to be associated with a paranoid practice of critique, thus repairing the practice of critique itself as well as repairing both the narrative of the television show and the narrative of the production of the television show.

However, critique of homophobia and the resolution of homophobic experiences through the transformation of the narrative is not the only way in which *SUAS* performs a reparative practice. coalitiongirl also repairs the SQ fandom's affective relationship with both the show and the greater *OUAT* fandom by giving SQ fans a greater sense of community through the nuanced use of references to SQ fandom discourse. Including these references functions to build community and allow for the queer women of the *OUAT* fandom to feel seen and acknowledged. Whether the references are to serious and sometimes even painful fandom events or to Swan Queen fandom specific jokes, they allow the audience of SQ fans to feel included and allowed to be the insiders rather than the outsiders. While anyone may still be able to read and enjoy the story as an interesting narrative that re-imagines the lives of the *OUAT* characters, unless they were present in or witness to these fandom specific dialogues, they will not be able to fully appreciate or recognize these instances of humor and reparation. I argue that coalitiongirl subverts the use of insider references and humor as a means to establish community boundaries because in many cases, this strategy is used by the normative society to further alienate

the already marginalized. However, the jokes and insider references used in *SUAS* flips this strategy and creates a piece of art in which the previously marginalized are now included while the hegemonically included are excluded.

In the following paragraphs I provide examples of what I argue are four different types of insider references used in service of this community building and acknowledgement in *SUAS*. The first references a Swen specific trope or headcanon that is continually reiterated within SQ fanworks. The second re-stages Swen-determined important moments between the *OUAT* versions of Emma and Regina for the fanfictional versions (as opposed to referencing a scene in fanfictional *HEA* that mirrors a real *OUAT* scene, which I argue serves a slightly different purpose), the third references Swen specific in-fandom jokes and/or crackfic<sup>28</sup> that continue to be circulated and reproduced, and the fourth references specific fandom events.

The example of this first type of reference that I will analyze is a trope of SQ fanworks that was originally born out of a critique and has since been circulated and reiterated throughout the fandom as a means to resist the original narrative. This trope is the reimagining of the character Marian as someone who might be a close friend to Regina, rather than a romantic rival.<sup>29</sup> In this case, coalitiongirl is not just referencing the trope, but also using it as an important part of the narrative. From the very beginning of

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<sup>28</sup> Crackfic is defined by Fanlore.org as “a fundamentally ludicrous premise, or otherwise including a plethora of unbelievable, incredible, or just plain silly elements - that is, implying the author/artist must have been on drugs to produce something so insane. It may be used in a compound noun (‘crackfic’), or as an adjective (‘crack pairing’)” (“Crack”).

<sup>29</sup> Published between October 2014 and February 2015, I believe amycarey’s *Down The Rabbit Hole (DTRH)* was the first influential SQ fanfiction to use this trope. The trope continues to appear in many fanfictions following *DTRH* both before and after *SUAS* begins to be published in August 2015. Some examples of this include *Getting to Know You* by sultrysweet, *right in front of me* and *A Third Chance At Life And Love* by Jinxter, *Will You Accept This Rose?* and *Give Me Your Hands, If We Be Friends* again by amycarey, *Freedom* by SgtMac, *Part of Your World* and *What Happens in Vegas (Comes Back to Storybrooke)* by queenssaviour, *a hushed sound* and many others by coalitiongirl, *Unexpected Conception* by justanoutlaw, *Marian’s Eleven* by angstbot, *it takes two to tango, and other dance cliches* by wistfulwatcher. and *you’ll never walk alone* by swatkat. Although, this is by no means an exhaustive list of the Marian/Regina brotp trope’s use.

*SUAS* it is clear that Marian and Regina get along well, and are maybe even close. Then in chapter 4, Marian informs Emma that she and Regina are “basically sisters” having “met on the *Barney and Friends* set when [Regina] was three and [Marian] was eight and [Regina] wouldn't talk to anyone but [Marian] during filming” (4.3). The sincerity of Regina and Marian's relationship in *SUAS* is further confirmed when Emma is scrolling through Regina's twitter and notices that the only photo in which her smile is real is one “where she's actually beaming, Marian and Jamaal beside her” (4.3). Marian continues to be the most important figure within Regina's support system throughout the fanfiction, and even goes on to extend her friendship to Emma when it becomes clear that Emma is important to Regina. This trope of Marian and Regina being close friends (often referred to as the “Marian/Regina brotp”) was originally used as a reparative measure to the highly critiqued *OUAT* storyline that pitted Regina and Marian against each other in a love triangle. Many fans found the storyline distasteful as, in *OUAT*, Robin Hood struggled to choose between his long lost wife (Marian) and his “soul mate” (Regina) and ultimately ended up stringing them both along, and forcing Regina so far out of character that she seemed to have no self-identity or self-worth outside her relationship with Robin.

