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# Throne of Fans: Examining the Roles of Feminism, Platform and Community in an Online Fandom

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**THRONE OF FANS: EXAMINING THE ROLES OF FEMINISM, PLATFORM  
AND COMMUNITY IN AN ONLINE FANDOM**

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A Thesis

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the Faculty of Arts and Humanities

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In Partial Fulfillment

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Master of Arts

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by

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Title: **THRONE OF FANS: EXAMINING THE ROLES OF FEMINISM, PLATFORM AND COMMUNITY IN AN ONLINE FANDOM**

Advisor: Dr. Erika Polson

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis involves examining the influence of feminism, platform and community on the fandom of Sarah J Maas (SJM) novels on the social network site Tumblr. The goals are to show how a shift to an open social network site has changed the practice of fandom and how various feminisms are applied to popular culture and learned through Tumblr. An ethnographic study and textual analysis on SJM fandom posts and interactions on Tumblr were utilized in order to reach these goals. The observations and analysis examines the data in three categories: the established characteristics of fandom on Tumblr, the characteristics of Tumblr, and the characteristics of the SJM fandom on Tumblr. The analysis suggests Tumblr fandom culture, of which popular feminism is a vital aspect, dictates how fans behave and interact. The fandom struggles to fill the gap created by a lack of clear authority figures, which leads to fans asserting their own authority through policing behaviors, shame and the validating of identity. Both the architectural structure of and the social roles on Tumblr lessen the boundaries of the fandom community, change interactions and build tension in fandom because it forces it to be public to endless potential audiences. The platform is as influential to the fans as the novels of Sarah J Maas are; the fandom is linked to the platform.

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## INTRODUCTION

The internet and modern media have altered the way communities, including fan communities, interact online. Social network sites are open to anyone who creates an account and change the way people within the same community can interact with each other. Fan communities, or fandoms, are made up of people who share an interest in the same cultural object and are defined by how the members engage with both the text and each other. This thesis is concerned with the Tumblr based fandom surrounding the novels of Sarah J. Maas (SJM), a young adult fantasy writer who writes fiction intended to be female focused and feature strong female leads. The SJM fandom uses various feminisms as a way to critically engage with the text, as well as to discuss current events and work through personal struggles. This fandom plays a role in how fans of any age might learn about different feminisms, themselves, critical thinking and social relationships.

This research adds to fan studies because it is examining a primarily female, fantasy book-based fandom, which differs from other studies on science fiction and television fandoms.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, while most fan studies research is based on fan specific email lists, websites and forums, more contemporary fandoms are not based on fan specific sites, but rather utilize social platforms including Tumblr, Twitter, Reddit and Facebook. Because social media platforms are not closed, fan-only sites, they affect how

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<sup>1</sup> Bacon-Smith, 1991; Jenkins: 2013; Bury: 2005; Kirby-Diaz: 2009

people engage with fandom and each other, as well as how fans build their identities both within and outside of the fandom. The structure of the sites, as well as the social roles that are built on them, influence the users. Although pre-internet and early internet fandoms engaged in fandom activities in similar ways, more research is needed to better understand the interactions between the affordances of social media sites and those who use them.

In this research, the concepts of community, platform and feminism all influence and shape each other, making an impact on the fans' experiences and the Tumblr fandom community itself. This thesis asks the following research questions: What role does feminist thinking play for the fans of Sarah J Maas novels on Tumblr? How does the inclusion of the term 'feminism' in popular culture and in online platforms influence those who encounter it? How does the platform of Tumblr itself influence the creation of and interactions within the fandom? Finally, what can be learned from the shift of fan communities from closed to open sites?

These questions are investigated through ethnographic observations of the SJM fans on Tumblr and a textual analysis of their interactions. How fandom characteristics are being adapted to a new platform, the influence of Tumblr on the SJM fandom and the fans engage with feminism are themes that the questions explore.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Sarah J Mass Novels and Fans**

Sarah J. Maas (SJM) is a young adult fantasy writer. Her two series, *Throne of Glass* and *A Court of Thorns and Roses* have both been released to favorable reviews. Maas describes her novels as fantasy adventures stories for girls and mentions the importance of having female leads and diverse characters on her website.<sup>2</sup> *Throne of Glass* is a seven novel series that follows hired assassin and political prisoner Aelin Ashryver-Galathynius (alias Celena Sardoithan) as she challenges the kingdom that stole her country and comes to terms with her past. She is considered a brash, sexual and vain character that challenges the idea of what a typical heroine should be, based on Maas' own description.<sup>3</sup> The characters in the series deal with complex systemic issues such as genocide, colonialism, enslavement, racism and ableism, as well as more personal struggles such as mental health and grief.

*A Court of Thorns and Roses*, Maas's second series, is a trilogy that follows Fyre Acheron as she travels into the Fae controlled lands of Prythiaian and is subjected to trials for her life, as well as war and prejudice. The storylines of this series include themes of grief, post-traumatic stress, and recovery from physical and sexual abuse.

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<sup>2</sup> Maas, 2018

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*



Fans of SJM novels write detailed fan fictions, engage in debates of the plot points, create artwork, and often discuss and offer advice to each other on personal problems outside of the fandom. Furthermore, they often engage with the texts with a feminist lens, critiquing Maas and the novels where they fall short of intersectionalism by not allowing for diversity in race, gender, ability, and sexuality. These fans are not the stereotypical mindless fanatics that wordlessly accept the text of the novels. These fans actively engage with and challenge the text as critical readers, educating themselves and fellow fans at the same time.

The Tumblr SJM fans have developed an extensive vocabulary to express how they engage in the fandom, I have curated the following definitions from my observations of the SJM fans on Tumblr. As is true on numerous other sites and within the fan community generally, some fan activities are based around the idea of ‘ships.’ Short for relationship, a ship is used to refer to a pairing of characters that the fan believes are a ‘one true pairing’ (OTP), or soul mates who are destined to be together. Ships can be ‘canon,’ based on textual evidence in the novel, or ‘headcannon,’ coming from the mind of the fan. ‘Fancasting,’ is when fans choose various real-life models or actors to play the novel characters in the movies. ‘Fanart,’ is fan-created renditions of scenes from the books or scenes from their own imagination that feature the characters. ‘One shot fictions’ are fictional situations applied to characters that are typically under five hundred words, or are presented in a list format rather than prose. ‘Fan fictions,’ are long stories that use the characters or world of the novels but change or expand on the plot and events. ‘Meta posts,’ or ‘metas,’ are the terms fans use when they create a longform post examining a specific section of the novel, either reading it for certain themes such as feminism, or

when they propose a theory for the future novels based on passages from the books. These often start debates within the fandom where other fans add their own critiques or support for the meta. Finally, there is also a community of anti-SJM fans on Tumblr who occasionally engage and interact with the fans; they are people who have read the books but disagree with them or ‘hate read,’ them, looking for issues and problematic aspects to call out. While the antis are not a primary concern of this thesis, the way the open site of Tumblr allows them to interact and engage with the fans suggests an interesting difference between fandom as it occurs on open or closed sites, as will be discussed.

Beyond engaging with the text, an important part of any fandom, including SJM, fandom is how fans engage with each other. Within the SJM fandom, There are several members who are considered leaders due to their in-depth knowledge of the novels, detailed critiques, metas, and popular fan fiction. These fans are often tagged in posts to help settle debates or answer questions. Beyond the world of SJM, they are also often asked highly personal questions from other fans seeking advice on relationships, sex, health issues, or other struggles. The community they have built on Tumblr is more than a forum for fans to post theories; rather it has become a community whose members rely on each other. Throughout their conversations both about the texts and more personal topics, the fans weave feminist thinking into their posts, including casual mentions of feminism and formal discussions quoting well-known feminist theorists. However, the undefined group boundaries of the community mean that people can enter or exit the community at will and may not consider themselves a member of the community.

There are many different feminisms in the world and fans do not all prescribe to a single definition<sup>i</sup>. Rather than examining the specificities of each feminism they use, I am

more concerned with mere presence and inclusion of the word/concept of ‘feminism’ in their posts. As I was growing up on the internet, ‘feminism’ as a term was rarely seen, unless it was a negative connotation, and in my experience was not connected to popular culture. Since using Tumblr and other social networking sites as an adult, I have seen feminism discussed more freely; the word is used both to market and to critique popular culture, and is something celebrities now frequently claim as part of their identities. As many people, including many young girls, use the internet as a source of education, it is interesting to consider the implications of how feminism is used on Tumblr and applied to popular culture. Because the fans prescribe to different feminisms, I will refer to the inclusion of feminism on Tumblr as popular feminism.

In addition to being the site where I personally learned about feminism, Tumblr is also where I first encountered SJM fans. Because of Tumblr’s structure I was introduced to the SJM fandom long before I read the books, and my understanding of the novels was impacted by what I had observed on Tumblr.

## **Tumblr**

Tumblr describes itself as “392 million different blogs, filled with literally whatever” on its “About” page.<sup>4</sup> The microblogging site was founded in 2007 by David Karp and purchased by Yahoo! in 2013. It is the 16<sup>th</sup> most popular website, 5<sup>th</sup> most prevalent social site, and 2<sup>nd</sup> most dominant blogging platform as of 2014.<sup>5</sup> Tumblr

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<sup>4</sup> Tumblr, 2018

<sup>5</sup> Chang, et al.,

differs from other sites in that it allows for more interaction than traditional blogging websites such as Wordpress, but has the ability for increased multimedia and rich content than sites such as Facebook and Twitter.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, it is non-reciprocal, meaning that it does not require users to mutually follow each other. This allows for more of a public broadcast style of publication rather than direct messages or comments. It also differs from traditional blogging sites with its ‘reblog’ feature, which allows for information to be propagated through Tumblr.<sup>7</sup>

The Tumblr community is more connected and intertwined than that of traditional blogging sites, without the content limits of Facebook and Twitter. The use of Tumblr for fandoms presents a shift from the days of email lists, forums and fan-specific websites. As Hillman, et al point out, “the concept of belonging to a fandom in Tumblr is fuzzy, unlike Facebook, you do not get accepted to a group.”<sup>8</sup> This is not a fan only space and not everyone joins looking for fandom; some fans find their fandom after years of being on the site, with their dashboards a mix of fandom and other blogs. Tumblr appears to work for fandoms because it is flexible; it allows for linking to other sites (including the fan fiction archive site An Archive of Our Own [AO3]), tagging of specific words or phrases for easy tracking, embedding various multimedia, and the ability to create short form or long form blog posts. There is no way to create set groups within Tumblr, changing the way people interact together or form bonds.

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<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*

<sup>8</sup> Hillman et al., 2014: 287

Tumblr users utilize the dashboard feature to see in one place what all of the blogs they are following post. On the dashboard they can reblog, reblog with comments, or like a post; these actions each add to the ‘notes,’ of a post. The count of notes is kept on the bottom left corner of a post and is a way to see how widespread a post is across Tumblr. When they reblog a post it is then shared on the dashboards of people who follow them. It is also possible to visit blog pages and see all of that blogger’s post in one location. Additionally, there is a private messaging function that can be used to send texts or posts between users that mutually follow each other. Tumblr has an “ask” feature, which sets it apart from other social network sites, where users can pose a question or send a comment to a blog either publicly or anonymously. If the user the question was directed at chooses to answer, both the question and the response appear as a blog post that can be reblogged, liked, or commented on by other users. This feature does not require that the users follow each other. The structure of Tumblr is open and public; there is no way to limit who can see a post, meaning that every post has the ability to expand beyond the scope of its creator.

Previous studies of online are based on online fandoms that use fan specific websites, forum or email lists.<sup>9</sup> These sites and closed lists are bound, maybe not in the geographical sense of pre-internet fandom, but in a way that keeps fandom members separate from other internet users, and keeps them from engaging in multiple fandoms in one space. Furthermore, they were politicized similar to pre-internet fandoms as they required someone to lead and run the sites or maintain the email list. A growing number of studies look at fandom as it traverse across different sites, and I hope to add to this

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<sup>9</sup> Jenkins 2006 & 2013; Bury 2005; Kirby-Diaz 2009

scholarship. Tumblr, as a non-fan specific platform, provides new insight into how fans are adapting the web for their needs, and how the openness and lack of a central authority or clearly defined group influences fandoms. Through ethnographic observations and textual analysis I explore how the shift to an open site and the prevalence of feminism for the SJM fan community influences the fandom.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The following is an overview of existing literature that is relevant to this research. These studies provide the foundation of knowledge for this thesis to build upon. The literature has been broken down into four categories: fan studies, community, feminism, and new media and platform.

### **Fan Studies**

Fan comes from the word “fanatic,” with roots in the Latin “fanaticus,” meaning “a devotee.”<sup>10</sup> Fan was first used to describe supporters of different sports teams but the term took on connotations of lunacy and zealotry once it was used to describe ‘Matinee Girls,’ or women who attended the theatre to see the male actors rather than to enjoy the play.<sup>11</sup> Male sports fans are seen as masculine, and male comic or science fiction fans can be seen as critical experts of their fandom, but “the feminine side of fandom is manifested in the images of screaming teenage girls,” who are unable to critically examine the cultural object because they are so overwhelmed by the desire to be intimate with it.<sup>12</sup> Nancy Baym discusses how fans of what is determined as low-taste, or

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<sup>10</sup> Jenkins, 2013: 12

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Jenkins, 2013: 15

cultural objects that are driven by emotions, including women's fiction, have been stigmatized and derided throughout history, again alluding to the gendered nature of the term fan and how it impacts how female cultural objects are viewed.<sup>13</sup> The term "fan" has been gendered and made to describe girls and women who are unable to critically enjoy a cultural object due to their preoccupation of men and men's bodies. Because the novels by Maas have been marketed for women and feature dramatic love stories with attractive males, they are stigmatized as low-taste.

Both male and female fans of popular culture face negative stereotypes fueled by reports of psychotic and dangerous fans, including the murderous fans Charles Manson and Dwight Chapman.<sup>14</sup> Part of these negative stereotypes is due to the association that having emotional connection and loyalty to a culture object demonstrates that it is of low-taste.<sup>15</sup> However, Jenkins points out that while male science fiction fans are described as dedicated with knowing the ins and outs of their cultural object, female fans are often described as lonely, unmarried or divorced women.<sup>16</sup>

Because of these negative mainstream ideas of fans and fandom, fans may feel culturally isolated from their non-fan peers, building these communities so they can build a group identity, despite the fact that they are mocked by mainstream culture.<sup>17</sup> Jenkins

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<sup>13</sup> Baym, *Tune In, Log On*, 2000:37-38

<sup>14</sup> Jenkins, 2013: 13

<sup>15</sup> Baym, 2000: 41

<sup>16</sup> Jenkins, 2013: 13

<sup>17</sup> Jenkins, 2013: 22



notes that as these fans create a collective identity, many people new to fandom are excited to discover that they are not alone in their enjoyment of their object of fandom.<sup>18</sup> This echoes Camille Bacon-Smith's discussion of the importance of the social and community aspect of fandom in her 1991 ethnographic study of female *Star Trek* fans in *Enterprising Women*. As fandoms have shifted to open sites they are no longer a private retreat for people to escape mainstream stereotypes. This thesis analyzes how fandoms have been impacted by their move to a public and open site that removes the boundaries of the community.

