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**Citation:** Wang, E. N., Kelley, B., Price, L. & Schuster, K. (2020). Beyond the multidisciplinary in fan studies: Learning how to talk among disciplines. *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 33, doi: 10.3983/twc.2020.1819

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# Beyond the multidisciplinary in fan studies: Learning how to talk among disciplines

Article in *Transformative Works and Cultures* · June 2020

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# Beyond the multidisciplinary in fan studies: Learning how to talk among disciplines

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[0.1] Abstract—In light of the Fan Studies Network's statement regarding fan studies being overrun with whiteness, we are in a unique position to engage in scholarship that challenges the overwhelmingly white and Global North-centric structures that define how we study fan cultures. Multidisciplinarity, which may be understood as disciplines laid side by side, should be contrasted with interdisciplinarity, which requires true dialogue. Despite recent field-shifting work by fan studies scholars such as Bertha Chin, Lori Morimoto, Rukmini Pande, and Rebecca Wanzo, more work needs to be done to both acknowledge and build on current research in transcultural fandom. In a dialogue that reflects the progress of our own striving toward interdisciplinary and transcultural work in fan studies, we seek to demonstrate a possible way forward for the field of fan studies to become more truly interdisciplinary and transcultural in its focus.

[0.2] Keywords—Dialogue; Interdisciplinary; Transcultural

Wang, Erika Ningxin, Brit Kelley, Ludi Price, and Kristen Schuster. 2020. "Beyond the Multidisciplinary in Fan Studies: Learning How to Talk among Disciplines." In "Fan Studies Methodologies," edited by Julia E. Largent, Milena Popova, and Elise Vist, special issue, *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 33. <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2020.1819>.

## 1. Introduction: The capacious field of fan studies

[1.1] At the 2018 Fan Studies Network Conference in Cardiff, Wales, UK, Naomi Jacobs argued that we need to go beyond multidisciplinary within fan studies. To be multidisciplinary, she argued, was merely to have multiple disciplines near each other, whether these disciplines talked to each other or

not. By contrast, to be interdisciplinary requires dialogue—a reflexive process of deep and active listening, reflective response, and progress toward synthesis of ideas. True interdisciplinarity, Jacobs argued, is something that fan studies desperately needs in order to move forward (a version of this conference paper is included in the Theory section of this volume: see <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2020.1665>). While "multidisciplinary" has become something of a trendy term, what the term lacks are the conversations, the disagreements, the misunderstandings, and the aha! moments that emerge during interdisciplinary work. What it misses are the kinds of innovations that a dedication to interdisciplinarity can lead to.

[1.2] While preparing for the 2019 Fan Studies Network conference in Portsmouth, many fan scholars rightfully pointed out that not enough has been done to engage with transcultural fandoms and fans. This led to the authors' own discussion of the differing economies and experiences of fans across multiple contexts, including Western contexts (such as the United States and the United Kingdom), and in Far Eastern contexts—namely, East Asian fans centered in Taiwan, China, and Japan. These discussions have helped us to better learn how to engage in interdisciplinary discussion, and to see the ways in which fan studies theories can be extended, deepened, and even refined by looking at fans that have before been underrepresented in much of the scholarship (similar arguments have been made recently by De Kosnik 2018; Morimoto 2018a and 2018b; Pande 2018a and 2018b; Stanfill 2018; Woo 2018). What it means to be participatory and transformative is very different within these contexts, and these differences, in turn, can better inform how to read ever-globalizing fan practices and discover what these practices might tell us about learning and education.

[1.3] In this article, we share our own experience with interdisciplinary and transcultural work, which began with a workshop we ran in June 2018 that considered the gendered nature of fan practices and fan studies, and what this might tell us as educators and librarians. We are a group of academics across the range of the academic experiences and fields—Erika is a doctoral student in Culture, Media and Creative Industries at King's College London (KCL). Brit, while trained as a writing teacher and literacy studies scholar, now serves at KCL as a Teaching Fellow in Digital Cultures, where they continue their work on the intersections of literacies, fan writing, and the digital. Ludi is a librarian at SOAS and Honorary Visiting Fellow at the Centre for Information Science at City, University of London, who is interested in how fans seek out, use, and remediate information, and who gained her PhD in Information Science through researching the information behavior of media fans in online spaces. Kristen is a Lecturer in Digital Curation at KCL focusing mainly on teaching students about metadata and digital asset management systems. While we come from a range of backgrounds and academic study, and while we are working at different points in our academic careers, we all share an intense interest in how people engage with popular culture.

[1.4] We have chosen to write this article as a conversation rather than as a typical academic article because we want to show how talking to each other is perhaps the most difficult yet most crucial component of effective and meaningful interdisciplinary and transcultural work. Furthermore, we have chosen to present our conversation (and work) in progress, rather than as a typical academic piece, to show how, first, interdisciplinary work can often be slower and require more patience (though concomitantly more rewarding) than single-field work, and second, that other types of "outputs" bring value to the scholarly community, even if they do not look like the traditional academic journal article or monograph. We were particularly inspired by the dialogic format in Freund and Fielding (2013), which was used as a guideline in the creation of this piece.

## 2. Fan practice and gender: Ludi—Gender, the affirmational, and the transformative

[2.1] My interdisciplinary journey into gender literacy and fan studies began in spring 2018, when I was contacted by Brit via Twitter about collaborating on a workshop. My background is in library and information science (LIS), which means I am familiar with the idea of literacies. As Kristen will discuss later, information literacy is one of the central concerns of Information Science and how we can best teach information users (in other words, everyone) to evaluate and critically think about the sources they encounter. In short, information literacy is "the ability to make efficient and effective use of information

sources" (Julien 2001, 1054). This kind of work, however, doesn't tend to take place outside of LIS, so I was interested in "talking outside the echo chamber" and seeking commonalities across other disciplines and cultures. I was also aware, through my doctoral studies on the information behavior of fans (Price 2017), of the drive within fan studies toward interdisciplinary and transcultural work. Thus, I jumped at the opportunity to take part in Brit's workshop.