Ultimately, *OUAT* Robin chooses Marian, but ends up cheating on her with Regina while Marian is in a magically induced coma, which SQ fans also judged to be highly out of character for Regina. Fans also critiqued the way Robin continued to pursue Regina after he had chosen Marian and after Regina had explicitly told him that she wanted him to leave her alone because he had made his choice and she wanted to move on. His persistence in courting Regina following that point was seen by many queer fans as an example of a misogynistic man who felt entitled to a woman's attention even when she had stated she did not want to give it and his insistence that she accept his attention even when she had asked for him to stop.<sup>30</sup>

In addition, it is important to note that Regina and Marian are the only women of color in that half season and many viewed *OUAT*'s insistence upon pitting the only two

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<sup>30</sup> This storyline took place in *OUAT* season 4 episodes 7 and 8 (Horowitz and Kitsis). A sample collection of posts critiquing the Robin Hood/Regina relationship can be found at <https://femslashrhetoricarchive.tumblr.com/tagged/oq-critique>.

women of color against each other as racist.<sup>31</sup> To counter the narrative as told on *OUAT*, many in the Swan Queen fandom both started shipping Maiden Queen (Marian and Regina) as a side ship and began writing their relationship as an important friendship within Swan Queen fanfiction.<sup>32</sup> I therefore argue that Marian and Regina's relationship in *SUAS* functions in multiple ways, one being as reparative to the misogynistic *OUAT* storyline, another being reparative in making Marian a more prominent character than she was in *OUAT*, therefore giving more story-time to the women of color and allowing them to be friends and allies rather than competition, and finally as community building in its reference to an in-fandom trope and practice of resistance that acknowledges a legacy of SQ fanfictions that have come before.

As an example of the second type of reference coalition girl makes (that is, the re-staging of canon Swan Queen scenes for fanfictional Emma and Regina) I analyze the references to a scene that takes place towards the end of the episode “Breaking Glass” in season 4 of *OUAT*. The scene takes place when Regina is still recovering from Robin’s reunion with Marian after Emma saved Marian’s life during her trip to the past and brings this past version of Marian from the Enchanted Forest back to present day Storybrooke. In *OUAT*, Regina blames Emma for her loss of Robin, who she believed to be her fated soul mate, and is frustrated and angry about the fact that even when they are allies, Emma and her family still continue to take away the things that are important to her. Emma, however, did not know who Marian was at the time she saved her and brought her back to Storybrooke and cares enough about Regina at this point to decide to try to support Regina in her grief, even as Regina blames her. She seeks Regina out in her vault, after a previous argument in which Regina had been unreceptive to Emma’s apologies. This time, Emma attempts to get through to Regina and show her that she is not just apologizing in order to make herself feel better about the situation, as Regina previously accused her of. She states, “I wasn’t looking for you to assuage my guilt. I was just

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Sample collection of posts about romantic Maiden Queen can be found here <https://femslashrhetoricarchive.tumblr.com/tagged/maiden-queen>. See footnote 25 for Maiden Queen brotp SQ fanfictions.

looking for you to be my friend.” To which Regina responds in confusion, “you thought we were friends?” (Horowitz and Kitsis season 4, episode 5). This scene was important for SQ fans as it was the first time Emma and Regina really discuss their relationship since becoming reluctant allies. It was an important in-text acknowledgement of the development that their relationship had over the course of the previous three seasons.

The first instance in which *SUAS* evokes this *OUAT* scene is subtle and not quite as direct as coalitiongirl’s later references, but it is still recognizable to fans familiar with the important SQ moments in *OUAT*. In the fanfiction, Emma has called Regina on the phone, out of the blue, during hiatus at a point in the story when their working relationship is still slightly rocky and any status of their relationship outside of the professional is highly ambiguous to both Emma and the reader. She justifies the phone call by telling Regina “I thought we were friends” (4.3). To which Regina replies “No you didn’t,” but “sounds amused” (4.3). I would go so far as to argue that it is *because* this reference is so subtle that it allows for such feelings of inclusion and community for the readers who recognize it as a reference. Choosing dialogue that references such a charged *OUAT* scene also further encourages an emotional response from the reader of the fanfictional scene by bringing to the surface the emotions they previously associate with the scene in *OUAT*.