Fandom requires more than just a few dedicated people liking the cultural object. Formative to modern fans studies is the idea that fans manipulate meaning. Fans take popular texts and read them in ways that serves their own interests, and those of their fan community. Rather than the readings being individual, fans turn them into a group participatory act, creating a new culture of popular culture consumption.<sup>19</sup> Central to cultural and participatory culture is the idea that popular culture texts are open and polysemic, or able to have different meanings interpreted from them.<sup>20</sup> Stuart Hall's encoding and decoding model of reading media texts with its inclusion of the dominant, negotiated, and oppositional readings by audiences is often applied to how fans interpret different meanings from cultural texts.<sup>21</sup> Jenkins positions himself against Hall's idea of

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<sup>18</sup> Jenkins, 2013: 23

<sup>19</sup> Jenkins, 2013: 23

<sup>20</sup> Sandvoss, 2005: 124

<sup>21</sup> *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse*, 1975

oppositional reading, which he describes as something that has been considered a rule for fans, and that forces fandom into a place of resistance.<sup>22</sup>

Jenkins argues for using Michel de Certeau's more fluid "poaching model," where readers only take away the things they find useful or pleasurable. This analogy also brings in the tension between the author and readers as they struggle for control over the meaning of the text.<sup>23</sup> He argues Hall's model does not fit into participatory culture because it is too rigid, which suggests that popular culture texts are classifiable, does not account for the multiplicity and contradictory readings of media texts, and implies a more stable reading position.<sup>24</sup>

However, Jenkins's position does not include a discussion about how fans rework the entire text to fulfill their needs. By focusing on fans that only poach positive aspects of the text, or things they agree with, this argument ignores fans who love a text in its entirety despite its flaws, and in writing fan fiction or participating in fandom reinvent problematic aspects of the text to suit their needs. The inclusion and focus on less positive aspects of the cultural object are extremely important to the SJM fandom. Because of this, I position myself somewhere outside of Jenkins's poaching model, but also separate from the focus on oppositional readings. While Jenkins's work has been seminal in fan studies, his research looks at specific fan websites and email lists of primarily *Star Trek* fans; there is a need for more contemporary studies to offer new

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<sup>22</sup> 2013: 23-24

<sup>23</sup> Jenkins, 2013: 24

<sup>24</sup> Jenkins, 2013: 33

insights on fans based on social network sites. I hope to add to the growing body of research that examines social network sites and their influence on fandoms by examining a specific fandom, SJM, on Tumblr.

While many fan studies scholars stress the community and interaction aspects of why people engage in fandom, Sandvoss examines why individuals engage in fan activities, and how being in a fandom affects their conceptualization of their identity. In his analysis fans are looked at “as performers rather than recipients of mediated texts.”<sup>25</sup> He bases this on Goffman’s theory of self-performance, which asserts that all people are constantly performing their self rather than authentically living it. Because Sandvoss sees fandom as a performance of the self, he feels that the community and interaction aspect are not as important. Rather, fans are searching for the reflection of their performed selves in their object of fandom.<sup>26</sup> Because fans perceive part of themselves in the external object of their fandom, they therefore perform the act of fandom for themselves, either consciously or unconsciously.<sup>27</sup>

Misailidou’s study of Tumblr fans reiterates this, the data showing that fans’ identities are expressed through fan practices.<sup>28</sup> It is important to recognize the intertwining of the fan’s identity, both individually and as part of the fandom, and how they interpret and manage these various ideas of self. Both the creation of meaning and

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<sup>25</sup> Sandvoss, 2005: 48

<sup>26</sup> Sandvoss, 2005: 46

<sup>27</sup> 2005: 97-99

<sup>28</sup> “Social Media Communities,” 2017

self-reflection are typically thought of as individual or small group acts. This thesis analyzes how the move to an open site influences the individual act of self-reflection and meaning manipulation.

Creating their own meaning is a defining feature of fandom, but so is the way fans discuss and build meaning together. Meaning can be created by people individually engaging with texts and is not limited to fandom. But for fans, the community they share it with compounds the enjoyment and importance of creating meaning. People can be fans on their own, but for more engaged fans, the defining feature of being a part of a fandom is the group participation aspect. Fans do not only feel joy in reading or watching their cultural objects, rather their true enjoyment comes from the activeness of engaging with the medium or genre, as well as other fans.<sup>29</sup> Fans are not mindless or merely obsessed with their object of fandom because they can be critical readers, examining multiple meanings and critically engaging with the text with other members of the fandom. Fandom and participatory culture does not just refer to being an active reader, but also being part of shared practices and culture.<sup>30</sup>

The social interactions, as well as a dedication to rereading fan texts, are what separate a casual viewer from a fan. The act of rereading the cultural object allows for the fan to gain more control over the narrative and to more fully connect with the text, as well as apply interpretations or thoughts from other fans to their own reading,

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<sup>29</sup> Bacon-Smith, 1991: 27-28

<sup>30</sup> Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers*, 2006: 10

consciously or not.<sup>31</sup> Being a fan is a social role and fans become fans because of what they discover in rereads of the text and in engagement with other fans, rather than through a pure love of the cultural object itself.<sup>32</sup> I analyze how fans have changed the way they interact with one another because of the less defined way communities are bounded on Tumblr.

Fans engage with their object of fandom through various ways, and while the introduction of the internet has shifted some of these activities, there are still consistencies from the pre-internet days. Fan activities continue to be important to fans in the digital age, just now mediated through the internet. Live-action role-playing, now referred to as cosplay, is often carried out in private at a fan's home, but fully documented online through video and photo uploads in addition to still being a constant at conventions. Fans still discuss and exchange copies of books, but use online platforms rather than relying solely on letters or in person. And while letter- and fanzines are becoming increasingly obsolete, the creation and distribution of fan fiction and art is still a cornerstone to fan communities. But rather than being mailed or emailed, the authors post it, spread it through the internet, and eternalize it in digital archives.<sup>33</sup> While fans still engage with the texts in the digital age, this thesis addresses the lack of research on how the shift to open sites has influenced the way fans engage with other fans and the community as a whole.

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<sup>31</sup> Jenkins, 2013: 54

<sup>32</sup> Duffett, 2005: 48 & 279

<sup>33</sup> Bacon-Smith, 1991:28

The community is built through the corpus of fan fiction writings that use the shared language of the fandom, both long and short, adding to and manipulating the world of the cultural object.<sup>34</sup> Fan fiction writing has been and continues to be a primarily female activity.<sup>35</sup> Gaining control of the narrative and creating their own meaning allows for people whose identities are not represented in the text to place themselves in the story. They can bend the race, gender or sexuality of characters to include more personal representation. This allows for people of marginalized or non-mainstream communities to re-create meaning and storylines that fit their needs, including people of color, the LGBTQIA+ community, people living with disabilities and women.

Many fan studies examine female fans, but they primarily focus on “slash” fan fiction writing.<sup>36</sup> Slash, which refers to the slash between character names, is fan fiction that features romantic and sexual relationships between two male characters, specifically written by women.<sup>37</sup>

Slash is written by and for women as a form of sexual representation and challenging repressive forms of sexual identity.<sup>38</sup> While it is a subject that people outside of fan studies often laugh at, it is a form of critique and offers a challenge to the original text. The imaginative and new storylines that appear in fan fiction and slash are used by

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<sup>34</sup> Bacon- Smith, 1991: 68

<sup>35</sup> Hellekson and Busse, *Fan Fiction Studies Reader*, 2014:75

<sup>36</sup> Hellekson & Busse, 2014:76

<sup>37</sup> Jenkins, 2013: 186

<sup>38</sup> Jenkins, 2013: 190

fans to correct perceived errors created by linear storylines in the text. Inherent to fan fiction, including slash, is the importance of seeing events from more than one point of view, and giving every character in a scene their own voice and interpretations of the events.<sup>39</sup> The women in fandoms often use fan fiction to place themselves and their experiences at the front and center of storylines, rather than only accepting the commercially produced versions that do not allow for as many nuances or character exploration.<sup>40</sup>

Misailidou expands this, saying that because fans are unsatisfied with how the main texts do not represent diverse aspects, “fan fiction is a way of negotiating everything that does not fit well.”<sup>41</sup> Slash in fan fiction has allowed for straight women to communicate with women of other sexual orientations, as well as provided a place where sexuality, constructions of gender, and patriarchal expectations can be challenged and explored.<sup>42</sup> Fan fiction writing, specifically slash writing, is a unique, communal ritual and practice that is specifically used by female only fandoms. This ritual within the SJM fandom specifically has been influenced by the shift to Tumblr, as this thesis discusses.

For this thesis, I did not read fan fictions for content, but examined how they are published, spread to fans, archived and tagged. While I did not look at slash specifically, the inclusion of this term in the tags or themes of the fan fiction is an important data point.

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<sup>39</sup> Bacon-Smith, 1992: 76

<sup>40</sup> Jenkins, 2013: 39

<sup>41</sup> “Social Media Communities,” 2017

<sup>42</sup> Jenkins, 2013: 220

Slash fan fiction writing is an important part of the history and growth of female fandoms because it allowed for a space to challenge heteronormative ideals. However, it is limited as both a term and a point of study, as it implies only male characters can be written about in a homoerotic manner, and despite its prevalence in the early internet age of fandom, it is not prominent on Tumblr. Fan fiction and slash have been ways that fans challenge hegemonic ideals and norms. Open sites may impact how fans can challenge these norms outside of fiction writing. Previous studies that focus on fans challenging heteronormative ideas only in fan fiction have created a space to explore ways beyond fiction fans challenge these ideas. Furthermore, most slash studies analyze the relationship between the individual slash author and their text, whereas I am more interested in the relationship of fan fiction to the platform and the community as a whole.<sup>43</sup>

While the internet allowed for more women to experiment with reading and writing slash, cyber-theorists predicted that female specific fandoms would not be necessary in the digital age.<sup>44</sup> With the onset of internet it was thought that cyberspaces that were defined by race, ethnicity, gender or ability would cease because computers and the expectation of anonymity on the internet would make physical differences obsolete. This democratic and optimistic view of the internet did not pan out; women and people of color still face hostility and denigration on white, male dominated forums.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Bury, 2006; Jenkins, 2013

<sup>44</sup> Bury, 2005: 3

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*



The onset of the internet into fandom changed several things, including allowing for female fans to create their own communities where female fans could contribute without having to face the ego and self-appointed power of long-time male fans.<sup>46</sup> Male fans, looking to exclude their female counterparts, no longer controlled the gates of fandom, particularly in the world of science fiction and fantasy fans. Although the internet did not lessen the importance of physical differences, it has allowed for specific groups to flourish without the constraints of physical locations and has changed the way information and communities are gated. As mentioned previously, the idea of being a part of a fandom no longer requires formal membership; fans do not have to be granted access, and they decide when they are in a fan community. This shift in the way fan communities are guarded and the new types of gatekeepers are something that this thesis addresses.

The internet allowed for the reordering of other structures of power within the fandom world. Prior to the internet, fan fiction writers or artists had to submit their pieces to a fanzine editor in order to be published. These fictions were created for other readers with insider knowledge and were not intended for wider audiences, as people could only receive their copy through the mail.<sup>47</sup> In the early days of the internet, the process of fan fiction publication was similar; fan fiction was distributed via email list or published on bounded fan sites, both of which had gatekeepers that decided on what was published and who was in the community.<sup>48</sup> In the current age of fandoms on social networking sites

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<sup>46</sup> Jenkins, 2013: 48

<sup>47</sup> Bacon-Smith, 1991: 56-59

<sup>48</sup> “I’ve Got a Little List,” Rambo, in *Buffy And Angel Conquer The Internet*, 2009: 13

and the existence of archives such as AO3, there are no longer the same specific gatekeepers to publishing fan fiction. Authors do not have to submit their work through an editor, nor do they have to request to join a mailing list. Rather authors upload their pieces with an abundance of tags and hope that other fans disseminate them through reblogs or word of mouth. This constitutes a large shift in the hierarchy and structure of fandoms brought about by platform change and is a place for more in-depth research. Adrienne Massanari discusses in her book *Participatory Culture, Community and Play: Learning from Reddit*, how social based sites reduced journalists and experts as gatekeepers of information on the internet. However, these roles are shifting in response to new sites and new types of gatekeepers are appearing.<sup>49</sup> This shift to self-publication has both positive and negative implications, and this thesis analyzes the way fan fiction writers in the SJM community publish and share their writing without a central editor.

A 2013 article co-authored by Rhiannon Bury, Ruth Deller, Adam Greenwood and Bethan Jones asked each of these fan studies scholars questions about social media and fandom in an attempt to start conversations around how social media is impacting shifts in fan communities.<sup>50</sup> The contributors answered questions about how older fans are or are not adapting to social media and how social media is changing producer/fan relationships. Their responses suggest that there is a need for research to examine the shifts allowed through social networking. Some of the gaps they discussed include the ability of fans that lurk but do not get directly involved and the overestimation in the

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<sup>49</sup> 2015: 8-10

<sup>50</sup> Bury et al, "From Usenet to Tumblr: the changing role of social media

number of fans who engage in fandom on social media.<sup>51</sup> While this article does not offer research or studies on the shifts social networks have brought to fandoms, it does show that there is a large gap in this area of fan studies. This thesis begins filling this gap through research on how Tumblr as an open social networking site, with an endless potential for lurkers, influences fandom.

The internet does allow for wider audiences for fandom objects, but the fandom community's norms for engagement and behavior are dependent and shaped by the platform and access that are available to them.<sup>52</sup> Societal impacts of digital and new media, as well as effects on how people connect and build communities, will be discussed in more detail at a later point in the literature review.

## **Community**

Fandoms are often described as communities, but this word has various meanings that differ across disciplines. In her examination of the fandom for *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Kirby-Diaz starts with a discussion of what communities are and how virtual communities relate to historical ideas. One of the first sociologists mentioned was also one of the first to write on the idea of community, Emile Durkheim. He defined communities in relation to religion, the idea of belonging to a community of people who continuously reaffirmed and reinforced each other's beliefs.<sup>53</sup> Simmel, Park and Burgess

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<sup>51</sup> 2013: 136

<sup>52</sup> Karpovich, 2006: 174

<sup>53</sup> Kirby-Diaz, 2009: 24

all connected the idea of community to the physical world or being rooted to other people in a territory.<sup>54</sup> However, as Kirby-Diaz points out, communities are no longer dependent on physical proximity. The internet is boundaryless, allowing for online communities to be so as well, and it is argued that they represent the modern idea of a public, or a group of people united by a common interest.<sup>55</sup> Moving out of sociological roots into communications and media, Willson argues that community is more than the people who interact together, it is about the experience of sharing that creates a unity.<sup>56</sup> The aspect of sharing is also a defining feature of fandom, as discussed above.

Online communities are boundaryless and they are sometimes thought of as being free of prejudice and as a place that is naturally liberated.<sup>57</sup> However, this is an oversimplified view of these communities. This naïve view does not take into account the surveillance and corporate aspects of the internet, the parts that are gathering data and concerned with making profit or negative behavior of users including trolling and cyber bullying.<sup>58</sup>

A common notion in fan studies is to relate online communities to Benedict Anderson's idea of imagined communities first published in 1991. Sandvoss describes Anderson's concept as "communities which are based on shared symbolic, mediated

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<sup>54</sup> Kirby-Diaz, 2009: 25

<sup>55</sup> Kirby-Diaz, 2009: 25-27

<sup>56</sup> Willson, *Technically Together*, 2006: 24

<sup>57</sup> Willson, 2006: 59

<sup>58</sup> Willson, 2006: 49

events as well as the knowledge of such a shared activity.”<sup>59</sup> While Anderson applied this concept to nation-states, it can also be applied to online communities. Media can be described as the shared activity at the center of these communities that inspires the ritualized consumption that is seen in fandom.<sup>60</sup> Imagination is key to keeping communities intact, even as they spread across space and time; it is what allows them to exist without boundaries and across generations.<sup>61</sup> Fandom becomes the way that imagined communities are cemented together, as well as a way for people to engage with how they view themselves and create their identity.<sup>62</sup> Anderson’s theory on the importance and connective power of imaginings in communities is a discussion point for many scholars who study online communities.