[2.2] Brit wanted to share the concept of gender literacy, and how fandom is a space for developing and negotiating such literacy. The potential overlap with the more familiar information literacy immediately piqued my interest. Within LIS, there is much literature on gender and information behavior, but there is a difference between exploring how certain literacies are gendered and what it means to be gender literate. From a fan studies perspective, it has been well-documented that fan activities are gendered. The difference between affirmational and transformative fan practices are usually marked by gender divides—see, for example, obsession\_inc's original Dreamwidth thread (2009), Tossenberger's interview in Jenkins (2011), and De Kosnik (2016, 146). In my doctoral research, where I was attempting to build a broad model of fan information behavior, gender was admittedly on the periphery of my research, but informants raised the point again and again:

[2.3] Encyclopedic [i.e., affirmational] fandoms enjoy mastery of the industry canon. They don't do "transformational" work like write fanfiction. They tend to be predominantly male and somewhat derisive of derivative creative works based on their fandom (Participant 3).

[2.4] It should be noted that a lot of times, it is female fans who get turned into a punchline and how "haha look at this fan and their whacky stories." Male fans rarely get the same degree of scrutiny [*sic*] or mockery that female fans have to face. (Participant 9)

[2.5] While these gendered practices do appear to exist, it is worth noting that the divide is not set in stone. There are, for example, men who write fan fiction; and there are certainly women who contribute facts and trivia to fan-based wikis. Take, for example, Hellekson and Busse's (2014, 3–4) definitions of affirmative and transformative practices, where the former's purpose is to "collect, view, and play, to discuss, analyze, and critique," and the latter's is to "take a creative step to make the words and characters their own." Using this as a guideline, we can see that many fans who are women and girls engage in affirmative practices (such as collecting figurines or writing meta that analyzes the source text), while many fans who are men and boys engage in transformative practices (such as engaging in cosplay or drawing fan art). Can we say that fan practices are truly gendered? And if so, what does that mean for the fan communities that engage in them?

### 3. Fan practice and gender: Brit—How fan fiction writers play with gender and sexuality

[3.1] Ludi raises an important question, and I think part of the answer links to how fans engage with and represent gender in their stories. I was especially struck by Ludi's point that fan texts provide cornerstones to building and negotiating knowledge in fan communities. I'd never considered this before, but it's a useful analytical lens. To take an example: during our workshop, I talked about Fem!Harry communities, where the writers portray Harry Potter as a woman. I discussed one particularly striking example of this practice in the story *An Avalanche*, a Harry Potter-The Lord of the Rings (LOTR) crossover by Lady Hallen (2014). In this story, "Heather" Potter has fulfilled her prophecy by killing Voldemort, but she has lost the war. Feeling there is nothing left for them in England, Heather, Hermione, Luna, and Draco decide to travel to another dimension. The group travel to the LOTR universe, and somehow become embroiled in yet another battle against evil. It is implied by Lady Hallen that the LOTR universe is not especially welcoming to women with power. In this way, then, perhaps Lady Hallen's Fem!Harry is not only a rebodilying of the very character of Harry Potter, but a rebodilying of the LOTR universe to include more powerful, three-dimensional woman characters.

[3.2] What I've learned from Ludi's and Kristen's expertise in information science is that another reading of this example might suggest that these fan writers are expanding the very field of possibility

for Harry Potter and LOTR fan discourses. Within Fem!Harry, fan fiction writers are negotiating the gendered canons of Harry Potter, as well as the notions of "femme" and "female." Within this perspective, gender literacy means not only the emotional and embodied elements of reading and writing about and with gender, but it also includes the tags and categorizations that not only make something like Fem!Harry possible, but make it findable and (re)shapeable by the entire fan community.

[3.3] However, it should also be pointed out that, within these Fem!Harry communities (at least in my experience at Fanfiction.net), rather than finding unique opportunities for representations of trans\*, nonbinary, genderqueer, and/or gender nonconforming identities, often, the play with gender is applied in very binary forms. Lady Hallen reported in an interview that, for her, the reason she writes Harry Potter as Heather Potter is because she feels more comfortable writing a female character, and pairing a female Harry with Draco Malfoy (Lady Hallen, pers. comm., September 16, 2014). In other words, while this writer has arguably empowered herself by rebodilying Harry to include her own desires, she has also engaged (though not a mean-spirited way) in discourses that are ultimately queer-phobic ([note 1](#)). An additional complicating factor here is that Lady Hallen is Filipina, and currently living in the Philippines, so her views of gender and the gender binary, as well as the queer community, are shaped by a very different cultural context. Furthermore, her work on texts coming from Western spaces, such as the Harry Potter series and *The Lord of the Rings*, is in a doubled conversation with the source texts and the cultures these texts reflect, as well as the complex relationships Lady Hallen must have with these texts as filtered through the lens of the Philippines' colonial past, especially at the hands of the United States until 1946. While I have yet to dig into these complications, it is important to acknowledge that while Lady Hallen's representation of gender is highly binaristic, it is also being done within a context of reading with and yet against the texts and their silence on nonwhite people (see De Kosnik 2018).

[3.4] Part of our work, then, as academics is not only to describe the ways in which fans might play with gender but also to call out the ways in which these practices are cisnormative, as they can often be both in fandom and in fan studies. In other words, while this example of Fem!Harry does show how fans might play with gender, it also shows how limited and even hegemonic this play can be. Furthermore, the more we engage in transcultural fandom, the more important it is for us to gain better understandings of what gender literacy might mean as Western texts are filtered through the cultural lenses and experiences of those from the Global South. Ultimately, I would say that fan practices are highly gendered, but that this gendering is sensitive to national, cultural, racial, and linguistic contexts.