This *OUAT* moment is referenced a second time in *SUAS* chapter 8.4 when Regina and Emma have been fighting. Regina is distancing herself from Emma following their first kiss at a cast party, and Emma wants to repair what she believes is damage to their relationship due to the kiss. Emma finally gets a chance to talk to Regina, assuring her that she’s “not going to try to kiss [her] again” but that she “wanted...to be friends again,” to which Regina responds with the line directly from *OUAT*: “You thought we were friends?” (coalitiongirl 8.4; Horowitz and Kitsis season 4, episode 5). In this scene, the genuine lack of clarity on what their relationship has been is clear and parallels that of *OUAT* Swan Queen. As in *OUAT*, *SUAS*’s Emma and Regina have spent three seasons working together, going from rivals, to reluctant allies, to genuinely caring for and protecting one another. And yet, fanfictional Regina, just like *OUAT* Regina, is unsure of what that means or where they stand, especially given the amount of previously



unacknowledged sexual tension between them that they both were aware of but had not acted on until Emma kissed her (a complication that obviously did not happen in *OUAT*). Regina's lack of clarity on their relationship causes Emma to second guess her own perceptions, and believe that maybe she has misread every single interaction they've had. This again seems to accurately represent the canon *OUAT* scene that this scene borrows from as well as speak to some common anxieties queer women have about their relationships with other women and the difficulty that persists in attempting to understand and define one's relationship with another woman. These anxieties manifest as questions of whether or not one's relationship is progressing as merely platonic or potentially romantic, or as the anxiety that interactions perceived as expressions of romantic feelings or flirting were really just friendship being misread.

The fanfiction combines a representation of canon SQ with a representation of this common queer female experience and in so doing allows the reader to see themselves in Emma and Regina in both the fanfiction and in the *OUAT* canon. The reader witnesses their favorite characters navigating this difficult ambiguity from a safe distance, which might then give them more confidence in understanding their own circumstances. While fanfictional Emma fears she has misread signs of platonic friendship as signs of romantic interest, a lot of non-fandom discourse circulating within femslash circles revolves around the opposite phenomenon. This manifests as a repeated joke that lesbians are oblivious to romantic gestures and flirting and accidentally end up dating each other without realizing it because they assume romantic gestures to really just be platonic. While many iterations of this anxiety about relationship ambiguity come in the form of humor, fandom discourse analyzes the reasons the jokes exist and how straight women culture and also homophobic narratives about predatory lesbians cause queer women to second guess themselves in every situation, and question the nature of every relationship they have with other women.<sup>33</sup> Many fans, as a result, brought forth questions about

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<sup>33</sup> Tumblr discussions analyze the role of heteronormativity and internalized stereotypes of predatory lesbians in feeding these anxieties and confusions. Examples of these discussions can be found at <https://femslashrhetoricarchive.tumblr.com/tagged/useless-lesbians> and <https://femslashrhetoricarchive.tumblr.com/tagged/lesbian-anxiety>.

*OUAT* Regina's reaction in this scene, wondering what Regina thought her relationship with Emma possibly was if she did not think they were friends. Perhaps she just assumed they were civil co-parents? or did she wonder if there was something else?<sup>34</sup> Either way, coalitiongirl acknowledges this ambiguity and twists it slightly to more directly reflect real queer anxieties.

While the previous examples of coalitiongirl's community building references are based in scenes from *OUAT* itself or well-circulated fandom critiques, some of coalitiongirl's references are used for humor alone. This third type of reference alludes to specific in-fandom jokes or crackfic. These joke references establish the bounds of the community coalitiongirl addresses and allow for a more intimate reading experience for those who get the joke. An example of this type of reference appears in *SUAS* chapter 6.1 when Emma is speaking to Marian about how to prevent Milah from blackmailing and outing her. Marian mentions in passing, "Before I met Dwayne, I had my moments" (6.1) meaning she is currently in a steady romantic relationship with someone named Dwayne. What the outside reader would not be able to know from this brief reference, is that Dwayne in fact refers to Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, and Marian dating The Rock is an in-fandom joke that to my knowledge was created by the fanfiction author amycarey in a series of crackfics entitled *Imagine that Maiden Rock was a thing that happened*. The first fic of the series is called "Imagine The Rock Came to Storybrooke" and, according to the author's note, was written for comedic purposes after amycarey decided that "The Rock should be on Once Upon a Time and he would be the best boyfriend ever" (amycarey, "Imagine that Maiden"). This fic series has been circulated throughout the fandom such that references to The Rock/Dwayne as Marian's love interest became