Bury states that while online communities are imagined communities, fandoms take a step further into what she refers to as interactive communities. Imagined communities, such as nation states, are bound by a sense of belonging, but not necessarily interaction. Digital communities such as fandom require both the imagined sense of belonging and the desire and means for interactions among members.<sup>63</sup> All of the authors mentioned above are interested in how the passion and common interest by fans in the object of fandom is the driving force for interactions and engagements, and therefore the

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<sup>59</sup> 2005: 55

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Willson, 2006: 23

<sup>62</sup> Misailidou, 2017

<sup>63</sup> Bury, 2005: 14

fan communities. It is the shared activities of reading the texts, creating fan fiction or art, and discussion that become the center of the community more so than the object of fandom itself. Fandoms are driven by the shared connections, rituals and symbol of imagined communities, but these connections are compounded by the interactions between fans. But the shift to an open site represents more of a nation-state level of community, as it is broader, less defined and less interactive. This thesis examines how this broad sense of belonging and the openness of the community influences the interactions of the fandom.

Fans do not exist in a vacuum, rather the meanings they derive and other fans influence the work they create. And the desire to participate in these activities is fueled by a wanting to be part of something communal.<sup>64</sup> The reciprocity that is inherent in social interactions is important to maintain a sense of community, regardless if it is virtual or not.<sup>65</sup> Another driving factor in the creation of fan communities is the creation of a pool of knowledge for fans, as it is impossible for a single person to remember all of the information about the object of fandom. Building a community pool of knowledge allows for sharing the responsibility of knowledge.<sup>66</sup> These pools can live on a ‘masterpost’ on Tumblr—a post that lists several links back to other, more in-depth posts generally consisting of information that is connected—or on ‘Fan Wikis’, which are fan built Wikipedia pages for different fandoms. These pools of knowledge can lead to fan

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<sup>64</sup> Jenkins, 2013: 75

<sup>65</sup> Willson, 2006: 28

<sup>66</sup> Jenkins, 2006: 139

communities to be stereotyped as homogeneous and of one mind.<sup>67</sup> However, Jenkins counters this, mentioning that although fans share from a pool of common knowledge, this does not mean the community is expected to confirm to the same thoughts and readings, but that fandom communities allow for multiple ways of knowing.<sup>68</sup> This thesis addresses whether fans feel that they can hold different opinions on their text or that they are stigmatized as homogenous on an open site.

In order to join an early-internet fandom, Jenkins found that “people initially learn through ‘lurking’ or observing from the margins.”<sup>69</sup> This peripheral learning from the margins is a part of the social learning theory.<sup>70</sup> Lurkers would join the fandom but not participate or engage until they had learned the social order and roles. Because joining a fandom on Tumblr is not a clear process and anyone on the site can see the fan interactions, lurkers include a broader audience; potential fans and potential trolls. The impact and presence of lurkers on Tumblr is more than a way that people learn how to be in a fandom, they also represent how fandom has become more public.

In addition to being referred to as communities throughout the literature, fandoms are also sometimes called subcultures. Subcultures are described as “cultural groups within larger cultures.”<sup>71</sup> Another way of determining a subculture is to examine how it

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<sup>67</sup> Willson 2006: 32

<sup>68</sup> 2006: 140

<sup>69</sup> 2013: 158

<sup>70</sup> Massanari, 2015: 68

<sup>71</sup> 2017

operates against hegemonic mainstream culture, and eventually, how it is incorporated into it.<sup>72</sup>

Defining subcultures only in reference to oppositional readings greatly narrows the amount of groups that could be included in the term, “subculture”. Furthermore, it raises the question if fans can ever be considered subcultures because by engaging in mass produced, mainstream culture they do not offend the majority or threaten society’s stability.<sup>73</sup> Even if fan groups initially could have been seen as subculture, due to the way fandom has been incorporated into mainstream culture through newer technologies and the wide publication of fan fictions such as *Fifty Shades of Gray*, they no longer fall under this definition.

For Fine and Kleinman, subcultures are defined by how they interact, or interlock, together. They argue that, “the Interactionist view of subculture locates culture in the interacting group...although culture is meaningful only when it is activated in interaction, cultural elements may constitute a subculture through the diffusion of information among groups.”<sup>74</sup> These interlocking communications spread information through the group, creating a common discourse throughout the network. Additionally, they take materials provided by icons of the culture and manipulate them to fit into the needs of the

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<sup>72</sup> Laughey, 2007: 71

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> “Rethinking Subculture: An Interactionist Analysis” 1979: 8



subculture.<sup>75</sup> This description echoes ideas of how fandoms function and create their own content within their community as discussed above.

While the terms subculture and community have been used interchangeably in the scholarship, I will be using “community.” This decision is based on the fact that subculture has connotations of resisting hegemonic culture, and while resistance can be a part of fandom, I feel that it is limiting to assume that all fans and fandoms are actively resisting mainstream culture. Furthermore, my interest in fandom lies in the interactions between fans, which is more a community-centered aspect.

### **New Media, Convergence And “Platforms”**

Media can be defined on two levels, one is the actual technology that allows for communication, and the second is comprised of the social rules that govern how they are used.<sup>76</sup> The concept of “media” refers to more than the medium that allows for communication, it also suggests cultural aspects that surround those mediums and that influence how and why people use them. Media convergence, or the flow of information across different platforms and the integration of media industries, requires more communal modes of reception than individualist ones.<sup>77</sup> Convergence allows for ideas to grow from the bottom up. The convergence of media relies heavily on the participation of consumers and their interactions with others; in other words, fandoms are a driving force

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<sup>75</sup> Fine & Kleinman, 1979: 12

<sup>76</sup> Jenkins, 2006: 13

<sup>77</sup> Jenkins, 2006: 25

of convergence.<sup>78</sup> And through this, fans are shifting the way media are created. They reject the idea that they have to calmly accept whatever is produced in the mainstream. This is evident in the publication and movies of the *50 Shades of Gray* series, which were initially fan fiction for the *Twilight* novels and movies. *Twilight* fan E.L. James was unsatisfied with aspects of the novels and wrote fan fiction that fulfilled her desires, and apparently those of other *Twilight* fans. The fiction gained popularity online and after going through substantial changes to avoid copyright infringement, became three books and movies.<sup>79</sup> This example of convergence of media across different platforms gives fans production power.

The books of SJM are two series in a genre that has exploded with high profile publications recently, and the fans are vital to the success of Maas as an author.<sup>80</sup> SJM novels are converging in other ways too; the *Throne of Glass* series has been green lighted for production as a television show by Hulu,<sup>81</sup> and *A Court of Thrones and Roses* will be turned into a movie.<sup>82</sup> While convergence across different mediums is supported by Jenkins, it could be something that alienates fans and negatively changes the fandom. While this thesis is not primarily concerned with how the fans feel about the convergence,

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<sup>78</sup> Jenkins, 2006: 3

<sup>79</sup> "Fifty Shades Of Grey' Started Out As 'Twilight' Fan Fiction Before Becoming An International Phenomenon," 2018

<sup>80</sup> Waratah & Bradshaw, 2018

<sup>81</sup> Andreevea, 2018

<sup>82</sup> White, 2018

it does impact the fandom during the time of data collection and can provide a space for future research.

Throughout this thesis, the word “platform” has been used to describe Tumblr and other online infrastructures. However, the term carries multiple connotations that must be unpacked. Platform is often used interchangeably with social networking sites, but Tarleton Gillespie discusses the intricacies of the term in his 2010 article, “The Politics of ‘Platform’”. The term “platform” gives providers, such as Tumblr, the ability to make broad claims to both consumers and advertisers, as well as provide a variety of content while claiming they are neutral.<sup>83</sup> Technology companies use ‘platform’ both as a word to signal to users that it is a place of freedom of expression and control over content, but also to persuade advertisers to buy advert space, illustrating how the term platform is not purely neutral or equal.<sup>84</sup>

Furthermore, “platforms” use the term to avoid liability for what the users of their service publish online, or “empowering all by choosing none.”<sup>85</sup> This notion is confirmed by Massanari when she discusses how the creation of a page on Reddit etiquette distances the administrators from the responsibility of policing and monitoring content.<sup>86</sup> Because platforms themselves will not always not police users behavior, users have taken it upon themselves to enforce specific behaviors on other users. Despite new media’s push to use

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<sup>83</sup> 2010:384

<sup>84</sup> Gillespie, 2010

<sup>85</sup> Gillespie, 2010: 357

<sup>86</sup> 2015: 74

the term platform to describe online sites in order to showcase progressivism, freedom of expression, and content control, they are still bound by social roles and norms as well as surveyed by the government and corporations. The term is a place of tension between the media industry and the users as means of control and production are shifting with the convergence of media.<sup>87</sup> I examine how the way the users have created their own form of policing and the tensions a platform creates influence the SJM fandom specifically in this thesis.

danah boyd also examines the terms used to describe social networking sites, as well as how they function through various affordances. She suggests that they are new types of networked publics that are reorganized by new network technologies. Network publics are cyberspaces that are built through networks of people, as well as a result of an imagined common space through the melding of people, technology and practice.<sup>88</sup>

“Affordances” was coined by Gibson in his book *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, where he states “an affordance is neither an objective property nor a subjective property...It is equally a fact of the environment and a fact of behavior.”<sup>89</sup>

Although he was applying it to animals in nature, scholars including boyd and Petersen have used it to describe how people interact with digital environments. These affordances do not control users’ conduct but they do shape the environment that influences how the participants engage with the network. This argument that the social rules and norms that

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<sup>87</sup> 2010: 359

<sup>88</sup>“Social Network Sites as Networked Publics: Affordances, Dynamics, and Implications,” 2010:1

<sup>89</sup> 2015:121

surround technology are a result of the way people use it rather than because of the technology is an often reiterated one.<sup>90</sup> Petersen suggests that the way users on Tumblr talk and interact is both supported and constrained by the affordances of the site. Fans are able to utilize the affordances of Tumblr, including the ability to add both text and images to post and the ask function to expand the universe of their fandoms.<sup>91</sup>

Networked publics are not only shaped by affordances but are also influenced by network mediums. Self-expression and social interactions are both components of these publics.<sup>92</sup> There are three dynamics that influence networked publics. *Invisible audiences*, or the people who are online but do not contribute, *collapsed contexts*, which describes the lack of typical boundaries of space, time, and social norms, and *the blurring of public and private*.<sup>93</sup> Through these dynamics and mediated online spaces being present and part of a community no longer depends on physical and temporal properties. Potential audiences include lurkers, who are not noticeable or communicative but are in the same space, as well as people who look at digital archives.<sup>94</sup>

Even if fans are not existing somewhere at the same place or time, because of the affordances of the network, they are still present as an audience. Furthermore, these

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<sup>90</sup> Willson, 2006: 225

<sup>91</sup> “*Sherlock* fans talk: Mediatized talk on tumblr,” 2014:90 & 95

<sup>92</sup> boyd, 2010: 4-7

<sup>93</sup> boyd, 2010: 10

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*

dynamics force the participants to preform for endless potential audiences.<sup>95</sup> In the pre-internet and early internet days of fandom, there were more clear boundaries of community and interaction, but these dynamics and the different audiences they allow for show a shift in the current age of fandom. It is important to examine affordances and dynamics of networked publics in order to provide more information on why they engage the way they do because the structural elements of mediated environments can be just as influential as in physical spaces.<sup>96</sup> For fandoms in the early internet days, the networked public referred to those who were part of the email list or fan website, but as fandom has shifted to social networking sites, the networked public includes those who are on the sites but not a part of the fandom. This suggests that fandom has become more a public action than a private one. By removing the bounds of a closed site, fandoms on social networks are open to lurkers and invisible audiences.

Massanari's analysis of Reddit was influenced by the actor-network theory (ANT), which is based on examining the connections between technologies and humans to "more fully illuminate the complex way social and technological infrastructures are co-consecutive and productive...a primary concern becomes unpacking the mutual ways that humans and the site's underlying technology shapes interactions."<sup>97</sup> This theory reiterates what boyd discusses about the impacts that networked publics and technologies make on

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<sup>95</sup> boyd, 2010: 11

<sup>96</sup> 2010: 15

<sup>97</sup> 2015: 25

each other. The Tumblr site impacts the way fans create and produce content in complex ways, and the connection between Tumblr and the users.

The expansion of the networked public influences the way the fandom behaves. No longer is fandom a private performance meant only for likeminded fans; fans that post opinions, fiction or other fan-related things are speaking to an endless sea of potential readers who come to the post with different levels of context and understanding. In Petersen's study of fans of BBC's *Sherlock* on Tumblr, she found that through comments fans would turn nonfan posts into a fandom post.<sup>98</sup> The affordance of the dashboard structure on Tumblr is what allowed fans to apply their own jokes and meaning to the initial non-fandom post.<sup>99</sup> The architecture of Tumblr is such that a post can be spread to any user's dashboard, rather than the creators of the post only publishing to fellow fans that opt into receiving the post.

Allison McCracken points out that Tumblr as a social site is different from others, both in format and in its reputation as a place for marginalized populations to call home, and asserts that Tumblr's design enables the blending of fandom's participation and progressive politics, referring to the site as a place where users can learn about feminism, gender studies, LGBTQIA+ discourse, antiracism, and post colonialism.<sup>100</sup> The site has become a place of free education on media literacy and analysis, the formation of identity,

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<sup>98</sup> 2014:94

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> McCracken, 2017

and political awareness.<sup>101</sup> Although Tumblr is often thought of as a young person's platform, McCracken shows that the users are less connected through demographics, and more united through their passion for progressivism.<sup>102</sup> While it is difficult to find full reports of Tumblr users' demographics, a Pew Research Center reports that users are "equal numbers male and female, and are demographically poorer, proportionally less white, and more urban than users of other major platforms such as Facebook."<sup>103</sup> Furthermore, most users' profiles identify themselves in terms of their sexual orientation, ethnicity, nationality, and fandom, with some getting more specific and putting in their favorite fan ships in their bio as well showing the importance of fandom on Tumblr.<sup>104</sup>

Identity formation and reflections of the self are central to Tumblr users, according to McCracken, relating to Sandvoss's ideas of fans using fandom activities to create meanings that reflect the self. Given the focus on identity and the self on Tumblr, it follows that media representation in popular culture is a main topic of conversation, creation and debate for many Tumblr users.<sup>105</sup> The users are primarily looking for representation of traditionally marginalized groups in mainstream media.<sup>106</sup> Some of the ways Tumblr users challenge mainstream media representation, including race-bending

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<sup>101</sup> McCracken, 2017: 152

<sup>102</sup> McCracken, 2017: 153

<sup>103</sup> 2017: 154

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> McCracken, 2017: 157

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid*



and fancasting, are also common fan activities. Fan fiction writers often post tips for other writers on diversifying their characters in a responsible and respectful manner.<sup>107</sup> However, while Tumblr users are thought to have more control over content while remaining anonymous, they are still subject to the corporate and governmental constraints that all people on the internet are.<sup>108</sup>

While McCracken provides interesting thoughts into how Tumblr can be a place of debate, growth and progressive thoughts, she lumps the billions of blogs into one young and progressive group and does not discuss at all the negatives of the platform, including online harassment and the lack of censorship that has led to graphic and sadistic sex blogs and blogs supporting unhealthy behaviors such as anorexia or self-harm; nor does she mention people who do not use Tumblr to discuss fandom or progressive politics. McCracken's discussion of Tumblr as a place that is primarily progressive and equal across users illustrates that Gillespie's assessment of the term 'platform' being forced into these meanings is still relevant eight years later. However, her continued assertion of Tumblr as place of inclusion and progressivism is an interesting aspect of the site that separates it from other social networking sites. This thesis will explore how the prevalence of these progressive topics influences the interactions of the SJM fandom.

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<sup>107</sup> McCracken, 2017: 160

<sup>108</sup> McCracken, 2017: 154

## **Feminism**

This research is concerned with how female SJM fans use different feminisms in their critique of the novels, as well as how they use fandom as a vehicle for discussing and educating others on feminist thought. As a note, I include trans, queer, non-binary, and questioning individuals who identify as female or feminine in my definition of women or female. The following is a brief description of feminist theory that I personally ascribe to, as well as a positioning of myself as a researcher who embraces an intersectional feminist lens.