## 4. Fan practice and gender: Kristen—Scaffolding and hegemonic masculinity

[4.1] My contributions to the workshop drew more from observations and interests in inclusive pedagogies than long-term research in fan studies. So, although I am relatively new to and unfamiliar with fan studies, working with Brit and Ludi has been an opportunity to reflect on and refine my conceptualizations of inclusive and transformative pedagogical practices. Over the past three years, I've endeavored to develop inclusive pedagogies, particularly in my assessment-heavy modules. Based on these efforts, I've explored ways to include students in developing marking criteria and the form and extent of feedback given for each assessment. My overarching goal is to develop collaborative methods for building and evaluating technical and literacy skills so that students perceive the value of their practices in the learning process. Over the past three years, I've enjoyed working in an international and diverse space and observed many different strategies students employ to obtain desired marks or change their learning strategies. I've taken this time to observe how gender, cultural identity, and educational background shape students' perceptions of their abilities and their willingness to ask questions during lectures and seminars and to sometimes constructively challenge my authority.

[4.2] So when Brit began discussing fan studies and the dynamic communities they engage in, I was more than intrigued. Not just because Brit had new insights into literacy and pedagogies but because they also presented a new avenue for drawing connections between the different areas of my research: gender, literacy, and identity. I contributed to our workshop because I wanted to participate in discussions about pedagogies that encourage students to practice and enhance their approaches to

reading, writing, and collaboration. I've looked at this from the perspectives of Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of peripheral participation and Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development (2012).

[4.3] In brief, legitimate peripheral participation is a strategy for implementing scaffolding in curriculum design. Lave and Wenger observed that the concept of scaffolding (first introduced by Lev Vygotsky [2012]) could be applied outside of classrooms. Scaffolding theorized that we don't solve problems in a vacuum; we work with others and depend on feedback from our peers to gauge our ability to try new things and how successful our efforts might have been. Vygotsky was keenly interested in the experiences of children in formal education settings, and he argued that the ways we are taught to solve problems affect our attitudes toward risk taking and the unknown. Lave and Wenger agree that context matters, and they explore the limitations of formal education settings, and the creative, social, and informal practices that affect the ways we perceive learning. Putting theory into practice is not a linear process: identifying policies and procedures for assessment and curriculum design can lead to creative problem solving to improve classroom dynamics (and make the most use of limited teaching time). While working with policies and experimenting with classroom management, it is important to consider the perspectives and privileges influencing the decision-making process. Theories like hegemonic masculinity can be particularly helpful here. Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) theory highlights the cultural complexities of gender and the power dynamics that may go unnoticed because they are assumed to be correct or unavoidable. While they focus on a critique of masculine identities, both scholars invest time and effort in situating men within wider cultural, political, and economic networks. While the connection between literacy and gender is not always clear or direct, it is important to consider how they interact, as different facets of our social and cultural practices. Fan fiction offers a unique space for these negotiations. Not only because creative adaptations of popular media are encouraged, but because peer review is an ongoing process of building shared sentiments, visions, and imagined alternatives to mainstream media

## 5. Fan practice and gender: Erika—BL culture, *funü*, and *tongrenzhi*

[5.1] In order to address how fan practices are gendered, I introduced my ethnographic research on *New Member*—the first boys' love (BL) stage play in Taiwan, focusing on the interrelationship between producers, *tongrenzhi* (fan-made magazine) writers, and fans who are women and girls. Based on this case study, I think that the gendered fan practice exists in the process of interpreting or decoding the source text, and creating fans' own works. *New Member* is the first BL stage play in Taiwan to be affiliated with its own series of BL cultural products and activities. It attracted a huge number of new audiences from among the women BL fans—*funü*—most of whom had never gone into a theater for any kind of performance, let alone a BL event. There have been three productions of *New Member* from 2014 to 2016. The story takes place in a fictional high school in Taiwan. After their lead singer drops out, the student rock band welcomes a new member, An Qifan, who is the protagonist of the play. In the band's rehearsals, Qifan gradually develops a crush on the guitarist Pei Shiguang. After a series of attempts at communication, quarrels, and conflicts, Qifan finally realizes that true love can transcend any difference, even gender.

[5.2] *New Member* is especially striking because of the way it extends BL. BL originated in the 1970s as a genre of Japanese *shōjo* manga (girls' comics) that featured "love, sex and romance between boys and young men" and later transformed into different forms of cultural texts (Martin 2012, 365). As the popularity of the BL genre increased, a *funü* (rotten girls) community arose along with it. *Funü* refers to a group of women, the majority of whom are young and heterosexual, who proactively consume, circulate, reproduce, and associate with the BL culture as it manifests in a wide range of cultural products, including manga, animation, video games, light novels, and cosplay (Galbraith 2011). Following Ludi and Brit, based on the case of *New Member*, I also argue that the practice of fans is highly gendered here, especially in the process of interpreting source text and creating *tongrenzhi*, which is the core practice of *funü*. That is because *funü* treat the storyline of *New Member* as the source text and interpret it creatively to create their own works. In this process of creation, the male characters in the stage play and the actors themselves become cultural products, because *funü* are keen on



consuming the beauty and sexuality of the actors and imagining the romantic relationship between male characters by creating *tongrenzhi*.