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Discussions of female specific experiences of heteronormativity can be found at <https://femslashrhetoricarchive.tumblr.com/tagged/wlw-invisibility> and <https://femslashrhetoricarchive.tumblr.com/tagged/gal-pals>. References to the predatory lesbian narrative can be found at

<https://femslashrhetoricarchive.tumblr.com/tagged/predatory-lesbian-rhetoric>. Many posts are cross-tagged as there is overlap and relation between all of these categories.

<sup>34</sup> TV.com writer Lily Sparks became well known within the SQ fandom for her reviews and analysis of *OUAT* and addresses this scene from the episode "Breaking Glass" in her article "*Once Upon a Time* 'Breaking Glass' Review: Date Night".

common place in certain circles. coalitiongirl's inclusion of Dwayne as Marian's boyfriend in *SUAS* references this phenomenon and provides opportunities for those within the fandom who had seen or participated in the circulation of this joke to be insiders who would catch the reference.

The fourth and final type of reference I will discuss references real SQ fandom events and therefore again specifies the community coalitiongirl addresses. Directly addressing her audience fosters intimacy between her readers through recognition and acknowledgement of shared experience. One such reference is to the myriad of shipping poll battles<sup>35</sup> that took place throughout the series run of *OUAT*. The *Top TV Chemistry Battle* that appears in *SUAS* chapter 8.3 synecdochally represents the many online shipping polls that television fandom in general participates in. In the case of femslash fandom, the most relevant at the time were the AfterEllen Ultimate Femslash Tournament and the Zimbio March Madness competition. The fanfictional version of the shipping poll combines events that happened during both of these polls in real life. It structures the logistics of the competition to be like Zimbio, in which all canon, non-canon, hetero, and homo pairings are eligible as long as their show is still on the air, but includes the duo interview reward offered by the AfterEllen competition (for which only femslash ships were eligible) that Swen won in both 2014 and 2015 (Hogan; Piccoli). In *SUAS*, Victory Rose also wins the competition, but Gold refuses to allow Regina and Emma to do the interview, claiming that it would be “promot[ing] Victory Rose winning...against Rose Captain,” when they were “just beginning to launch [the Rose Captain] relationship,” and that it would be “mainstreaming Victory Rose” which is something the producers absolutely do not want to happen (coalitiongirl 8.3). In real life, Lana Parrilla did the interview for at least one of the AfterEllen wins (Anne), but Jennifer Morrison never did. SQ fans began to speculate about her refusal to do the interview, and some even argued that this was proof she hated SQ or was homophobic, or didn't care about her queer fanbase. However, as coalitiongirl states in her author's notes (1.AN, 7.AN) the inclusion

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<sup>35</sup> Shipping poll battles are events run by entertainment journalists/platforms in which ships from various TV shows are put into a popularity contest. Fans of those ships vote for the “best” ship in a multiple round tournament process.

of the poll in the *SUAS* is not meant to speculate on how much the real actors and producers pay attention to fan polls or what their acknowledgement or lack thereof mean, but to reference fandom events that large portions of Swen were emotionally invested in.

By writing fanfictional Emma and Regina as caring about the poll, wanting to acknowledge the win, and even voting for Victory Rose themselves, coalitiongirl allows fans to feel validated and understood. Many who obsessed over the polls never expected the cast or writers to care about the results, but to the fandom it was a way of taking up space and staking a claim to our right to exist. It gave femslash fans something to point to, to say “look how many of us there are, look how many people believe in this story and want/need this story to be told.” The shipping polls were a fun rallying point for the community, even as those opposing Swen’s existence constantly took it upon themselves to inform Swen that the poll would change nothing and SQ wouldn’t be end game just because they won a poll.