Rachel Griffin says that the discord between feminist theory and its practice lies in the way people who fall outside the traditional idea of a woman are treated.<sup>109</sup> This includes women of color, queer women, and transgendered women. Feminist scholars need to allow for self-reflexivity within their research and challenge each other to ask questions that focus on more diverse and inclusive topics.<sup>110</sup> This stress on the importance of reflection and reflexivity in feminism is important to consider when studying how SJM fans use feminism as a tool of critique and as a point of education on Tumblr because their analyses are a form of reflection and reflexivity through a piece of popular culture. These ideas discussed by Griffin build upon the thoughts of scholars like Kimberle Crenshaw, who discussed the importance of intersectionality in her 1991 article.<sup>111</sup> Throughout the article Crenshaw discusses how women of color, particularly

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<sup>109</sup> “Feminist Consciousness and “Unassimilated” Feminism,”2014

<sup>110</sup> Griffin, 2014: 256

<sup>111</sup> “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color”

black woman, have been disadvantaged by mainstream feminism leading to increased tensions within the movement.<sup>112</sup> The SJM fans on Tumblr often discuss the white-washing of characters that some fans presume to characters of color, as well as debate the effects the death of a female character of color that was used to advance the journey of the white main character. Their inclusion of race and class when discussing these characters is similar to ideas suggested by the authors discussed here.

Suzy D'Enbeau states that the patriarchy maintains a single reality or worldview based on the realities of men and that in order for women to comprehend the world, they must learn this patriarchal language, and thus forfeit any opportunity for different viewpoints.<sup>113</sup> Feminism can be an alternative way for women to rename the world in relation to them, rather than only existing in a male created reality. Nancy Hirschmann agrees and argues that the construction of language by men for women is restraining and limits the realities of women.<sup>114</sup> Both authors assert that the patriarchy, or the “ideological systems, social structures, and practices created by men and reflecting male values,” is the main proponent of all suppression.<sup>115</sup> It is interesting to note that D'Enbeau and Hirschmann are preoccupied with the patriarchy being the source of their own suppression, while they fail to take into account how their own constructions of

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<sup>112</sup> 1991:1242

<sup>113</sup> “Feminine and Feminist Transformation in Popular Culture,” 2009

<sup>114</sup> “Toward a Feminist Theory of Freedom,” 1993

<sup>115</sup> D'Enbeau, 2009: 18

reality and language could be oppressive to other women, namely those of color and queer women.

These authors, and the way they discuss the importance of language as a way for women to resist brings to mind how fan fictions writers use their own language to change the point of views and to broaden stories. It also relates to John Fiske's idea that fandom is a place of resistance for those who are disenfranchised.<sup>116</sup> Furthermore, they both stress the importance of female relationships to help women gain control of their worlds, which relates to discussions of community and social interaction through fandom.

Many different feminisms exist and are used by people, which can be described in terms of the "waves" of feminism. Currently on Tumblr the main divide in feminism that I see is among those who prescribe to intersectional feminism, TERFs, and white feminists. TERF stands for trans-exclusionary radical feminist and is a movement that feels nonbinary or trans women should not be included in feminism. White feminism refers to the way that "feminist account of the politics of popular culture marginalize black women's experience."<sup>117</sup> The SJM fans on Tumblr could all have different definitions and meaning of the term feminism that they look for and apply to the books. I am not attempting to determine the specificities of the each of their personal feminisms, but rather looking at the prevalence of the term or beliefs in the fan community.

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<sup>116</sup> Sandvoss, 2005: 13

<sup>117</sup> Ferreday, 2017:271

## METHODS

The main methods for data collection for this study were online ethnography and textual analysis. Because online ethnography is a relatively new research field that folds standard ethnographical practices into the study of digital media, the following explains the method in detail, as well as discuss its challenges and limitations.

Ethnography is a research method where the researcher observes and analyzes a culture-sharing group.<sup>118</sup> Because of its roots in anthropology and the importance of fieldwork in ethnography, it has typically been carried out in specific physical spaces. However, for this research the data was not collected from a physical field site, but rather from an online platform. As discussed above, members of virtual communities are not bound by physical connections but rather connectivity or interaction.<sup>119</sup> I was drawn to researching the SJM fandom due to the intense levels of interaction and connection visible on Tumblr. While these interactions take place in a unique space, the data collection for online ethnography shares practices from the traditional method.

Both online and traditional ethnography collect data in the same ways, participant observation, interviews, and artifact collection.<sup>120</sup> Through collecting data on Tumblr I

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<sup>118</sup> Creswell, 2016: 90

<sup>119</sup> Steinmetz, 2012: 28

<sup>120</sup> Boellstroff et. al., 2012

have become a participant in the fandom. While I do not engage in discussions, comment on or question posts, by following blogs and my system of archiving posts requiring that I 'like' them makes me a participant, rather than a separate observer. However, despite my participation in the fandom, I do not consider myself a fan or a member of the fan community.

Because of the expansive amount of data available in online situations Tunçalp and Lê discuss the importance of researchers establishing the boundaries of their fieldwork and understanding how virtual communities have reconstructed ideas of space, time and social relationships.<sup>121</sup> An online ethnographer has to decide on the limits of their field. Unfortunately, even once boundaries are drawn in online ethnography, they can be difficult to maintain due to the inherent multi-site nature of the internet. Users on the site a researcher has decided on as a boundary could post hyperlinks that would draw the researcher away from their intended field. For this research, my field site was limited to Tumblr, and I did not follow links away from the site.

Time is another field issue for ethnography that takes place in a virtual setting. Because the internet brings people from different time zones together it can be difficult for researchers to collect data in a true linear fashion. Because researchers do not share the same time frame as the participants each post and subsequent reblogs need to be examined in their own time, rather than in relation to the timeline of others.<sup>122</sup> The issue of time is more complex on Tumblr, where there are no time stamps or ways to discern

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<sup>121</sup> 2014: 59

<sup>122</sup> Steinmetz, 2012: 30

when a post was created. This changes the way users interact with each other and posts. People can ‘revive’ or reblog old posts that are outdated or lack context, which can reorient the meaning of the original post. Time, or lack thereof, is an affordance of Tumblr that separates it from other social sites, and part of the reason it was chosen as the field site. Because I was not able to observe the posts and interactions in real time or a linear way, the posts were analyzed through a textual analysis. This type of analysis entails reading the posts and noting the different themes that appear across the data. Then these themes are used as a point of discussion in relation to how the fans are influenced by feminism, platform and community.<sup>123</sup> The issue of time illustrates the blurring between ethnography and archival analysis in virtual ethnography. However, online ethnography is distinguished from content or archival analysis by way social connections are felt in posts, as well as the immediacy of the interactions.<sup>124</sup> By combing the details provided by the archival nature of the internet with the social connections of ethnography, a researcher can examine different aspects of an online community.

Identity in online ethnography incorporates two different aspects: it is important researchers identify themselves as such, and that they maintain the anonymity of the participants. Members of online communities, including Tumblr, utilize usernames and avatars that keep them anonymous. It is not enough to assume that a username, or URL for Tumblr, is enough to maintain someone’s identity is anonymous, as it is possible to

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<sup>123</sup> Cresswell, 2016

<sup>124</sup> Steinmetz, 2012: 27

trace a user back to their online username.<sup>125</sup> Individuals in online communities have lives offline, and they should be granted the same respect for privacy that traditional ethnographic study participants are. Additionally, online communities often attract members because they offer a space and allow for people who are traditionally marginalized in the physical world to create a sense of community.<sup>126</sup> I disclosed my identity as a master's student conducting research for a thesis on my own Tumblr bio before I started to collect data.

However, it is possible for people to misrepresent themselves online. Users that identify as female and in their 30s could be neither, but their choice to present themselves as such does not automatically degrade their online identity. As a researcher I cannot guarantee that the participants I observe are what they say they are. I am choosing to abide by their online presentation as their identity because that is how they are living their life on Tumblr and engaging in the SJM fan community.

At the core, online and traditional ethnography are attempting to reach the same goal; understanding a cultural sharing group that exists in a specific location. The difference is that the group in online communities exists in a virtual world that is less easily defined than physical spaces are.

Because of the ethnographic nature of this study, the Tumblr posts analyzed were examined both as part of ethnographic observation and through textual analysis. When observing the interaction on the posts I specifically examined the interactions and rituals

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<sup>125</sup> Steinmetz, 2012: 34

<sup>126</sup> Darwin, 2017: 321



involved in the fandom.<sup>127</sup> As an ethnographic researcher I interpreted these interactions and rituals and derive meaning from them based on my understanding of the group.<sup>128</sup>

The second method I employ in this study is textual analysis, a process with which I evaluate meanings in the posts and develop themes that express how they are connected. The ideologies of popular feminism, Tumblr, and young adult literature as a structure all impact how the fans create meaning, and therefore are important frameworks for this textual analysis.<sup>129</sup> From my analysis of the posts I uncovered themes through codes that connect various aspects of the posts and help to illuminate the how feminism and Tumblr play a role in the identity creation of the fandom, both as a whole and as individuals.<sup>130</sup>

The categories and themes were developed inductively, based on phrases and words, or codes, which are interrelated in the data collected. These categories will be what Lindlof and Taylor refer to as “high-inference,” meaning they will rely on my knowledge of the fandom and Tumblr to help interpret the meaning.<sup>131</sup> As opposed to a content analysis that would count the number of times phenomena occur in the data, this analysis is more concerned with the themes and meanings that come from the text rather

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<sup>127</sup> Brennen, 2013: 170

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> Brennen, 2013: 202

<sup>130</sup> Cloud, “Foiling the Intellectuals: Gender, Identity, Framing, and the Rhetoric of the Kill in Conservative Hate Mail,” 2009: 458

<sup>131</sup> Lindlof & Taylor, 2018: 316

than how many times the fans use a certain word or phrase.<sup>132</sup> A textual analysis allows for examining the whole text and the various meanings it could hold.<sup>133</sup>

Included in the textual analysis of comments is the way users utilize images as a way of conveying messages and ideas. Petersen's study on how fans 'talk' on Tumblr asserts the importance of images and 'GIFs'—Graphic Interchange Formats which are a small film clip of a few seconds played on a loop.<sup>134</sup> Bourlai and Herring also found fandom on Tumblr is often described through images because of their ability to convey more emotion than text posts.<sup>135</sup> Analyzing images and GIFs as comments by fans allows for full examination of the layered communications on Tumblr. The polysemic nature and the creation process of GIFs by internet users illustrates how they are a cornerstone of modern participatory culture, including within fandoms.<sup>136</sup> The adding of GIFs and images as a reaction or a way to deepen the effect of a comment or thought is an affordance of Tumblr and can reinforce the feeling of belonging for fans.<sup>137</sup> The ability to use images and GIFs in this way is another change in fandom on Tumblr that this thesis will explore.

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<sup>132</sup> Johnston & Swanson, "Undermining Mothers: A Content Analysis of the Representation of Mothers in Magazines," 2009: 248

<sup>133</sup> Brennen, 2013: 194

<sup>134</sup> 2014:90

<sup>135</sup> "Multimodal Communication on Tumblr," 2014: 174

<sup>136</sup> Miltner & Highfield, 2017: 9

<sup>137</sup> Petersen, 2014: 96

## **Data Collection**

For the past several months I have been following SJM fan blogs. Due to the vastness of Tumblr and the fandom, and the lack of clear boundaries, it is difficult to find every single SJM fan blog. Through a snowball effect wherein I follow one blog to the next via the bloggers reposts, tags, or followers, I have managed to follow over thirty Sarah J. Maas fandom blogs. This means I am mostly following blogs that follow each other, and mostly likely represent a small faction of the SJM community on Tumblr.

I limited the fan blogs I follow to ones that specifically mention support of the SJM fandom in their bio section. Using textual analysis, I evaluated original posts, comments on other fan posts, fan fiction they write, and how users answered questions from other fans. For the longform meta posts, comments, and answers to fans, I analyzed the texts to see how the fans engage with feminist thoughts, and how they used “feminism” in their expressions of fandom. I did not read every fan fiction I come across, but instead examined how the authors tagged and archived them, as well as how other fans engaged with them through comments or extended tags. Because of the lack of time stamps on Tumblr, observing online interactions in real time varies from user to user based on who they follow and how their own dashboard looks at the time they are observed. It is impossible to tell how much time has passed between a user posting and someone else responding through a reblog or comment. The goal of this analysis is to find themes across the fandom including feminism, interaction and platform.

My primary data collection was observing fan interactions on posts, including responses, how they comment and the asking of anonymous questions. Because Tumblr does not have time stamps, and I cannot monitor the site all day, my observations focused

on a sample of posts. Because this could be a shift into archival analysis, I analyzed each post as present time, rather than looking at them linearly from time of collection. Initially, I attempted to follow specific tags, including #TOGfeminism, #acotarfeminism, #feministRhys, #feministSJM, #metaSJM, #acotarfanask, and #TOGfanask. However, I found that tags on Tumblr for the SJM fandom are not used for tagging or organizational purposes as they are on other social networking sites; rather they appear to be extension of the users' thoughts. I am not examining how tags are used in the SJM fandom on Tumblr but it is an area that could be future research.

For the past several months I "liked" fan posts that come across my dashboard. It is important to note that this my personal blog that has existed for several years, and therefore I follow blogs that are unrelated to SJM or fandom. I chose to use my personal blog instead of creating a new one because I found the SJM fandom through this blog and, because an open, non-specific site influences fandom interests me, it was important to maintain the random, non-specific fandom aspects of my own blog.

The posts I have been collecting for observation fall into four broad categories each with subcategories, outlined below.

- Fiction
  - Publication of fan fiction that includes tags of other users so they are notified or based on another user's request
  - Short, 'one-shot' fan fictions
  - Memes, incorrect quotes or situations applied to the characters
- Asks (both anonymous and public)
  - Questions, thoughts or opinions about the books or fandom

- Personal questions
- Long form/meta posts
  - Predictions and theories for future books
  - Analysis of the books
  - In-depth critiques of passages or characters
  - Live blogging a reread of the book
- Fandom/Tumblr posts
  - Posts that discuss what the fandom means to them, fandom etiquette, or fandom issues
  - References to Tumblr as a site

I excluded asks where fans reply to trolls or anti fans, art or fancasting posts and posts about fandoms that are not SJM because I feel that I do not have the time or ability to fully incorporate these aspects into this thesis. Furthermore, the posts I am collecting are a sample based on what I see when I log into Tumblr to limit the amount of analyzed data. It is important to note that these categories were merely a way to organize and collect data out of the thousands of posts that appear on my dashboard each day, they were not used when analyzing the post for themes.

As stated before, I observed each post with the assumption that it is in real time and I looked at the content of the posts to see what themes emerge across them and how fans discuss different feminisms.

## **RESULTS**

### **Description of Data**

I originally collected over six hundred posts and chose around three hundred to use for the textual analysis, selecting posts that were directly relevant to SJM, did not feature depictions or illustrations of sex, and included text, rather than just images. I analyzed them in a random order to match the structure of the Tumblr dashboard. Posts ranged from multi-chapter fan fiction, long form meta posts, anonymous asks, fan theories and debates. I read through each post twice, once to note emerging themes and again to further analyze the posts within the established themes

Several users appeared multiple times in the corpus of posts analyzed. During the second examination of the data, I paid attention to the type of content these frequent fans created or reblogged. Based on my interpretation of fan leaders, discussed previously, they seem to fulfill specific roles within the fandom community. I have assigned pseudonyms to the three fans that appeared multiple times in the corpus. The pseudonyms were randomly assigned and are all female names because each of these fans self-identifies as female in their Tumblr bio. I chose to assign pseudonyms to maintain privacy of the bloggers, as many revealed personal information on Tumblr and as a way to make it easier to separate their different comments and thoughts, as their blog names are very long and similar. Below is a chart identifying what I learned about each of these prolific bloggers based on their bios. These blogs were not the only ones analyzed and

will not be the only ones discussed, but the high concentration of their posts and their constant appearances throughout the data mean they stand out from the other bloggers. They each disclosed their sexual orientation in their bios and while this demographic information was not a primary interest in my thesis, the fact that they all are bisexual is interesting to note and could be a space for future research.