[5.3] Moreover, Kristen's use of hegemonic masculinity has inspired me to revisit the study of fandom. As some researchers (e.g., Galbraith 2011) have defined, the BL text itself is primarily created and read by women authors. It has established a relatively free fantasy platform for women, where they could escape from the male gaze to view men's beauty, sexuality, body, and desire, and express their thinking of the idealized romantic relationship. Based on some Asian fans' practices, we could witness that such fan culture has established a close connection with the experience of women and negotiation with mainstream society.

[5.4] The original intention in creating *New Member* could help to explain this point. *Funü* in Taiwan was usually misunderstood as a freak group by the mainstream, which always stereotypes *funü* as a group of slovenly, weird, and lascivious women (Wang 2016, 27). Thus, inspired by their own members' experiences as *funü*, the troupe decided to create an original stage play, *New Member*, in order to help the public understand these girls and accept BL culture. Moreover, the practice of the first generation of *funü* in Taiwan also indicates the cultural links between BL writers and LGBT support. In the 1990s, Taiwanese culture changed drastically when martial law, restrictions on establishing political parties, and state control of mass media were all abolished. Discussions and student movements of democracy rippled through the country. Those student movements influenced Taiwanese young people deeply and awoke their consciousness of democracy and freedom, and discussions on homosexual rights began to spread among high schools in Taipei. Students considered themselves pioneers in the wave of LGBT acceptance and advocacy, and some girls in the high school comic club began to create amateur manga to promote homosexual love. Among them, BL was one of the most important genres. Therefore, from the Asian perspective, the attitudes of BL fans toward masculinity and homosexuality could be seen as BL becoming a tool for expressing subculture and also providing a resistant space in culture.

## 6. Interaction of gender and literacy: Ludi—Fans, gender, and information literacy

[6.1] Information literacy (IL) is a core area of research in LIS—for practitioners and academics alike. A key area of IL research focuses on developing methods for engaging with users, as a means to enhance users' understandings of their information behaviors. While traditional forms of IL focus on library-centric interactions and information sources, there is a growing trend to explore IL outside of the library, and to consider the transferability of IL skills and practices into more diverse environments. Combining fan studies and IL offers a unique opportunity to engage with a diverse and creative community that is equally invested in destabilizing normative literacy practices.

[6.2] Let us first assume that fan works may be gendered along affirmational and transformative lines. From a LIS perspective, both affirmational and transformative forms of fan practice are integral to the wider information flows seen within fandom—that of creation, organization, dissemination, preservation, and ultimately remediation. Fans are providers of information (e.g., through informal wikis, walkthroughs, guides, rec lists, etc.—which are usually favored over official sources), which they organize (via strategies such as the "curated folksonomies" [Bullard 2014] that we see on sites like AO3); preserve (through initiatives such as the Open Doors project); and remediate, or, indeed, remix (through transformative formats such as fan fiction, fan art, fan vids, etc.). Affirmational or encyclopedic fan texts are ways in which fans can aggregate the fan community's knowledge of the source text, and thus disseminate such knowledge back to that community. Transformative fan texts are ways in which the fan community may navigate and negotiate that knowledge, and again share their understanding of the source text with said community. Both types of fan text inform fan understandings of the source text; they build the fan community as much as they are built by the fan community. In many cases, both types can form informational or creative works of their own—for example, in her article on fan wikis, Feleki (2016, 55) found that both affirmational and transformative practices come into play to produce fan wikis, and that in such contexts both exist in symbiosis, rather than as opposing concepts.

[6.3] There is a cyclical movement of information, that is entered into at many points, where information users (i.e., fans) may add to the sum of knowledge; take from it in order to build further works, both encyclopedic or creative; or even organize, index, and classify it (as the volunteer tag wranglers on AO3 do). These are all practices that, at every stage, are intrinsic to the fan community. This means that information, and the creation of fan information works, is not strictly gendered in itself. Where it *might* be gendered is in how fans choose to deconstruct, remix, or use information resources in the creation of their own fan works—in whether such information is used to create further affirmational and/or transformative works. But, as discussed in the previous section, it isn't always clear-cut where gendered boundaries lie in the creation of fan works, or even if gender should be taken as binary in such cases. My own interest in Brit and Kristen's idea of gender literacy is that in my own research, gender was a noticeable peripheral concern of my informants, one that I did not have time to explore further—for example, it would have been interesting to delve more into whether fan conceptions of gender are as binary and cisnormative as the brief participant references to gender indicated. This gap is something that Brit and Kristen's gender literacy concept might go some way in helping to flesh out, thus giving a rounder appreciation of the gendered aspects of fan information behavior.

## 7. Interaction of gender and literacy: Brit—The craft of fan writing

[7.1] I've been deeply struck by two of Ludi's points: first, that fan practices occur in flows of information; and second, that the movement of information within fandoms is cyclical. In my own work, I looked at "fan canon" or fanon within certain communities. In particular, I followed the trope of the "marriage law" fic ([note 2](#)) in Harry Potter communities, specifically those that wrote about a romantic and/or sexual relationship between Severus Snape and Hermione Granger (SS/HG). At some point, the marriage law concept was brand-new—it was an extension of the existing universe of Harry Potter. In fact, it started as a challenge posed by chelleybean on the WIKTT Yahoo Group in 2003. In the time since this initial challenge, it has become extremely popular within SS/HG communities, to the point where many different versions existed.

[7.2] When I first looked at these communities, I focused largely on the resistant elements of fanon. But Ludi's and Kristen's expertise in information literacies provides even more depth. While it is important to investigate each individual story to understand the nuances of marriage law fics within a community, it is also important to identify the ways in which tagging is used across communities in ways that both resist the source-text author's (J. K. Rowling's) intent by having Severus Snape and Hermione Granger engage in a sexual relationship, and yet still reflect dominant ideologies regarding marriage—as necessary to procreation, as well as being limited to a binary understanding of men and women. The tagging in this community also deals with particular ideologies regarding law—as something that is decided by a small minority of those with power and inflicted upon the public, and as something a good citizen cannot escape.