Of course, those Swen invested in the polls all already knew this. Convincing the show runners to make SQ canon was not what the polls were about. They were about creating a concrete acknowledgement of our existence within the space of the fandom after many years of having been made to feel invisible and pushed out.<sup>36</sup> Fanfictional Emma and Regina are shown to understand this through their own investment in the fanfictional poll and through their wishes to do the interview, which would acknowledge the Victory Rose fandom's accomplishment. In fact, once Swen started making Zimbio March Madness (which was not limited to femslash participation) an important fandom event, many other femslash fandoms joined in the frenzy and femslash ships took over the final rounds multiple years in a row. I argue that femslash fandom dominated these polls because in many ways, the heterosexual ships did not need the polls. Hetero ships from fandoms that did not have large and vocal femslash ships seemed to pay little attention to the polls because they were already canon and needed no validation. This then begs the question of why the canon heterosexual ships that *did* exist in fandoms with large femslash fandoms felt the need to compete in these polls. Based on the homophobic

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<sup>36</sup> Posts discussing the Zimbio March Madness competition are collected here <https://femslasrhretoricarchive.tumblr.com/tagged/zimbio-march-madness>.

anonymous hate Swen received during these shipping polls, I argue that hetero ship investment was direct homophobic backlash.<sup>37</sup> Femslash fandom was being loud and triumphant about something, and the homophobes wanted to shut it down, and thought the best way to do this was to beat the femslash shippers in their own game. Fortunately, that did not happen often, as, again, fandom acknowledgement in the form of shipping polls is much less necessary for canon heterosexual ships, and I would actually argue fandom activity in general is much less necessary for fans of canon hetero ships, because they have no need to create something together as a community in order to have their existence acknowledged. Their fandoms are assumed to exist by default because the canon heterosexual romance is assumed by the creators to be popular with audiences no matter how poorly it is written. *SUAS* reflects the nuance and depth of fan investment in shipping polls through Emma and Regina's investment in the outcome of the *Top TV Chemistry Battle*. This nuanced depiction then works to counteract the barrage of hate sent to fans invested in shipping poll events that seeks to invalidate their efforts due to homophobia or simple lack of understanding of the benefits that these events have for noncanon femslash fandoms. Including these polls also evokes the feelings of community in the reader that they may have had while participating in the event, or creates new feelings of community and belonging by describing and validating this shared experience, which is healing after experiences of alienation.

Through my close reading analysis, I showed the ways in which coalitiongirl performs reparative practice through the validation of critique and queer reading and through community building and catharsis. *SUAS* repairs the queer fandom's negative affective response to *OUAT* that was born out of feelings of frustration and alienation by providing a transformed resolution to the fandom's struggle for visibility and representation. It builds community through specific in-fandom references in order to cultivate a sense of belonging for the queer audience that is often lacking in queer fans'

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<sup>37</sup> Once again see the Zimbio March Madness collection <https://femslashrhetoricarchive.tumblr.com/tagged/zimbio-march-madness>. Homophobic attacks in response to Zimbio activity are also collected in the SQ fandom receipts blog here <http://sqreceipts.tumblr.com/archive/2015/4>. Unfortunately, the receipts blog was not yet running prior to October 2014, so it is difficult to locate previous years activity.

interactions with the *OUAT* production and the broader *OUAT* fandom, and in doing so, the fanfiction is reparative. *SUAS* also provides the feminist narrative that fans initially expected from *OUAT*, but which ultimately failed to be delivered, in order to satisfy the disappointed audience and provide an avenue through which they could once more enjoy the *OUAT* characters and world.

*OUAT*'s failure to deliver on femslash fan expectations disrupted these viewers' ability to fully engage in the pleasures of entering into the fictional world. According to Will Brooker in his chapter "A Sort of Homecoming – Fan Viewing and Symbolic Pilgrimage," a large part of what causes fan investment in a text is the fans' experience of a "symbolic pilgrimage" while viewing a television show (149). Brooker relies on Roger C. Aden's definition of "symbolic pilgrimage" as "a trip without drugs, a journey and return without leaving the easy chair" (Brooker 149). Brooker claims that the attraction of this symbolic pilgrimage is the ability to enter into the world of a fan object and through interaction with this fictional world, gain new tools for coping with real social structures and situations (149-150). However, Swan Queen fans became alienated from the fictional world of *OUAT* when they began to recognize it as heteronormative, misogynistic, and racist, and, as a result, no longer wished to complete a pilgrimage there. Rather, Swen became fans of their own fan works instead of being fans of the television show, and now use fanfictions as the fan objects providing the new worlds into which they travel on these symbolic pilgrimages. Fanfiction allows queer women to experience some different kind of social life in which problems of homophobia, while not completely removed, are at least successfully navigated by the protagonists. While *OUAT* itself gives queer audiences no useful tools for navigating their real lives, femslash fanfiction does. *SUAS* as a fanfiction was a fan object in and of itself insofar as Swan Queen fans sat down to "view" (or given its textual form, read) it weekly as it was published in a serial format chapter by chapter. Therefore, each chapter had a defined beginning and end to the pilgrimage. Even fans who read the fanfiction all at once after its completion would still have a defined entrance into and exit from the fanfictional world of the story, a "reassurance of an exit" that Brooker claims is what allows fans to approach the navigation of socials structures in a playful and exploratory way that they are not