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	<b>Profession</b>	<b>Location</b>
Kate	Early 30s	Bisexual	n/a	USA
Jane	Late 20s	Bisexual	PhD Candidate (Medieval feminism)	United Kingdom
Mary	Early 30s	Bisexual	Professor (writing and linguistics)	USA

*Table 1*

In addition to the textual analysis of the post themselves, I made ethnographic observations of the ways fans talk to each other, their interactions on Tumblr, and defining features of their community. Tumblr culture creates and supports specific behaviors, beliefs, rituals and language for the SJM fandom.

### **Development of Categories and Themes**

I divided the analysis three parts to best address the themes across the data. Part I is Established Characteristics of Fandom on Tumblr, Part II is Characteristics of Tumblr and Part III is Characteristics of the SJM Fandom on Tumblr.

Part I includes examples of fandom activities that have continued on despite the shift to a social network site being the place of fandom. Part II features examples that show how the open nature and other affordances of Tumblr can influence the fandom.

And Part III specifically looks at the SJM fandom on Tumblr. This category is further broken down into the following subcategories: feminist authority through lived experiences, feminism as community, and beyond white feminism. The examples in each of these subcategories show the different way feminism is discussed and used within the SJM fandom.

Overarching these categories is language about ‘Tumblr Fandom Culture.’ While not easily definable, Tumblr fandom culture relates to McCracken’s description of Tumblr as a place for progressive politics.<sup>138</sup> A large part of Tumblr culture is the idea of ‘call-out culture,’ described by Connelly as a way users police each other through a “system of pseudo-peer reviewing.”<sup>139</sup> Feminism, even if not named, also weaves into almost every conversation observed, suggesting that it prevails in this culture. These two concepts of influence each other, as feminism appears as a prominent part of Tumblr fandom culture and therefore is a pillar of the SJM fandom. The pervasiveness of different feminisms across the posts show that fans value it and that it is an integral part of the fandom discourse. The fans understand how Tumblr fandom culture impacts their fandom and discuss both its negative and positive impacts on how they interact. Furthermore, the structure and culture of Tumblr impact each communication on the site.

The overarching influence of Tumblr fandom culture throughout the data echoes what boyd<sup>140</sup> discussed on how networked publics are shaped by affordances and the

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<sup>138</sup> 2017: 152

<sup>139</sup> “Welcome to the FEMINIST CULT,” 2015: 20

<sup>140</sup> 2010



Actor-Network theory Massanari<sup>141</sup> uses in her analysis of Reddit. The structural environment of Tumblr, including the anonymous ask feature and the way posts are shared impacts how the fans discuss the books and interact with one another. Furthermore, McCracken's<sup>142</sup> description of Tumblr being a place of intersectionalism, media representation debates, identity politics, and education on diverse issues is supported both by how frequently the fans mention these issues, and how in-depth these conversations are. Again, this data only represents small sections of both Tumblr and the SJM fandom.

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<sup>141</sup> 2015: 25

<sup>142</sup> 2017: 152-153

## ANALYSIS

### I.) Established Characteristics of Fandom on Tumblr

Despite the shift to an open platform, there are some parts of fandom that are still visible on Tumblr through the SJM fans. Most noticeably is the way the community supports each other through the sharing of knowledge and the discussing of theories. Fans look to build community by sharing knowledge and experiences with each other in the same ways the earlier fandoms discussed by Jenkins<sup>143</sup> and Bacon-Smith<sup>144</sup> did through non-digital pools of knowledge and exchanging of information through list serves. The pools of knowledge that Jenkins<sup>145</sup> described now live on Tumblr master posts where they can be continually updated by the fandom and the links can be shared widely across Tumblr. As observed in the SJM fandom, these pools of knowledge are not limited to the world of the novels. In addition to character information, they also posted an update with information on a talk given by author Sarah J Maas.

Two posts titled “SJM LONDON EVENT WRAP UP” and “ACOTAR character profiles: Rhysand” illuminate the ways fans build pools of knowledge within their digital community on Tumblr. The first details a talk with Sarah J Maas in London, along with

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<sup>143</sup> 2013

<sup>144</sup> 1991

<sup>145</sup> 2013

photos for fans who were unable to go. The poster summarizes her talk and describes various events that happened during the event. They include details such as, “the place was packed, probably like 800 people,” and where Sarah J Maas’ husband was sitting and then described how the event was structured. The second example, the character profile post, outlines all the details the fans currently know about the character Rhysand. It includes his background, physical descriptions, relatives, and his key scenes. It is one installment in series of character profiles. At the end the creator reminds users to contact them if there are any mistakes or omissions and provides a link to the master list of character profiles.

These two posts represent the pools of knowledge discussed by Jenkins.<sup>146</sup> One of the benefits of fandom is that no one person is responsible for remembering all the details, rather the community can pool their knowledge and have it accessible to the entire fandom. The SJM fandom on Tumblr can direct other members of the community to this existing knowledge. As mentioned in the description for the character profile, there is a master list where links to all the character profiles live, showing a community aspect of the fandom. The event wrap-up post illustrates how the fandom wants to bring the experience of hearing the author talk to everyone, understanding that many of the fans live in different countries or cannot afford to attend these talks. This is reminiscent of how *Star Trek* fans would share convention experiences with those unable to attend.<sup>147</sup>

The sharing and discussing of theories is another characteristic of fandom that has continued on Tumblr. Fans work together to build a theory and ask for each other’s

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<sup>146</sup> 2013

<sup>147</sup> Bacon-Smith, 1991

opinions on it. Creators of theories tag specific blogs to help confirm a theory and to make it more accepted within the fandom based on the influence of those who agree and support it.

A post suggesting a crossover theory between the two SJM novels was reblogged by a fan who liked the theory but needed more confirmation before supporting it. The user then tagged four other SJM fans, including Kate. One of the tagged fans reblogged with their opinion on the theory (see appendix for post). By specifically tagging these certain people this poster is recognizing their authority in the fandom and wants them to validate the theory discussed. It is likely that if not tagged these users would not have come across this theory. Not only does tagging fandom leaders allow for authority on the theory, it also shares it with a wider following than the original poster. One of the people tagged obliges and although they do not like the theory they state that they have thought about it and could see it happening, thus lending their credibility (if not their support) to the theory.

These theories are now posted and shared through reblogs and comments by influential fans rather than being mailed or emailed out. The open nature of social media sites allows for authority to be asserted through the support of these theories. Rather than theories coming from fans who already have authority within the fandom, authority can be created through the support and sharing of theories. The theories posted by the SJM fandom are not automatically accepted, but through the affordances of Tumblr some are spread and can gain traction and credibility as different, key and influential people support them.

While they may enjoy the books themselves, the content that fans create and share with one another furthers their gratification, another characteristic of fandom that has carried over to Tumblr. Fans enjoy the content and camaraderie of the fandom in addition to reading the books. For example, in a post that demonstrates the specifics of what people on Tumblr enjoy about fandom culture, Mary writes that while she is excited about the release of the new novella, *A Court of Frost and Starlight* (“acofas”), she is also excited about what the fandom will create, including fiction, memes and other things that she categorizes as “stuff.” Mary also preemptively asks the fandom to remain kind and to not act like “dicks,” presumably so that they don’t ruin her pleasure (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1** Mary expresses her excitement for the new book and the potential of new fandom created content

This excitement about the potential new content for the fandom shows support and demonstrates that members are part of the fandom because of the interaction and community aspect, echoing the conclusions from Jenkins<sup>148</sup> and Bacon-Smith<sup>149</sup> that fandoms are driven and created by people so that they interact and engage with other fans. The books themselves are exciting for Mary, but this excitement is compounded by the

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<sup>148</sup> 2013

<sup>149</sup> 1992

possibilities of content creation from the fandom. Even if she is worried that fans will try to dampen others' enjoyment ("So don't be dicks!").

These posts show the ways fandom has maintained its roots and can still be a supportive community. The SJM fandom seems infatuated with the interaction that being in a fandom allows; echoing Jenkins's discussion of what separates a fan from a casual viewer.<sup>150</sup> Despite the changes wrought by the move to Tumblr, the fans still look for fan created content to enrich their experiences as fans. They still rely on each other for feedback and confirmation of their fiction ideas and to build community pools of knowledge.

## **II.) Characteristics of Tumblr**

Tumblr as an open social network site has a specific architecture and environment that is simultaneously built by and influences the users. The lack of timestamps is an affordance of the site that collapses the context of posts and can create conflict. Old, outdated post can be found again, people can change their opinion but an old post lives on that others can find and use to attack the original poster. However, another affordance of Tumblr that allows users to reblog and comment on their own posts does create a sense of balance between these two aspects.

Mary posts her intention of writing a fan fiction that is based in a modern alternate universe (au), where the characters of *A Court of Thorns and Roses* are placed in a bookshop. "...So anyway I think I might write this if anyone wants to be tagged, it will

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<sup>150</sup> 2013

be a long fic because I am incapable of writing anything else lately.” Mary replied on her own post with the following update for her followers.

Hey friends, thanks for your interest, I’ll tag everyone who wants to be (some of your comments made me smile, thank you). I’m definitely going to write this - I’ve already started, but as usual, I have no idea how long it will be. I might try to keep up a regular posting schedule though? (\*gasps from the crowd\*)

Mary’s post shows this unique aspect of Tumblr, her ability to reply on her own post with an update. This feature allows her to share the original message with people through an update, so they understand the context of her new post. The post thanks the fandom, referred to as friends, for their interest in the fiction. It also mentions that she will definitely write the fiction, supposedly confirmed from the support that the fandom had for her idea. She further demonstrates the power of the community in the post with the mention of how some people’s comments made her smile. The feedback other fans give Mary encourages her to write and publish the fan fiction, illustrating how the community can be a driving force for the creation of fan texts. By replying on her own post, Mary gives her followers context for her comments. It could have been days or months since she posted about her fan fiction idea, but by replying on her own post other users can read the message in its entirety.

Mary illustrates how the SJM fandom circumvents the issue of collapsed context created by the structure of Tumblr. The dashboard feature posts for the user based on followed blogs reblogs, there is no algorithm to put posts created by most frequent interactions with other users at the top of the dashboard. Therefore, it is very easy for a

fan to miss the next installment of a fan fiction if it is published at a time when they are not on Tumblr. By tagging fans who want to remain updated on the fan fiction, the SJM fandom still utilizes Tumblr for their needs while supporting a less authority dependent way of sharing fan fiction.

The openness and lack of timestamps influences the culture of this community on the site. The open site and the collapse of context creates an environment where people must be on the defensive and are policed in their behaviors. It becomes ‘cool’ and expected to label things as problematic without critically considering the context. In one post Jane actively refers to two phenomena of Tumblr culture, call-outs and “obsession with the problematic.”

I worry that tumblrs call out culture and obsession with the problematic means that people aren’t thinking critically about books anymore...So while I love that Tumblr encourages people to reject abusive and unhealthy relationships I also worry that no one ever really stops to think about the specificity of those terms and what they actually mean.

The word “problematic” is one of the meme words within Tumblr fandom culture. It is used throughout the posts analyzed and is often a point from which people can call out others. However, I never saw a post that outlined what is meant by the word “problematic,” nor how the fans have come to all understand its meaning in this context. In the post above, Jane does not define what she means by problematic; however, based on discussions by both McCracken<sup>151</sup> and Connelly,<sup>152</sup> as well as this fandom’s

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<sup>151</sup> 2017



dedication to feminism, I assume that media or posts are considered problematic when they do not have good representation of diversity in ethnicities, sexual orientations and genders, or there are events that are misogynistic, racist or homophobic.

Calling-out people for such things would be considered critical thinking by most. However, Jane seems to feel that the Tumblr fandom's focus on problematics is not about critical thinking, but that calling-out issues is just so ingrained that users simply label things "problematic" to fit in with others by mimicking the fandom's popular discourse. She cites the example of calling actions or relationships abusive when they are not. She outlines how this can undermine and devalue actual abuse victims and survivors. Rather than critically addressing these so-called 'problematic issues,' Jane implies that Tumblr users are jumping on the bandwagon of calling out any issues and labeling them inappropriately. She further comments that while users demanding healthier representations of relationships and less celebration of abuse is positive, these critiques are losing value and are not always warranted.

There is also an irony in Jane creating a "calling out" post about issues with the call-out aspect of Tumblr. But how else is one to comment on the culture of the website to its users? The irony and tension between policing behaviors to maintain a community and policing behaviors to promote one's agenda is evident throughout the corpus.

The openness of Tumblr is an affordance that allows users to celebrate all of the things they are fans of in one place. Furthermore, they can use Tumblr for other types of interests beyond fandom. They can follow blogs that all discuss the same thing, or a

random collection based on their interests. Personally, I follow a wide variety of blogs on different interests, making my dashboard a hodgepodge of things. However, the variety of topics available on Tumblr, and its existence beyond being a place for fandom, creates tension for some of the fans and becomes something that fans feel they should police. If one fan only wants SJM posts on their dashboard, but they follow a fan who likes variety and reblogs non-fandom things it can lead to disagreements. Rather than tailoring their own Tumblr experience to best fit their desires through blocking certain users, tags or posts, users curtail others who might utilize Tumblr because of its openness and ability to curate more than one interest at a time. One anonymous ask posed to a fan asked, “can you stop posting hockey stuff?” The blogger responded, “here’s the thing, anon. I’ve said it before, I’ll say it now, and I’m absolutely positive that at some point, I’ll have to say it again. While my blog is SJM-centric, it is still *my blog* [sic]. ToG and ACOTAR are not the only things I’m allowed to post.”

The shift to an open site has created tension within the fandom about how and what people should post. An anonymous asker is upset that the blogger is posting hockey related things and has asked them to stop. The blogger states in their reply, which included a GIF of a hockey player rolling his eyes, that this is not the first time they have had to address this topic. Then they say that while their blog is SJM focused, that is not their only interest and they can post about their other interests. They then suggest that if it bothers the anonymous asker that much, they should unfollow them.

First, it is interesting that the anonymous asker feels that they have the authority to ask someone to stop posting content on their blog. This shows a sense of ownership of fan related blogs because they occupy the same community. They did not provide

reasoning, but the reply from the blogger suggests that they have been criticized for posting non-SJM things before so that is how they interpreted it. The anonymous asker does not qualify their request with an assertion of their own authority, but the fact that they felt comfortable asking the blogger to change what was posted to suit their own wishes suggests a sense of ownership in the blog. The anonymous asker does not have to follow this blogger; there are lots of other SJM only blogs that they could follow instead. But rather than unfollowing this blogger they request that they censor their content to fit into the experience that the asker wants. They simultaneously assert authority over the blogger in this ask, but also reduce their own by not taking control of their Tumblr experience in an independent way.

The blogger then asserts their own authority over their own blog, stating that they are allowed to share whatever content they would like, they are not limited to SJM related things. This illustrates a tension that the move to an open site has had on fandom, they do not have control over the content that appears on their dash, and it might not be fandom centric. The blogger, while enjoying the fandom, has other interests and uses their Tumblr to discuss these things alongside with SJM. For the anonymous asker, this other material apparently disrupts their fandom experience, showing how an open site can influence fandom.

Tumblr fandom culture, which influences how the SJM fans interact, centers on the idea of policing behavior and thoughts, as evident in these examples. The openness of the site means the fans and users have less control over the content they see. This

combined with the focus on progressiveness discussed by McCracken<sup>153</sup> and the affordance of the anonymous ask mean that users can directly police each other's blogs and posts without context.