[7.3] As I am beginning to understand, thanks to Ludi and Kristen, an IL perspective helps to better address the ways in which fan fiction practices demonstrate alternative approaches to LIS and literacy—fans are capable of not just naming genres but creating them through their complex social processes of searching, reading, responding/reviewing, and writing. In this way, tags and the ideologies they refract and reflect might be seen as ways in which fans quickly show their identification and disidentification with certain genres, fandoms, characters, and so on, and as one way fans label their expectations for fics, especially when these are not canon-compliant representations of characters, settings, plotlines, and so on. This perspective can have important impacts on education praxis. Within fandom, folksonomies are, ultimately, created by groups of fans themselves (though these are not without their own power dynamics) rather than by a small minority of experts, as tends to be the case in a classroom or library environment. One possibility, then, for more effective education might be to open up meaning-making to include learners in the development of educational resources, from taxonomies to vocabulary to content, which could likely empower learners, as it does fan writers, by providing a more collaborative educational environment.

## 8. Interaction of gender and literacy: Erika—BL fan writing and hierarchical community

[8.1] Considering fan writing practice as a kind of IL, Ludi discussed above that the gendered practice of fans mainly exists in the deconstruction of the source information and the creation of fans' own works. I agree with this statement, based on my case study from the perspective of the East. However, the fan writing in the East is more diverse regarding nonbinary and noncishnormative narratives, especially in BL works. BL, developing from one of the genres of Japanese *shōjo* manga, always features the romance between boys and young men who are lacking masculinity and characterized by the beauty of androgyny. As Galbraith observes, in BL texts, "genitals are blurred, body hair is absent, and penetration is not graphic" (Galbraith 2011, 212). Furthermore, drawing from four months of fieldwork in Taiwan with the BL fans, I have collected some BL *tongrenzhi* about the male characters in *New Member* with a special theme—they give birth to a baby. In such story, sex is often not the focus; instead, the pregnancy process of male characters in the idealized romantic relationships is highlighted. These cases, to some degree, could prove that the gendered fan practice from the Eastern perspective is not always binary and cishnormative.

[8.2] Furthermore, the assumptions of Ludi and Kristen inspire me to examine the Eastern fan practice from the perspective of IL. *Funü* fans not only establish the fan community providing a free space for their own creation, but also tend to form subgroups in it based on different preference of BL couples. That is, the *funü* fan community has become a hierarchical and heterogeneous system. For example, a *funü* group may be fond of the same BL work, but the individual members may prefer different man-man or M/M couples and so might split to form different subgroups. Within these subgroups, the *funü* allies usually center on one or more *tongrenzhi* creators. A-Xu is the leader of one such *funü* subgroup.

[8.3] In order to promote the second production run of *New Member*, A-Xu posted a message for her *funü* readers advertising that if any *funü* bought tickets from her, the buyer would not only get the discount, but receive a BL *tongrenzhi* created by A-Xu for free. A-Xu used her *tongrenzhi* as an incentive to attract her *funü* readers to buy the tickets. As Jenkins (2009, 7) mentions, fan groups involve a relationship similar to the one between masters and apprentices in that some of the most experienced people are willing to deliver the knowledge, information, and skills to the novices, and fans always believe in the value and significance of their own contributions. The *tongrenzhi* creators can be considered as the more experienced people—experience demonstrated by A-Xu in her subgroup by drawing *tongrenzhi* and thus delivering her thinking, preferences, and tastes regarding the BL couples to her own *funü* fans. As a *tongrenzhi* cartoonist, A-Xu not only acquired pleasure from the contribution of being a ticket agent to promote *New Member*, but also earned prestige and respect from her *funü* fans by drawing *tongrenzhi* to deliver the information to other *funü*.

[8.4] Ludi has classified two types of fan texts: affirmational and transformative, and points out that these two types often intertwine to form their own creative works. My case may become another example to prove Ludi's statement. Firstly, in order to attract more outsiders, the *tongrenzhi* texts have the function of affirmational fan texts to aggregate the knowledge of the original text of *New Member* to introduce the whole background story to new audiences. Meanwhile, *tongrenzhi* also has the characteristics of transformative fan texts, because *tongrenzhi* is the second creation of fans, so that to some degree, it conveys personal opinions and understandings. The *tongrenzhi* authors acquire more power not only through creating *tongrenzhi* to introduce *New Member* to nonfans, but also through forming their own subgroups in the fan community. I agree with Brit's opinion that those discourses were ingrained within symbolic and cultural capitals among fans, because when the *tongrenzhi* authors create their works to attract new fans, they begin to possess more knowledge than others, and then have more power and right of speech in the subgroup. Therefore, the fan community is never considered as homogeneous. Instead, the complexity in power/knowledge dynamics and hierarchy within fan communities should be given more attention.

## 9. Fan fiction, teaching, and libraries: Brit—The power of the Mary Sue and fan collaborations

[9.1] I'm especially intrigued by what Kristen has said about creative approaches to assessment. Throughout my work, I've been interested in fan collaborations. Fans do have firm rules about plagiarism (Tushnet 2007; Kelley 2016), but ultimately, they acknowledge the collaborative nature of the making of fan works (including fan writing, fan art, fan videos, etc.). During the workshop, I discussed one intriguing example of how information behaviors, literacies, and collaborative making come together within one wrestling fan fiction subcommunity on Fanfiction.net, WWE Fanfiction World, where collaborative writing and what other communities would refer to as "Mary Sue stories" are used frequently—that is, they celebrate designing characters that are positive reflections of themselves and their desires within the WWE universe.