afforded in real life (150). In many ways, *SUAS* also had its own mini fandom within the greater SQ fandom, as there was fan art and fan discussion about the story both during the run of its publication and afterwards.<sup>38</sup> So, the fanfiction was able to allow for a productive pilgrimage that *OUAT* itself failed to provide, and allowed for the navigation of experiences that are actually useful for queer readers, rather than creating a world in which queer people do not exist.

Brooker uses Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's "flow experience" theory as an example of "interior travel" and defines "flow" as "the pleasurable sensation of losing oneself in an activity—work, a game, a physical or mental challenge—and becoming immersed, with everything perfectly meshing in a harmonious state where goals are set and satisfyingly met" (152). Brooker argues that television viewing is just as much a "flow experience" as reading or viewing art (152-153). One argument he makes for including television viewing as a flow experience is the way it could be described as a "trip" that "has a double meaning of drug-induced-trance" (155). He goes on to provide examples of fans who described their investment in a television show as an addiction. While Aden already accepts that reading can be a flow experience, I think it is relevant that the reading of fanfiction shares this addictive trait with that of viewing a television show. In the case of SQ fans, reading of fanfiction is much more of a flow experience than watching the show itself. Not only do SQ fans tend to lose interest or concentration in scenes in which Emma and Regina are not present (one of the biggest critiques of the writing of the show is that it introduces too many side characters and story arcs that fans of the main cast do not care about), but many television show fans who log large numbers of hours on social media end up multitasking while watching a television show. Even just live tweeting one's viewer experience would remove the viewer from the pilgrimage into the fictional world and disrupt the flow experience. Fanfiction reading practices, however, differ from TV viewing practices for these same fans. Many fans report to

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<sup>38</sup> Examples of fan posts about *SUAS* can be found at <https://femslashrhetoricarchive.tumblr.com/tagged/Send-Up-a-Signal-%28that-everything%27s-fine%29>.

sitting down to read a fanfiction and losing all sense of time and doing nothing else for hours on end, often late into the night and early hours of the morning.

Flow, however, was also disrupted for queer viewers of *OUAT* specifically when queer-coding and feminist catchphrases set up a “goal” or expectation for the viewing experience that ultimately failed to be “satisfyingly met.” Femslash fanfiction on the other hand aligns its goals with those of its target audience and therefore allows a full “flow experience.” This is possible due to the femslash fanfiction author occupying the same social space and similar identity as their reader within a more collapsed social hierarchy than exists between cultural industry professionals and their audiences. It is also possible given the narrowness of the intended audience and a lack of drive to widen the reach of the story or cater to a broader audience in order to gain wider popularity and therefore monetary success.

Brooker also emphasizes the “experience of pilgrimage as a homecoming—a sense of rejoining a community” and the ways in which fans search for a community of fans who appreciate the fan object in the same way they do. Brooker states that “the association of a sacred place of fandom with belonging helps contextualize practice and experience of fan pilgrims” (162). Here he is referring to fans who perform both symbolic pilgrimage to the fictional world through their viewing of the tv show and fans who go on physical pilgrimages to special filming locations associated with their fan objects. I would argue fan conventions are a similar pilgrimage experience, but rather than going to a location directly associated with a fictional location in the fan object, the fans are going on a pilgrimage to find the physical manifestation of their community. For femslash fans, the overlap of their fan community with their queer community is vital for the impact that the pilgrimage toward that community has on their real life. Therefore, fanfiction can be used as a community building method and as a new medium through which queer audiences can experience a more effective and satisfying symbolic pilgrimage. Through such a pilgrimage, queer audiences might experience healing and catharsis after the trauma and alienation of being queer in a homophobic and heteronormative society.



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