### **III.) Characteristics of the SJM Fandom on Tumblr**

The SJM fandom is expansive and full of different voices. Both established fandom characteristics and Tumblr as the site of fandom influence it. They still engage in fan activities such as fiction writing, theory discussions and creating communal pools of knowledge. But beyond novels, the fans are impacted by the open nature of Tumblr and how the culture of the site is centered on the policing of behaviors. In addition to the novels of Sarah J Maas being a point of connection, feminism is a thread among the fandom that keeps them together despite the expansive and open nature of Tumblr. Their feminisms are varied and different but there is a basic understanding of the term and philosophy, they just enact on it in different ways. The data in this part falls into three subsections: feminist authority through lived experiences, feminism as community and feminism beyond white feminism.

#### **Feminist Authority Through Lived Experiences**

Some fans give themselves authority by asserting their position their own experiences and identities as validation and place from which to shame others. I refer to this concept as 'the politics of validation.' This is the idea that in order to have an opinion on something a user must declare why they have authority on the subject through the

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<sup>153</sup> 2017

disclosure of personal information. By having certain identities or experiences, users can call out others and avoid being called out themselves. If users declare their authority over a subject through their experiences, then people who are calling them out have less evidence to stand on. It makes those who call them out look insensitive or as if they are attacking the experience of someone in a marginalized community or who has experienced trauma. This relates the idea that feminist research and feminists need to value experiences and individual identities.<sup>154</sup> However, influenced by the culture of Tumblr fandom, sometimes the use of experience to validate an opinion goes beyond exploring other voices to a way that authority is asserted and behaviors as policed.

Fans use their own experiences and identities to assert their authority as a fan and a feminist on other fans through meta posts or comments on theories. Part of the SJM fandom culture allows for fans to fixate on small sections of the book that do not always impact the characters at later points in the series. These small scenes that the fandom elevates become large talking points and often overtake other messages or themes present in the novels. Some fans express on Tumblr that the inclusion of these small problematic scenes make them no longer want to read the books or be apart of the fandom. The quote below is an excerpt from a post where the user wrote over six printed pages addressing the issue of sibling abuse, something that is only referenced in the first two chapters of one of the novels. The creator also uses shame and her own experiences as way to call-out other fans.

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<sup>154</sup> Creswell, 2011: 27-29

I am writing this post to deal with the misconceptions about what constitutes sibling abuse in the ACOTAR fandom. When replying to this post, it is very important to keep the discussion polite and respectful...  
...Unlike Feyre, the abuse I suffered was physical as well. When reading this posts remember that I have a lot of experience with this topic and that others who read it and your comments may too...  
...I am tagging everyone who liked/reblogged a post I saw earlier stating that there was no sibling abuse in ACOTAR. I am not looking to call anyone out, but only to shed light on a very prevalent and harmful form of abuse that has been swept under the rug far too many times.

The existence and writing of this post show how fans are assuming authority through the politics of validation. The creator of this post asserts their authority as creator to police how people respond to the post. The creator furthers their authority on the matter by disclosing that they personally have suffered from psychological sibling abuse, similar to the character Feyre, but has the added authority of suffering from physical abuse as well. This is a clear illustration of the politics of validity and how fan use this strategy to assert authority and police behavior.

At the end of the post the creator tags over one hundred other Tumblr users, presumably in the SJM fandom, who interacted with a post discrediting sibling abuse in the novels. They state that they are not doing this to call anyone out, but to educate them on the issue of sibling abuse. Despite the fact that they say they are not calling anyone out, the act of tagging them in this post that breaks down sibling abuse in our world seems to fit the definition of call-out noted previously by Connelly. But the creator is aware of the

negative associations of call-out culture, and how people who feel they have been called out respond, so they take lengths to distance themselves from that aspect of Tumblr culture, while actively engaging in it.

The politics of validation that are reproduced by Tumblr fandom culture mean that fans feel compelled to share things about their lives when they might be uncomfortable to give themselves authority and shame people into not calling them out.

Jane discloses her own experience with rape with trigger warnings and an authority claim: “\*\*\*trigger warnings for rape\*\*\* and personal details about my life that I’m uncomfortable sharing but if I don’t ppl will wonder why I have the authority to discuss this.” This quote comes from a long form post where she discusses the language used by SJM to describe rape, the possible meanings of these descriptions, and how they impact the development and intentions of characters that have experienced sexual assault. This particular excerpt shows both politics of validity and the importance of support through trigger warnings.

Trigger warnings have their origins in feminist blogging and are used by content creators to let potential audiences know that there is material in the post that could lead to an extreme emotional response.<sup>155</sup> Jane used the tag “#tw rape” on the post, as well as this message at the top of it, both as ways to ensure that other Tumblr users did not consume content unaware. She understands that to have authority on this subject, she has to disclose personal and intimate facts, even though she is uncomfortable about sharing these.

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<sup>155</sup> Robbins, “From the Editor- Sticks and Stones: Trigger Warnings, Microaggressions and Political Correctness, 2016:1

Jane's post also illustrates a tension between the support and authority aspects of the SJM fandom. It could be assumed that the fandom would not want someone in their community to have to share uncomfortable details, but the structure of the fandom also suggests that if someone does not validate their opinion with their reason for having that authority, then they will be called-out in Tumblr culture fashion. Jane knows that people will have issues with what is written in the post and is preemptively stopping people from questioning her opinion by disclosing personal details. Again, there is an element of shaming: "do not disagree with the creator or question their authority; they have experienced this, and you have not," seems to be the implication of this sharing. Jane has posted about the issues of this call-out culture where people need authority, but also plays into it by defining her own authority through her experiences.

Both of these posts show how Tumblr allows fans to discuss their own traumatic experiences and lend their voices to discussions on the patriarchal society in the novels. However, these fans also use their identities and experiences as a seat of authority to stand on and police how other fans engage with them.

Shame based call-outs are a way to force fans to behave in a specific manner, or police their behavior. Mary received an anonymous ask that said, "people have continued to try and police everyone's thoughts (regarding ships/characters/etc)." This asker is aware of the culture of policing on Tumblr and appears to be complaining about it to Mary, as there is no question in the ask.<sup>ii</sup> But in a way, this is a call-out of those who are participating in the policing of behaviors, showing the cyclical nature of the Tumblr fandom culture.



This ask to Mary also demonstrates the intricacies of proving oneself on Tumblr through the politics of validation, or using their experiences or identities to assert authority over others. In her response, Mary discusses her personal qualms with this aspect of Tumblr culture, saying she is not out as bisexual to her family so why should she have to tell strangers online that information. She also references the idea that just because one experiences something or has a certain identity should not be deciding factors for validating their opinion.

There is a pervasiveness of vague, fandom wide call-outs that is dependent on shaming people into policing their own behavior. Tensions within the Tumblr fandom culture, between how to comment on Tumblr etiquette without policing others, how words become memes, the politics of validity and how the site can simultaneously be place where people do not always feel comfortable, but still enjoy are evident. Mary's answer discussing the policing of behavior brings to light the idea of authority on Tumblr and how it is determined by politics of validity. The disclosure of certain personal facts creates a tension with the call-out culture, as calling out someone who has disclosed themselves to be marginalized or a survivor, could result in the shaming of that person for discrediting their experiences.

The fans also use shame and loosely recognized feminist beliefs to force other fans to follow established thoughts in the fandom. The following quote from post titled: Unpopular Opinion About Tamlin: Maybe We've Been too Harsh? illustrates how those who go against the established fandom belief are challenged and called-out by others in the fandom:

Again, I love ‘Tamlin the Tool’ and think he’s abusive with that temper of his, but **just from his point of view** [sic] – are his actions really so hard to understand? Now, add Feyre and Rhysand’s perspectives back into the mix and it's a whole different beast, but Tamlin didn't *have* that benefit when he made his decisions. He didn't know the whole picture.

In response to this post, Jane writes:

I don't...think we've been too hard on Tamlin. Maybe that's because I am the conductor of the Tamlin Should Die train but...it's also because...**I look at Feyre's story and I see a real abuse victim. I look at Tamlin and I see a real abuser. The same way I would never go to an abuse victim IRL and say to them 'You should really consider your abuser's point of view,' I won't do that with fictional characters** [sic]. The point of Acotar is not to...justify abuse. The point of the entire story is to...focus on the abuse victim's perspective. That's why we only have Feyre's PoV. That's why the first person is so important. **The ENTIRE story is her voice, her perspective, her thoughts and feelings on her abuse.**

This exchange, which outlines the behavior and context of a character that many in the fandom view as abusive to justify his actions shows the different ways authority influences the fandom. The original poster feels that the consensus on Tamlin is too harsh and not nuanced enough so they seek to offer other opinions. Despite outlining why exactly they think the character might not be abusive, they still claim that they see him as ‘Tamlin the Tool,’ and do admit he can be abusive. This shows that they understand the

fandom line on this character and understand that they are bucking authority by posting this. It also fits into Tumblr fandom culture where they offer an opinion that is controversial but still heed to the main fandom agreement. They understand that they will likely be called-out for their 'unpopular opinion' and seek to limit that preemptively, similar to other posts discussed.

Jane adds her own commentary on the post saying that she does not agree with the original poster and uses feminism to bolster her point. Again, because of the lack of time stamps on Tumblr it is impossible to know whether she posted this before or after she wrote on her issues with Tumblr culture, but it is interesting to note that she takes issue with how people call out abuse when it might not always be abuse. Between these two posts it is clear that Jane views herself as an expert on what constitutes abuse and uses that authority to discredit this opinion on Tamlin. She further exerts an authority through shame by bringing up that she would not approach real life abuse victims to tell them to consider the feelings of their abusers, so she should not do that with fictional characters. Tumblr fandom culture appears to be a cycle of telling people to share their thoughts, calling them out for those thoughts, and then calling-out how there are issues with call-out culture and that people should not let it deter them from sharing their opinion. This cycle is both demonized and reproduced by users, including Jane, and illustrates how authority in this fandom is impacted by Tumblr and is messy and difficult to pin down.

Within the SJM fandom there are established beliefs that are understood by the fans and do not need to be constantly explained or defined within posts, similar to the words that have become memes. When fans want to challenge the authority of these beliefs they know they will likely be called-out so they often preemptively state that they

still maintain the accepted belief while actively challenging it. Others often shame them through call-outs or the politics of validation to return to the established line of thinking. Both of these concepts, the challenging of the established belief in the fandom, and the shame based call-out that use feminism as a point of authority are illustrated in the examples above.

### **Feminism as Community**

The SJM fans also use feminism to educate and support others. It is a part of the community and helps create the connection between fans. Tumblr allows for the fans to ask one another anonymous questions. These questions do not have to be related to SJM even if they are asked to an SJM blog. Key fans, such as Jane, Mary and Kate use some of these as a way to educate their followers and other fans on feminist topics outside of the novels.

For example, a fan reached out to Jane to tell her she had had sex for the first time since ending a relationship. She was struggling with feelings of slut shaming and disliking herself for having sex outside of a relationship. This is a highly personal and private issue to be asking for advice on an open and public platform, but the identity of the asker is confidential. Jane responds attempting to support the fan and the encourage her to consume media that is not misogynistic and embraces female sexuality in a positive light (see Figure 2). Furthermore, the anonymous ask affordance of Tumblr and the way the responses are published on Jane's blog mean that other users can read and absorb her advice.

anonymous asked:



So I had sex for the first time since I broke up with my long term bf. I enjoyed it a lot, and it was the best sex I'd ever had. However, I keep slut shaming myself and I have no idea why! I don't regret the sex, and 12/10 would fuck again but I keep calling myself a whore. I'm so confused!

Ahh anon, I am happy you had good sex, but I'm sorry you are feeling whore-ish about it. Honestly, slut shaming and degrading women for enjoying sex is so ingrained into so many aspects of our culture, that it's difficult to stop automatically doing it, even with ourselves. There are so many movies, books, songs, shows, and that teach us that women are lesser or damaged or sluts for having sex with a lot of people, or even just with one person they aren't committed to. And there are so many christian religious institutions that place a high value on female purity and virginity, reinforcing the idea that women who have sex are BAD WOMEN. But...they aren't and you aren't either. If you had good sex, then GOOD FOR YOU. SERIOUSLY. GET IT GIRL. If you're feeling badly about it only because you worry it makes you a whore, focus on consuming books, media that features complex female characters who are allowed to have sex with more than one man and still be you know, great amazing people who aren't any less "pure." I'd recommend reading Sarah Maclean's romance "A Scot in the Dark" in which the young heroine deals with being shamed for sleeping with someone, and eventually learns to accept it.

**Figure 2** Jane responds to an anonymous ask unrelated to SJM

Jane in her response discusses internalized misogyny and slut shaming. In another post, Kate responded to a different ask saying, "that is the patriarchy making you feel guilty for not wanting the attention of a man because god forbid you turn a man down because you're not into him the way he is in to you." When giving advice these key fan leaders can bring discussions of feminism out of the SJM world and apply it directly to their followers, educating them on feminism. This also creates a community of support where fans can share their struggles and receive advice and comfort.

## **Beyond White Feminism**

There are many different ways to define and apply feminism. The SJM fans seem to prescribe to various interpretations of feminism. However, there the data does illustrate the fandom's dedication to expanding beyond white feminism. White feminism refers to how liberal white feminists often ignore the concerns and issues of diverse populations, including women of color, LGBTQIA+ and people in various socioeconomic classes.<sup>156</sup>

Jane created a survey for the fandom that asked several questions on why they enjoyed the books, why they did not enjoy the books and how the fandom impacted their experience. The survey included both quantitative questions and open-ended qualitative sections. Jane published the results of the survey, stating that there were 254 responses. 65.4% of fans appreciated the "bad ass" female characters. 44.5% disliked the lack of diversity in regard to LGBTQIA+ characters and 47.2% disliked the lack of diversity in regards to characters of color. This casual survey is not entirely reliable, but its creation and responses illustrate fans' dedication to the fandom and curiosity about their community.

The results from the survey confirm that the fans find diversity and female characters important in the novels. This echoes how McCracken described Tumblr as a place where diverse media representation is discussed and valued.<sup>157</sup> The survey did not include the word feminism in any of the questions, but that a majority of fans like the inclusion of "bad ass" female characters shows that women and their experiences are

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<sup>156</sup> "Growing up White: Feminism, Racism and the Social Geography of Childhood" Frankenberg, 1993: 51

<sup>157</sup> 2017

vital to the fandom. The celebration of female main characters without considering other aspects of diversity exemplifies white feminism. The fans say they would prefer more diverse representations of feminism through the survey results that demonstrate they dislike the lack of diversity in regards to LGBTQIA+ and characters of color. These survey results, while imperfect, do offer insight into how the fandom views the books in regard to feminism. The reported survey responses express what the fans find important mirror the description of Tumblr culture as one that values diverse media representation described by McCracken.<sup>158</sup> The vague and roundabout way that the survey asks about these topics, notably without using the word feminism, suggests that Jane understands that there are many ways of describing feminism. It could also suggest that she is not sure that all of the fans taking the survey would have an agreed upon definition of feminism so she wants to avoid confusion.

In addition to the survey results showing the importance of diverse feminism for the fans, there are other instances in the data that further this idea. Characters and scenes that are not ‘feminist’ enough are critiqued, fans call-out Sarah J Maas as an author and other fans who reproduce ‘less feminist’ ideas on Tumblr. For the fandom feminism is an established belief that does not have clear definitions, but has become a meme word. The fans seem to have trouble deciding whom to blame for the less than perfect feminism within the novels. Some only attribute it to the characters themselves, discussing them as if they are sentient and comparing them to contemporary feminist thought. Others blame Maas as an author, derogatorily labeling her a white feminist. Some fans feel that the

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<sup>158</sup> 2017

characters should have an understanding of feminism and act accordingly; others suggest that the learning of feminism is part of the journey.

An anonymous user asked Mary for advice on what constitutes diversity in young adult literature and asked if the presence of female main characters makes a book diverse. An excerpt of Mary's reply is below.

I wouldn't consider having a female MC to be a diverse book - if that's the only yardstick we are using. Maybe 20, 30 years ago, but not anymore. Especially in YA, as it tends to be female-dominated in terms of main characters and authors...