[9.2] Within fan folklore, the Mary Sue story is a common practice of newbie fan writers, who are depicted as young, naive, less educated, and overly driven by their romantic desires (Bacon-Smith 1992; Penley 1997). However, in reality, the Mary Sue is often very generative for fan writers, because she allows fans to place themselves into both individual stories and larger discourses that they are otherwise excluded from. Liloweewoah and babyxbxgurl's story (2010), "Fallin' for You" ([note 3](#)), is an especially intriguing example of the transformative power of the Mary Sue. It recounts the stories of original characters (OCs)—Kimberly (owned by babyxbxgurl) and Nicole (owned by lilo). Lilo's OC, Nicole, is of particular interest because she shares traits with lilo: she is in her early twenties and Filipina-American. Moreover, Nicole shares traits with Mary Sues from lilo's other stories: they all tend to be clumsy, and to do important work behind the scenes for WWE. While these elements of the Mary Sue might lead to suspicion or even disgust in another fan community, in WWE Fanfiction World, the Mary Sue OC is a common occurrence. The responses to "Fallin' for You" are uniformly positive. Moreover, this story was written with the creator of the subcommunity, suggesting, in conjunction with its popularity, that the community rejects the dominant distaste for the Mary Sue.

[9.3] In WWE Fanfiction World, the Mary Sue is important because she allows people to write their fantasies and to share these fantasies with friends. Furthermore, in this community, the Mary Sue is a tool for collaboration, which allows writers to develop their craft alongside lasting friendships. From an educational perspective, lilo's and babyxbxgurl's use of the Mary Sue, along with the collaborative nature of much of fan writing, reminds us that there are many different ways in which effective learning and knowledge-making happen, and that we would be well-served to revisit our ideas of best practices. What's more, in this case ([note 4](#)), both writers share the identity of Filipina-American, which has been reflected differently through their own experiences growing up in the United States, as well as babyxbxgurl's knowledge of her parents' immigration experience. Through their friendship and writing, they are able to expand the possibilities of the WWE universe, and to address the nuances of Filipina identities within the United States and the larger Philippine diaspora.

## 10. Fan fiction, teaching, and libraries: Kristen—Challenging conceptions of literacy and taste

[10.1] I have used Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of participation and Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) theory of hegemonic masculinities present to functionally identify my biases and limitations as a teacher. Both theories promote reflection and collaboration among researchers, teachers, and participants. Beginning to work in fan study spaces has presented new opportunities to consider the ways literacies intersect and to experiment with different ways to raise students' consciousness about these intersections. Changing the ways we evaluate learning is easier said than done, but adopting more inclusive, ongoing, and peer-based assessment is one way to move forward. First, the creative and collaborative aspects of fan writing practices can help teachers develop more inclusive forms of literacy instruction, as Brit mentioned earlier. Second, the organizational and analytical aspects of fandoms can help teachers develop more inclusive and socially constructed forms of feedback and more appropriate and usable information management.

[10.2] For example, as I began to discuss above, one of my areas of interest explores the way(s) collaborative writing facilitate creative forms of information and digital literacies. Before the workshop, I found it a bit difficult to discuss writing because I do not always teach classes where essays are appropriate forms of assessment—instead, students submit extensible markup language (XML) records. After working with Erika, I started to think more critically about the types of materials I asked students to work with—the books, images, and documents they worked with were often outside their existing scope of knowledge, mostly because I selected Western-centric and English-language materials. With my new awareness about the implicit biases in my selection of materials, I, admittedly, struggled to discuss learning strategies with students. Setting up discussion forums, asking them to select materials they were comfortable with, and encouraging them to submit versions of their records in Mandarin or Japanese did not work. I believe these efforts failed because I did not encourage students to collaborate—either with me, or with their classmates. Now I feel more confident in asking students to first view XML as a kind of writing that takes practice, and I encourage students to collaborate while completing their assessments.

[10.3] It is quite easy to say "include students in learning," but not quite so easy to actually include them. While it is possible to directly ask students about their learning experiences and assess their literacy skills, it takes time to build a rapport that encourages students to first talk to each other and then share their experiences with classroom learning and receiving feedback on their work. I have found that it is effective to ask students to talk about how they do research to learn about the images and books they catalog. Discussions about what search terms they use to Google information, and how they share this information with their classmates, can shed light on what language students are most comfortable reading, and how much information they are comfortable sharing and/or reusing before they feel they are plagiarizing or copying work. This, I think, is a more subtle way to engage students in IL practices—it enables collaborative information-seeking and, what's more, collaborative evaluation and application of information. These last two practices, I think, are key to creating inclusive learning practices that students can transfer from one classroom environment to another. These discussions facilitate connecting complex concepts like gender and culture so that we can reflect on our assumptions about students (or peers) and our roles in participating in learning processes.

[10.4] Together, these two aspects of participation and hegemonic masculinities are ways to develop guidelines and teaching practices that facilitate cocreated content that expresses student learning. With an awareness of how gender, class, and experience interact, we can start to discuss the difficulties we have in balancing our optimism about students with the practicalities of teaching without falling prey to institutional (deeply Anglo-centric) rhetoric. However, the subjects explored through fan fiction are rarely topics we ask students to engage with in assessments—perhaps we might ask them to analyze fan fiction, but not write it, or review it.

## 11. Fan fiction, teaching, and libraries: Ludi—Fan archives and the anticollection

[11.1] As Kristen rightly intimates, one of the most powerful aspects of fandom and fan works is the voice they give to marginalized groups. It is not merely through the practice of writing fan fiction that this is achieved but through the entire body of fan works, of fans' "archontic production" (Derecho 2006). This re-sites the concept of the fan archive as a potential teaching resource created by and for marginalized communities, or as an alternative voice to more mainstream audiences and/or archive users.