...When I consider a book diverse, I think about race (non-white), sexuality (non-straight), gender (in terms of trans, or non-binary, or generally genderqueer), class (not middle class), and disability. So those examples I gave on this post I considered diverse because the characters were non-white and/or queer...

...If all we are thinking about is male/female, then that's a good definition of White Feminism and a problem because then we are not considering intersectionality and the different identities that might have an effect on the power dynamics in a situation.

The question asks whether because women are often considered 'others' compared to men then it would make young adult fiction featuring a female main character ("MC") diverse, suggesting that heroines in these stories challenge typical gender roles. The asker starts their question with an apology for their ignorance and with a request for advice. This illustrates that Tumblr users can often interpret a lack of education on progressive



issues or diversity as ignorant and that this user is hoping to gain more knowledge on this topic.

Mary's response states that in the past female characters would be considered as adding diversity, but in the current media landscape white female main characters are not enough to qualify as diverse. Mary then walks through how she determines diversity in media, including looking at race, sexuality, gender, class and ability. She states that only looking at diversity in terms of male/female is a definition of white feminism, and that it does not account for the different intersections of identity that can affect power. Mary also mentions that diversity in books can be found both in the characters and the authors.

This post shows how diversity and feminism are areas of conversation for fans and the importance of including these topics on Tumblr. Because the question is not SJM based it is impossible to know if the asker is a SJM fan, but regardless they approached an SJM fan blog for advice. Perhaps they are not a SJM fan but through the openness of Tumblr found Mary and felt that she would be able to answer their question. The response shows how fans are looking for diversity in their reading, more than just female characters. This shows the possible influence of Tumblr fandom culture where diversity of gender, orientation and ethnicity are important. The response shows that Mary recognizes that she needs to incorporate more diversity into her reading and that the measurements of diversity have changed over time. Lastly, Mary explicitly discusses feminism, suggesting that the asker's definition is based in white feminism, which is a term used to describe people who prescribe to a feminism that does not incorporate different identities. Mary then states that intersectionality is more diverse as it takes into

account the way different identities affect power structures. Through this response Mary is educating her followers on intersectional feminism and its importance in books.

White feminism as an insult can be a way to shame fans into following certain behaviors. Shame is instilled through call-outs to indirectly force users into following accepted norms for behavior. By not directly asserting authority of their behavior, but instead suggesting that the users should feel a sense of obligation to follow the unspoken behavior patterns, users can ensure that others police their own behavior. Indirect comments and shame are a way that users can call out whole groups and force people to analyze their own “problematic” behavior. The following quote is from a fan who wrote a post calling-out other fans for not representing diversity in their fan art.

I have a problem...Its about fan art. Now before I begin, I just want you all to know that I absolutely adore fan art and you are all extremely talented artists, but when it comes to fan art of dark skinned characters, some of you just don't realize how harmful your art is....

...You have no obligation to write, draw, or create diverse characters, but for a community that celebrates diversity, basically championing it, seeing such a small fraction of our beloved characters as diverse and even smaller fraction represented well, its deafening.

The creator of this post claims they still support fandom artists, and that these artists are not under any actual obligation to produce art that clearly depicts characters of color. However, the language used, especially the phrase about how the fandom appears to champion diversity but the lack of diverse characters in fandom art contradicts this, is shaming fandom artists and those who say they care about diversity in the fandom.

The fans care about diversity in fan fiction as well as in the world of the novels. One of the main points of discussion in fan studies is how straight women write slash fan fictions, which features two male characters in sexual scenarios.<sup>159</sup> However, some of the SJM fans take issue with that type of fan fiction and argue that it can fetishize gay men. Jane posted her feelings about male/male pairings.

okay sometimes i lowkey have issues with the way this fandom sexualizes male characters in m/m fics and reduces them to like, gay sex, rather than fully formed people, but like, idk its fic so do you. just dont treat gay men irl like they are your sex objects okay byeee...

...like i do love that we are seeing romance novels and more and more fic that is inclusive of LGBTQ characters but there is a LOT of m/m pairings being written by straight women and sometimes it comes off as fetishizing.

Jane appreciates that fans are including LGBTQIA+ characters in their fan fiction, but takes issue that they are written as just sex and that they are not fully fleshed out characters. She also worries that fictions that fetishize gay men will influence how people treat gay men in real life (“irl”). This is a stark comparison to how Jenkins describe slash as a way for women to celebrate, explore and challenge sexuality.<sup>160</sup> Jane is encouraging fans to maintain diversity in their fan fiction but to be careful and not stray into the fetishizing of gay men. This again is an example of how intersectional feminism is a part

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<sup>159</sup> Jenkins, 2013: 190, 220

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

of the Tumblr fandom culture and the SJM fandom. The fandom prefers fan fiction that is female/female or multiple partners at once. They no longer describe this type of fiction as 'slash,' but rather use the term 'smut,' to denote any sexual actions within the fiction. This is still a way of challenging hegemonic norms and creating a sense of representation in media, as discussed by Jenkins.<sup>161</sup> But in addition to exploring sexuality and including diversity, these fan fiction writers are also challenging the stereotype that female fans write slash to focus on the masculine form.

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<sup>161</sup> 2013: 190

## **DISCUSSION**

The themes found through the analysis and observations offer insight into how Tumblr, both structurally and socially, impacts SJM fans. The site does not directly change fandom activities, such as the writing of fiction or sharing of theories, but it does change how people communicate and interact within the fandom. SJM fans adapted their fandom activities to be viable on an open site based on Tumblr's structure. The shift to an open site created a gap for authority leaders that the fans struggle to fill and the lack of defined fan groups creates tension within the fandom. Because of the endless potential audience on Tumblr fans must be more conscious of what they post and the context it could be read in. Beyond the structure, the culture of Tumblr has a profound impact on the interactions of the SJM fandom. The way fans discuss and share opinions or thoughts are policed through call-outs and the politics of validity. For the SJM fandom there is still the supportive part of the community, but it is starkly contrasted against the new power structures and the rigidity they impose on the fandom. Considering the analysis and observations in relation to my research questions, it would seem that the affordances on Tumblr make the community less defined, change interactions and build tension in fandom because it forces it to be public to endless potential audiences.

My first research question asked what role feminist thinking plays for the fans of Sarah J Maas novels on Tumblr. I found that feminism, of varying, unclear definitions, is a baseline requirement for contributions to the fandom. The most vocal of the fans I

observed stress the importance of diversity within their definitions of feminism, and the push to include different identities and experiences is visible throughout the data. Due to the open nature of Tumblr there is no way to discourage those who do not identify as feminist from the fandom, but across the data feminism as an identity is noted as a basic belief for the fans. The fans use feminisms in order to critique the novels but also regulate one other and police behavior. The fans understand that to be in the community they must be feminists, whether they state it in their bio or not, but the nuances and various definitions of the word are not discussed. This creates a question about what is feminist enough for the fandom, and who gets to decide. Some fans attempt to assert their authority on feminism by sharing their personal stories as validation, but this creates tension and further debates when multiple people who have the same identity or similar experiences disagree. Fans use this “politics of validity” to assert their own authority on feminism when they are commenting or calling-out others. Lack of feminist knowledge is also used to shame fans into following the established norms.

In addition to using feminism as a point of regulation, key figures in the fandom such as Mary, Kate and Jane use feminist thinking when responding to anonymous asks for personal advice. They use the situations presented in the asks as a way to discuss different feminisms, including how the patriarchy creates internalized misogyny and the importance of intersectionalism. Because these fans have influence within the SJM community, they reproduce the importance of feminism for the fans each time they respond to an ask.

Within fan fiction the prevalence of various forms of feminist thinking has impacted the type of stories written. While slash was popular in the fandoms studied by

Jenkins<sup>162</sup> and Bury,<sup>163</sup> the SJM fans discuss why only having male/male sex in fiction is damaging and sexualizes gay men. By including more diverse groups or females with female, these fans are expanding slash to create ‘smut’, a genre that more accurately represents the community on Tumblr. McCracken<sup>164</sup> discussed how Tumblr is a place of progressive identity politics, including increased representation and discussion for the LGBTQIA+ community. Smut, and the way it has challenged slash, shows how the culture of Tumblr supports more diversity, even within its erotic fan fiction sections. Smut as a concept for the SJM fandom exemplifies how the fans stress the importance of diversity within fandom content of all types. Not only do they want author Sarah J Maas to be more inclusive, but they demand it in their fan fiction and art as well. This shows how the SJM fandom values diverse media representations and expects it across the fandom. It also shows how slash is not diverse enough for the SJM fans and illustrates how they understand diversity to be more than writing male characters as gay but requires a more nuanced look at gender and sexual orientation.

All of the ways the fans use feminisms, whether or not they are consistent, are publicly shared to Tumblr and thus educate users on feminism through popular culture. My second research question was concerned with inclusion of feminism in popular culture and how it influences those who encounter it. From the observations and analysis, feminism learned on Tumblr can be confusing due to the conflicting definitions and

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<sup>162</sup> 2013

<sup>163</sup> 2005

<sup>164</sup> 2017; 152-3

applications. However, this is no different than academic discussions of feminism, where definitions of the waves and sub-waves are often in dispute. There are contradictory definitions and philosophies used by fans, sometimes within the same posts. Additionally, since most feminist authority within the fandom is asserted through disclosing personal information or experiences, it suggests that people who are learning in order to have an opinion or counter-argument to feminism, need to have a certain identity or experience. The necessity of feminism within the fandom does suggest that fans who might not have encountered the term or ones of its various definitions in real life, will engage with it through the fandom.

When beginning this research, I did not think feminism and Tumblr culture would be related in such a complex way. While the way fans embody feminism into their fandom is interesting, I did not find as many indications on how they learn about feminism as I had hoped because it was so ingrained in almost every post. The presence of feminism in the fandom and on Tumblr is intriguing and deserves more in-depth research into how fans define and interpret the concept to fully address its impact on popular culture.

Popular feminism, and the ways people enforce it, fit into the Tumblr culture outlined in the analysis. Despite the prevalence of the term ‘popular feminism’ across blogs, academic definitions were more difficult to find. Most scholarship discussing the connection of feminism to popular culture describes it more as a kind of post-feminism, which suggests that gender equality has been achieved and that feminism is no longer



relevant.<sup>165</sup> Wikipedia describes it as an attitude that suggests if girls feel empowered they are empowered and that there is not a need for more in-depth analysis or critique of patriarchal structures. However, these definitions and discussions of popular culture and feminism do not encapsulate the SJM fans. These fans do not only use feminism as a way to empower themselves, and they do not seem to believe that gender equality has been achieved. In *Reclaiming The F-word: the New Feminist Movement*, Redfern and Aune (2013) describe it as looking at popular culture through a feminist lens.<sup>166</sup> They also suggest that popular feminism incorporates ideas of media representations of gender, examining how people engage with popular culture.<sup>167</sup> Redfern and Aune create space for people to critique popular culture in their discussion but do not refer to it as popular feminism, although their description matches the activities of the SJM fandom more so than others. While they do not mention fandom in particular, they do discuss how feminists can broaden media representation by creating their own media, challenge popular culture and build a community of other feminists.<sup>168</sup> These concepts can all be directly connected to SJM fandom activities. Fans create their own stories and media representation through fan fiction. They challenge the feminism in the books through discussions and metas. And they are building a community that is based on feminist thought. The SJM fans represent a new type of popular feminism, where they engage and

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<sup>165</sup> *Feminism and Popular Culture*, Munford & Waters, 2014

<sup>166</sup> pg. 83

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> 2013: 91-96

challenge popular culture through feminist ideas that demand intersectionality and disregard white feminism.

Overall, in response to these two research questions it is evident that feminism is an important part of SJM fan culture on Tumblr and plays a role reproducing the Tumblr cultural aspect of policing behavior through call-outs, shame and the politics of validity. The meme quality that the word 'feminism' has taken on within the fandom shows that is tenet belief for the fans but also that the meaning is multilayered and disputable. The idea of feminism featured in young adult literature, which arguably was meant to bring females fans together, has created division through its many meanings and the way that people use their identity and experiences to police others' feminisms. Regardless of the accuracy or understanding of the nuances of the word, the prevalence of feminism in any definition throughout the fandom shows that popular feminism is a way that people learn about and engage with feminism in their lives.

The pervasiveness of the Tumblr fandom culture and how it impacts the SJM fandom address my third research question: How does the platform of Tumblr itself influence the creation of and interactions within the fandom? Before analyzing the data, I was unsure about a cohesive and noticeable culture on Tumblr as suggested by McCracken.<sup>169</sup> While I still find her overarching positive assessment of Tumblr as a place of progressive ideals to be too innocent, the focus on these ideals, including diversity, feminism, and education, does help create a sense of the Tumblr culture. She found the culture of Tumblr to be like a classroom on identity politics, challenging hegemonic histories, and a place where people could educate others on the experiences of

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<sup>169</sup> 2017; 152-3

marginalized identities.<sup>170</sup> In addition to seeing some of the things she discussed, I also found it to be a place where users who did not support the established beliefs of the fandom were called out and where experiences and identities gave people more validity and a place from which they could shame others.

The way the fans police behaviors illustrates how ideas of gatekeeping and authority within fandoms has shifted due to the affordances of Tumblr. The lack of editors as gatekeepers or authority on fiction mean that fan fiction is self-published and promoted. The fan learned how to use Tumblr's structure, which does not inherently support the publication of fan fiction, in order share, gain feedback and promote fan fiction. Gatekeepers have shifted in that they are no longer focused on keeping people from receiving knowledge or joining the community, as it is impossible to do that on Tumblr. However, they can use their authority to enforce certain established beliefs and opinions. Gatekeepers in the SJM fandom do not keep people out of the fandom but rather protect the fandom from 'other' ideas and opinions. They do this through self-appointed authority based on the politics of validation. These self-appointed leaders contrast with another type that Tumblr culture creates, those who are given authority. Through the asking of advice or confirmation on theories, fans manage to appoint leaders themselves. These leaders are publicly given authority by fans when they respond to asks or are tagged in posts to offer their opinion. This type of leader shows that Tumblr does not only form self-appointed leaders, but also allows for fandoms to choose authority based on expertise and past responses. Because different groups within the SJM fandom on Tumblr are not able to define themselves, there might be authority leaders in one

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<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*

faction who attempt to assert their authority on post of someone outside their circle. Or a post could be shared across the fandom more widely, opening itself up to policing from different authority leaders than the user has interacted with in the past.

The shift to an open site did not do away with gatekeepers, rather it led to the creation of new structures of power that are in some ways more rigid than the previous ones. Because authority is less clear and more based on influence, experts do not matter and amateurs create their own rules. This structure of authority is similar to Wikipedia and how the collaborative process has become a battle of who is the most influential.<sup>171</sup> While the fans might have a multiplicity of readings and interpretations, as the posts are shared and reblogged through Tumblr, less ‘correct,’ ones are weeded out until a single reading remains. This was evident through the example of the post on Tamlin the Tool and how the reading that was ‘incorrect,’ was shot down by other fans. The only ideas that are spread across the fandoms are ones that have been deemed correct through a process that examines how feminist a thought is and how much it resonates with key fans.

This culture on Tumblr where users must have a certain ‘validity’ to have an opinion and use that validity to police others thoughts and behaviors impacts the fandom’s interactions. Most fans announce their ignorance on a topic or state that something is their opinion but they do not have a full understanding. The language used by the fandom when challenging accepted beliefs or asking questions is overly polite and apologetic. When fans are asserting their authority through the politics of validation or calling others out, the language is shaming. They rarely use aggressive or direct language to police others behaviors, rather they rely on shame and an understanding how Tumblr

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<sup>171</sup> “When The Tenets of Composition Go Public,” Purdy, 2009: 356

culture works to keep fans within the mainline beliefs. In the literature on fan studies,<sup>172</sup> I found little about the policing of behavior and shaming of opinions within a fandom itself, suggesting that Tumblr culture has influenced this shift. This directly counters Jenkins's assertion that fandoms do not require all members to maintain the same thoughts and readings of the text.<sup>173</sup> I argue that the new and open platform forces the SJM fans to follow specific, established beliefs that have been vetted through the gatekeepers and are deemed 'not problematic,' and acceptable for the fandom.

The lack of clearly defined community boundaries mean that it is more difficult to maintain a cohesive community. The fandom is fluid, which can allow for the fans to be more than fans. People are not defined by their membership in the fandom and can be a fan for multiple media objects at once. Tumblr, as with most social sites, also has an app, so fans can integrate fandom into their daily lives and can try to tailor their fan experience based on who they follow. The ability to pose anonymous ask has many implications for the fandom. This affordance allows for people to ask for advice on personal issues without having to disclose who they are. However, beyond people abusing the anonymous feature to send hate, it also takes away the personal connections that could be fostered through these interactions. Rather than having a large community for the media object, the fans I observed separated into small groups that mainly interacted with each other and sometimes with larger group as a whole. The openness of the site means the fandom is not a cohesive group but rather several small groups of people who are interested in the same thing. Instead of directly engaging as a whole

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<sup>172</sup> Bacon-Smith, 1991; Bury, 2005; Kirby-Diaz, 2009; Jenkins, 2013

<sup>173</sup> 2006:140

community, they orbit the SJM novels in small groups that occasionally cross paths with one another.

Fandom in these less defined and more fluid communities becomes less about the group and more about the individual experiences. While fans can engage and interact together, they also can tailor their fandom experience based on who they follow or who they chose to interact with. Furthermore, the politics of validity and the way fans police each other to maintain the same beliefs push those who do not agree into a more individual reading of the text.

The three dynamics of networked publics that boyd<sup>174</sup> discussed are evident in Tumblr culture. The blurring of private and public<sup>175</sup> is represented by the politics of validity and the way fans are forced by the culture to disclose personal information in order to have an opinion. Collapsed context<sup>176</sup> relates to the lack of time stamps and how the openness of Tumblr means that old, outdated posts can be revived and read without an understanding of what context the post was created in, and can lead to unnecessary call-outs. The last dynamic she discusses, invisible audiences, I argue is one of the most influential aspects for the SJM fandom and Tumblr culture. boyd's invisible audiences are similar to Jenkins's lurkers,<sup>177</sup> in that they represent people who can see the posts but

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<sup>174</sup> 2010:10

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>177</sup> 2013:158

do not engage. The invisible audiences include more than just people who do not interact on a post however, they also include the endless potential of audience for each post.<sup>178</sup>

The fact that an SJM fandom specific post has endless potential audiences, who do not understand the context of the post, means that the fans often write them in a way that cannot be argued. I suggest that it is the presence of these invisible and potential audiences that encourages and reproduces Tumblr culture, specifically the aspect of the politics of validation. These invisible audiences help create the more rigid power structures of the SJM Tumblr fandom. Because fans do not know who and in what context people will read their posts, they preemptively disclose personal information so that others will feel shame in calling them out, reproducing this aspect of the culture, despite their dislike of it. Furthermore, the importance of the fandom having established and enforced beliefs is also related to these audiences. The openness and lack of context that Tumblr enables means that fans no longer support varying opinions and ideas. They debate not in the spirit of hearing other's opinions but in a way to shame people into following the accepted beliefs. I feel the fact that their fandom is not bound and can be seen by anyone on Tumblr means they use the policing of behavior to present a homogenous reading of the text.

Because of Tumblr culture's focus on feminism, diversity and progressive politics, and because on Tumblr fans have to directly engage with anti-fans or haters, they police their own fandom. I believe that this is so they are not vulnerable to call-outs or the demonization of SJM by the Tumblr community at large. The policing of behavior within the fandom is a way of protecting the community from the openness of Tumblr. The need

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<sup>178</sup> 2010:10

to police each other that fans and Tumblr users feel is born of the affordances of the site. The lack of established etiquette from the platform of Tumblr means that fans take it upon themselves to create the environment they feel they need, similar to Massanari's discussion of Reddit users creating their own site-wide code of conduct.<sup>179</sup> Although it was not used when analyzing how the fans use Tumblr, the Actor-Network theory provides a framework through which fandom, and Tumblr could be studied in the future as it more closely examines the structure of the site and how humans and technology interact.

The invisible and potential audiences, as well as the openness of Tumblr, make the once private act of self-reflection and meaning creation from the text a more public act. Sandvoss suggested that fans are looking for themselves in the external object of fandom and therefore make fandom a performance.<sup>180</sup> After observing the SJM fandom, I still assert that the creation of meaning is a private, self-reflective act, but the sharing of these meanings becomes a contest within the fandom. The SJM fans still derive their own meaning from the novels, but when they share their thoughts they have to provide evidence, both from the text and through the politics of validation. I do not feel that they are performing a certain meaning, but rather they have to be prepared to prove and fight for the meaning they found. It becomes a contest of who's meaning is the most 'valid,' 'feminist,' or least 'problematic,' and rather than fandom being a space for fans to share their interpretation, it becomes one where people have to justify their reflection of the novels to invisible and endless potential audiences.

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<sup>179</sup> 2015: 74

<sup>180</sup> 2005:97-99



The fandom still engages in fandom activities, such as fiction writing, content creation and fan theories. The community still supports each other through feedback on fiction and advice on different issues. It is still driven by interaction and community, but Tumblr as an open platform—a place for popular feminism and culture—defines the SJM fan community just as much as the novels of Sarah J Maas define it.

My last research question asked what could be learned from the shift of fan communities from closed to open sites. I initially thought that Tumblr and other open sites would create a more open and supportive atmosphere for the SJM fandom, as they allow for more participation from different voices and appear to dismantle the hierarchal power structures that were associated with the gatekeeping of fandoms that were on closed sites. While I only examined one fandom, on one site, I argue that the shift to open sites creates new power structures in place of the ones they were supposed to challenge, and the openness leads to endless invisible and potential audiences that fans must perform for. The new power structures and gatekeepers are created through influence rather than expertise. To build influence, key fans have to dedicate their time to writing fiction, answering questions, creating theories and writing meta posts. They also have to actively engage with other fans and posts in order to expand their influence and gain more authority. Perhaps this chance to gain influence and authority is one of the reasons why fans dedicate themselves to the fandom, this is something that could be researched in the future. This model, which does away with the central authority of the past, borrows from other corners of the internet, including Reddit<sup>181</sup> and Wikipedia.<sup>182</sup> This new model

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<sup>181</sup> Massanari, 2015

of authority coupled with the Tumblr fandom focus on progressivism and identity politics leaves open space for people to police others.

The fandoms discussed by Bacon-Smith,<sup>183</sup> Jenkins<sup>184</sup> and Bury<sup>185</sup> were varied and had different struggles, but ultimately they were places where people who enjoyed a media object could bond over that object in various ways. While these authors did not ignore the negatives of fandom, the primary source of tensions was related to those outside the fandom. Fans were able to bond over a cultural object and being stigmatized by non-fans and could create their own close-knit community. The fan groups were able to privately discuss and disagree, their thoughts and feelings were not public to those outside of the fandom. While slash writers or ‘Trekkies,’ might have been mocked for their fandom, they still found a supportive group, that they were clearly a member of. With the shift to open sites, fandom is no longer private. All of the interactions between the fans are visible to a wide and limitless audience. This has led to the fandom being a less supportive place. The SJM fandom is focused on increasing diverse representation within the novels but does not support diverse opinions within the fandom. Because Tumblr culture outside the fandom views certain ideals as important, the fandom polices its own behavior to fit in with those ideals, including various feminisms. With the shift from closed to open site, tension in fandom has shifted from something that is outside the

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<sup>182</sup> “The Authority of Wikipedia,” Goodwin, 2009

<sup>183</sup> 1991

<sup>184</sup> 2013

<sup>185</sup> 2005

fandom to something that is inside the fandom. There was in-fighting in fandoms before open sites, but now that in-fighting is public to witness and the impacts of it are visible on almost every SJM post, through the language that posters use to the way people interact with it. The in-fighting help build the new power structure. It allows fans to through their weight behind different interpretations of the books. If their side's argument is deemed the 'most correct,' they gain power and influence as a fan.

While the openness of Tumblr allows for more voices, experiences and populations to be heard it also means that there is freedom for anti-fans, trolls and haters to share their opinions and thoughts. The openness encourages users to censor others through policing of behaviors, which creates a rigid culture within an open site. These populations also use feminism within their critiques of the fans and novels. The invisible and endless potential audiences that come with open sites mean that the fandom is forced into the public. Especially on sites such as Tumblr, where there is no way to create a defined group, fandom posts can be taken out of context and used to demonize fans or fandoms. The anti-fans often suggest that SJM fans cannot truly be feminists because the books are inherently anti-feminist, and they write their own meta posts outlining why they think so. While I did not directly analyze how the antis define feminism, it appears that they believe Sarah J Maas as an author is a white feminist and therefore unable to write anything feminist. They also tend to call Maas and the SJM fans homophobic, racist and transphobic, as they feel the novels to do not feature inclusive discussions of these topics. These fans are engaging with their media object and community on a platform that is also used by people who have bonded over their hate for the same object. The existence of antis and haters on the same site as the fandom means that the fans have to

be prepared to defend their media object or learn to ignore trolls that interact on their posts. It is because of this forced and uneasy co-existence that fans police other fans behaviors and opinions, shame them into agreement and assert their validity through disclosing personal information. I feel that this aspect of the SJM fandom is a defense mechanism that users have developed because by using an open site they are open to attack from trolls and haters. The defensiveness and attempts to protect one's self impact how the fandom interacts as a whole. It leads them to censoring one another and policing behavior. It also lends credibility to the new power structures, as influence across the fandom carries more weight than any other form of expertise.

The shift to an open site and the way it forces fandom to be public makes community more fluid, creating tension within the fandom. The popular feminism used by the fans represents a tenet of their community and a way they challenge the books and regulate each other. The prevalence of feminism, and the stress the fans place on diversity are defining features of the SJM fandom. The influence of Tumblr is evident in how new power structures keep fans in line with established beliefs through policing behavior and censoring ideas. Tumblr as a site impacts the fans of SJM just as much as the novels do. The fandom is inherently connected to the platform and it influences their community and interactions.

### **Limitations**

This research was limited in that it only looked at one part on a fandom on one social site. Examining a multiplicity of fandom on different sites could expand the research. There are many different fandoms and many different social networks that they

use. Each one could show a diverse culture and results of the shift to an open site. Furthermore, more detailed demographic information could allow the researcher to compare how fans of different ages, genders and other identities engage in fandom on open site.

Additionally, this research was only a partial ethnographic study and textual analysis. A more complete ethnographic study would have included interviews with fans. In-depth interviews with the fans could provide more information on how they feel Tumblr as an open site has impacted their fandom and how they feel feminism is used within the fandom. Did the SJM fandom use Tumblr because of its established progressive ideals or were the fans influenced by those ideals once on Tumblr? Did fans have an understanding of feminism before joining the fandom? How did it change their view on feminism? Do they feel pressured to act a certain way within the Tumblr fandom? These questions and how interviewees answer them would provide more relevant information to the research questions.

## **Conclusions**

This ethnographic study and textual analysis of the SJM fandom on Tumblr adds to the growing literature on social network sites, their users and how they influence one another by examining how the shift to an open site impacts a fandom. This study offers examples of how the culture of Tumblr fandom shapes the community on the site and how the shift to an open site is changing fandom interactions. As social network sites become more prevalent the way they shape culture and society, including fandoms and how people are educated through social sites become more significant research.

Through various affordances and its own site culture, Tumblr influences the fans of SJM novels as much as the books themselves do. It has led to a different way that authority is created and asserted within the fandom. Rather than relying on a central, clearly defined authority figure, the fandom bases leadership on what fans has the most influence. Furthermore, authority is assessed based on both knowledge of the novels and feminism, which is displayed by disclosing personal information or experiences. Despite the openness of Tumblr as a site, it creates an unyielding form of authority through which fans are swayed to follow specific beliefs.

### **Future Research**

I believe the shift to open sites provides an interesting space for the future studies of fan studies. The shift to these open sites has influenced fandom in numerous different ways, opening up several different research opportunities, as discussed by Bury, Deller, Greenwood and Jones.<sup>186</sup> Researching the impact of the shift on different types of fandoms, and how the different sites create diverse cultures would greatly add to the literature on fan studies. Additionally, how people come to join fandoms on social sites and how they create a sense of belonging in an undefined community could be researched further.

The unique culture of Tumblr fandom, and how feminism is taught through popular culture did not fit into the scope of this thesis but could be studied to provide information on if and how the popular applications of feminism influence users. Beyond

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<sup>186</sup> Bury et. al, 2013

fandom, Actor-Network theory as discussed by Massanari<sup>187</sup> would provide an interesting framework to examine more closely how the site of Tumblr and those who use it impact and shape one another.

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<sup>187</sup> 2015: 74

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## APPENDIX A



The image shows a screenshot of a social media thread with three posts. The first post is by a user with a red and black profile picture, titled "A Theory, if you will." The second post is by a user with a green and blue profile picture. The third post is by a user with a blue and green profile picture. At the bottom of the thread, it says "95 notes" and has icons for reply, retweet, and like.

**A Theory, if you will.**

For those that have read both ToG and ACoTaR, I'm certain you know of the creatures created by Erawan that were able to cleave through Lorcan's shields. Does that remind you of anything? Say the constructs made by Hybern to attack Velaris? Based on that I'm sure that in some way, someone from one series went to the other. Who it was, I'm unsure. But I'm sure it happened.

Also, Fenrys, I believe it is has the power to winnow. Or at least, something like it, as he stated that it was like walking through the folds of the world. It was also stated that he was unsure of where it came from and that he couldn't summon an element, so that may offset that theory a bit.

OOH. I hadn't even thought of Fenrys being able to winnow, but for lack of a better term, that really is a good description what his power is. Just on a smaller scale than what we're used to seeing.

And I could totally see Erawan and the King of Hybern somehow being related (if not familiarly, than connected) in some way. I don't know if I want to jump straight to "Kybern has Valg powers", but I see the similarities and I'm intrigued.

@tacmc @rowaelinsmut @propshophannah @queen-archeron thoughts, ladies??

The theory I've thought about (that I do not support as I'm not into the crossover theory) is that Maeve founded Rhys' line somewhere in history (granted she isn't very motherly sooooo). Violet eyes, the similar powers etc.

Hybern used that spellbook that Amarantha stole from him to break the wards on Velaris and he used the Cauldron for most everything else we see from it. I don't think it touches on him having powers outside of those items but I could be wrong and it's been forever since I read ACOTAR.

But re: Fenrys and his winnowing, it's possible that if the TOG world "founded" the ACOTAR world, that the power would grow stronger as the lines progress. Just depends on who bred into what.

Granted I'm also thinking of a world being founded as humans would do it. It's possible it was also all magic cus, well, fantasy.

I am really hoping she keeps these worlds separate but there's too many little things that Sarah has said or done that make me feel like I'm going to be disappointed haha.

95 notes

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<sup>i</sup> Feminism is the idea that experiences and realities are shaped and impacted by gender. Feminist movements are dedicated to challenging norms that suggest genders should be treated differently. Historically feminist movements are described in three waves, representing different movements that all prescribe to feminist philosophy. In the United States the first wave in the late 1800s to the early 1900s established the right to vote for (white) women, after World War II the second wave broadened the conversations to include female workers, family and reproductive rights. The last wave, which some consider to be on-going, includes more of a focus on the various voices and outlooks that exist within feminist thought. There are various sub-waves and other names for describing parts of feminist history, but the scope of these goes beyond this thesis.

<sup>ii</sup> Despite being called “anonymous ask” and being displayed in a way that suggests a question, they do not actually require a question.