[11.2] One of the largest and most celebrated repositories for fan works on the web—Archive of Our Own (AO3)—was set up and is run almost exclusively by women. This is important from a LIS perspective, because it suggests that fannish spaces can challenge patriarchal and hegemonic conceptions of the archive—of the memory institutions that are the bastions of our human culture. Transformational fannish archives, however, favor feminized-centric experiences, queer culture, and what might be termed "folk production"—voices that have rarely been heard in traditional cultural spaces. In fact, Martens (2011) pointed out AO3 as one of the exemplars of what she calls the anticollection—collections that fall outside the remit of normal memory institutions. AO3 is a

significant example of this, not only because it represents minorities, but also because it champions the worldview of its users in the very metadata systems that it uses. Its tag-wrangling system allows authors/creators to self-tag their work, while all tags are standardized on the back end by volunteers (tag wranglers), once the tag becomes popular enough ([https://archiveofourown.org/admin\\_posts/267](https://archiveofourown.org/admin_posts/267)).

[11.3] What is important here is that the original tag is preserved, thus preserving the authenticity of the original post. This is in contrast to standard library subject headings, where metadata is prescribed in a top-down, monolithic approach, that may not serve the user's true needs or worldview. Tag-wrangling, by contrast, standardizes tags (which aids in the discoverability of fan works in the collection), and also preserves the original tag used by the author/creator, thus protecting that creator's voice. This is not without its difficulties—see Bullard (2017)—but in general, AO3 succeeds in maintaining the marginalized voices that compose its anticollection, voices that tend to get swamped in the hegemonic practices of mainstream cultural memory institutions. In this way, the fan archive allows students, and others, to challenge what Kristen has called "institutional (deeply Anglo-Centric) rhetoric."

## 12. Fan practices in increasingly globalized and digitized economies: Erika—Prosumption of fandom

[12.1] As I discuss above, *tongrenzhi* authors become spontaneous independent promoters to attract new fans entering the theater. They are also able to influence the source text through their production and consumption of BL *tongrenzhi*. In general, the original works are isolated from *funü*. Because of the infringement of copyright, their BL fantasies are hardly known by the original producers, at least not publicly. However, in the *New Member* phenomenon, the isolation between the original stage play and the BL *tongrenzhi* has been broken.

[12.2] In December 2014, one month after the first production of *New Member*, the biggest *tongrenzhi* market in Taiwan, CWT38 (Comic World in Taiwan 38), opened. Inspired by the popularity of *New Member*, many *funü* fans planned to sell their own BL *tongrenzhi* about it. The playwright, Jane, was very curious as to what their *funü* audiences thought about their stage play. So the troupe collected all the relevant *tongrenzhi* from CWT38. They were so touched by those fan-made works that they decided to repay their *funü* fans in the second run of performances. As thanks to their *funü* fans, Jane wrote the fans' fantasies—their *tongrenzhi* stories—into reality. In the 2015 performance run, these *tongrenzhi* stories became the daily bonus scenes attached to each day's performance. The bonus scenes involved happy endings for four couples. Each was based on a story created by *funü* fans in their amateur works. Among the nine performances in 2015, each bonus was put on the stage twice, and on the last day, the troupe designed a "thank you" program to express their sincere appreciation by reading a list of all *funü* fans' names. It was very meaningful for *funü*—as many of them told me in their interviews—because it meant that the name of every *funü* fan was written in the official script. A-Xu said that when she heard her name spoken by her favorite actor, she immediately started crying. "It is really unbelievable that my dearest idol knows my name and says 'thank you' to me!" A-Xu said.

[12.3] Although I have explained that the traditional production and consumption boundaries have been disrupted and *funü* became prosumers, I disagree that fans have full initiative to be prosumers; they are still appropriated by producers. In the case of *New Member*, fans participate in cultural production, distribution, and consumption as prosumers, but such processes were designed more or less by the troupe from the beginning. The troupe, as producers, created and promoted *New Member* through *funü*'s familiar ways, like posting advertisements on Plurk and in comic stores, and encouraging *funü* to expand the popularity of *New Member* in the *funü* fan community by creating and selling *tongrenzhi*. On the one hand, fans become free promoters to advertise the cultural products (the stage play) without any material reward from the producers; on the other hand, fans are perceived as enthusiastic consumers to buy the products of their favorite stage play. For fans, such appropriation seems to be covered up by their willingness and enthusiasm. They are glad to spontaneously promote their beloved cultural products, and they feel honored that their creations have received an official response. More interestingly, for the *tongrenzhi* authors, they are not merely appropriated by the producers, but also take advantage of the troupe's encouragement to become producers in their subgroups to establish their own

prestige and power. The interaction between such producers and fans is quite complicated—they both need each other and use each other.

### 13. Fan practices in increasingly globalized and digitized economies: Ludi—Men and women making money from fan fiction

[13.1] It's interesting that Erika brings up prosumption, since part of my doctoral research touched on patterns of money-making and entrepreneurship in fandom, although firmly from a Western viewpoint. In Western-based fan communities, it is quite normal to see requests for donations or Patreon contributions for fan projects such as podcasts, YouTube channels, and dedicated websites (spaces where the proportion of male fans is much higher, I would contend, than in transformational spaces), understandably to defray the costs of production, bandwidth usage, and so on. Such practices are rarely associated with what might be considered the most transformational of fan works—fan fiction. Jones (2014) discusses the outcry from *Twilight* fans that followed the publishing in 2011 of *Fifty Shades of Grey*, with one cited fan describing it as a "poorly written and poorly edited soap opera that was 'published' to line James's and TWCS's [The Writer's Coffee Shop] pockets" (§ 1.5). Fan culture, Jones further argues here, exists in a gift economy. To make money from transformational works is to subvert the gift economy, but it also means that women are likely to be disproportionately denied payment for the fruits of their labor (whether they desire it or not), precisely because they are the main producers of transformative works. This, of course, leads to debates on whether capitalist paradigms have any place in fandom at all, but that is outside the scope of this article.

[13.2] Erika's work is important, because it highlights the ways in which Far Eastern fandoms differ from Western fandoms in the realm of fan economies. Certainly, in the West, it is not the norm for fan fiction writers to profit from their work. In countries such as China and Japan, it is acceptable to make money from fan works that would usually risk a cease-and-desist action from a producer or media company, and for women to gain remuneration for their fan fiction and/or art. *Tongrenzhi* is a case in point; but this also extends to fan fiction. In China, there are sites such as Starting Point Woman's Net (*Qidian nüsheng wang*), a place where female writers are given the opportunity to earn money via a pay-per-word model, or accept monetary gifts from readers—and fan fiction is also posted on this site (Feng 2013, 26–27; Xiong 2015). This suggests that in the Far East at least, attitudes to profiting economically from transformative works are vastly different to those in the West. How this translates to cultural and social differences—if at all—is deserving of more investigation.

### 14. Fan practices in increasingly globalized and digitized economies: Brit—Emotion economies

[14.1] I was really interested in the very different forms of exchange that Erika and Ludi discussed. Hills (2002) has already warned us not to see fandom as completely separate from the larger capitalist economy in which we live. However, when we look at the practices of *tongrenzhi* and *funü*, even Hills' (2002) discussion of the split fan is inadequate to address fan practices beyond the Global North (even considering the increasing use of Patreon that Ludi discussed). If we consider my earlier examples of Lady Hallen's work with Fem!Harry and liloweewoah's and babyxbxgurl's work with WWE and the Mary Sue, we begin to see a complex situation as fandom, particularly fan fiction, is practiced almost solely in online spaces with a near-global reach. First, we find fan writers who are based in the Philippines or the United States with Filipino cultural and linguistic backgrounds being shepherded into fan fiction practices on sites such as Fanfiction.net and AO3, which maintain the baggage both of the Western literary fanzines of the 1970s to the 1990s, and of the US and UK paranoia regarding copyright. These writers are in a literal contact zone (Pratt 1991) of political-economic and cultural differences when it comes to gender, good writing, and ownership. I have learned from engagement with Erika's work that these examples are not just interesting for how fans write in/about these fandoms, but even more so for what they represent in terms of the complexities of transcultural and international fan

practices. Ultimately, Erika's work raises two really important questions: (1) How can we provide a more complex picture of fannishness worldwide? (2) How can we account for the fan prosumer within the ever-increasing reality that now we are all, to some degree, prosumers, whether we actively choose to be or not (Fuchs 2017)?

## 15. Conclusion

[15.1] Interdisciplinarity requires communication, and communication requires having something to talk about. Our work to date has given us plenty to talk about, and we are still investing in projects that allow us to pool our research areas and expertise. Over the past year, our collaborations have evolved from sharing ideas to developing a shared research agenda. Beginning with a workshop designed to promote open discussion has enabled ongoing conversations that identify and explore many points of crossover—the overlapping layers that our respective disciplines share. In the course of doing this work together, we have begun to identify some areas for future research in the field of fan studies, as follows.

[15.2] Fan practices, taken from a wide view, should be studied in more depth in relation to what they might teach us regarding curriculum, classroom practices, and certainly assessment, because they are potential sites through which students can enter into a dialogue with the typical paradigms of educational institutions and libraries.

[15.3] Better understanding of gender and fan practices requires studying the parallels and divergences in fan practices other than those in the West, and Far Eastern fan cultures is one useful place to start. There are interesting parallels, and significant divergences, between feminized fan practices in Western and Far Eastern fan cultures.

[15.4] Moving fan studies forward will mean interdisciplinary and transcultural research teams. Importantly, these teams cannot be too big, like the World Lord of the Rings and World Game of Thrones projects. When a team becomes too big, it becomes impossible to develop effective and meaningful research outputs for the field and for fans in any format. Instead, effective fan studies teams can consciously bring together members from different fields, and ask them to focus on how their different training and research interests can and do overlap. Ideally, they would include researchers who have a range of languages beyond English. Additionally, fan studies has a long history of excellent qualitative research, but it could benefit from quantitative analysis, as Benjamin Woo (2018) has pointed out. Therefore, effective fan studies teams would include experienced quantitative researchers in media studies, digital humanities, and even digital sociology.

[15.5] Through our own ongoing dialogue, we have become even more dedicated to exploring how fan cultures and fan practices challenge systems of power. Working in an interdisciplinary dialogue enables us to discuss and practice different methodologies (like textual analysis and ethnography), which provides important inspiration for future research and teaching. This conversation is just the beginning, but we hope it serves as inspiration not only for us, but for the field as a whole.

## 16. Notes

1. By using the term "queer-phobic" here, I include the nuances that exist within the QUILTBAG+ community (queer/questioning, undecided, intersex, lesbian, trans\*, bisexual/pansexual, asexual, gay, and genderqueer, plus any other identities not otherwise represented here). I intend it as an inclusive label.

2. Within this trope, two characters are forced into a marriage by legislation. It has often been used in Harry Potter fandom as a way to forge a relationship between Hermione Granger and Severus Snape. For more information, see the Fanlore discussion of the development of this trope here: [https://fanlore.org/wiki/Marriage\\_Law\\_Challenge](https://fanlore.org/wiki/Marriage_Law_Challenge).

3. It is important to note that I have received both liloweewoah's and babyxbxgurl's permission to share the direct link to this story in all of my future publications.



4. In babyxbxgurl's case, both of her parents immigrated from the Philippines.

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