

HATERS, GATEKEEPERS, AND STANS: THE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON FANDOM AND THE ESTABLISHED ORDER

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In 2014, an aggressive harassment campaign now known as Gamergate briefly came to national attention when feminist media critic Anita Sarkeesian was forced to cancel a speaking event due to threats of mass violence. Sarkeesian's chief offense: a YouTube series in which she discussed sexist depictions of women in video games. Because self-identified Gamergaters could no longer pretend that games and gaming culture belonged only to them, they were forced to seek ways of de-legitimizing any attempted redistribution of power within their community as a way of protecting not only the community at large but also the specific, collective identity of the community members. Further complicating the shifting power dynamics is the belief that gaming culture itself exists outside the conventions of "normal" society—a narrative that is becoming more difficult to maintain with each new AAA title. Although the drastic measures taken by Gamergaters and the national attention they received make Gamergate an extreme example, similar patterns of behavior are seen across the entire spectrum of Internet-based fandoms, aided by the design of the social media sites on which these fandoms congregate. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of doxa, heterodoxy, and orthodoxy, this paper contextualizes Gamergate and other inter- and intra-fandom

clashes within the wider arena of modern-day digital rhetoric, and in doing so examines how social media plays a part in creating an atmosphere in which these kinds of hyper-aggressive behaviors are seen as acceptable, normal, appropriate, and even noble reactions when the established order of a community is questioned and challenged.

Establishing Doxa

In Pierre Bourdieu's theory of doxa, heterodoxy, and orthodoxy, *doxa* represents "the established cosmological and political order" of a given society or community, where said order is "perceived not as arbitrary, i.e. as one possible order among others, but as a self-evident and natural order which goes without saying and therefore goes unquestioned" (Bourdieu 166). Both parts of the definition are critical: a doxa is successful precisely because the members of the community perceive it and take it for granted as a normal, unremarkable part of the natural order of the world. In other words, the community works the way it does because—ostensibly—there simply is no other conceivable way for it to work. The hierarchy of groups within the community and the kinds of ideas that are permitted in or forbidden from public discourse go unquestioned, unexamined, and even

unacknowledged. It “goes without saying because it comes without saying,” meaning the established order is so self-evident that there is no need to even point it out because that would imply the possibility of some other order that could be established (167). In this way, community members accept the status quo without pause because they are “unaware of the very question of legitimacy, and hence from conflict between groups claiming to possess it” (168).

These hierarchies and established orders exist just as much within Internet-based fandom communities as they do offline. In the past, fans congregated online through message boards, mailing lists, chat rooms, and websites such as FanFiction.Net and LiveJournal, but in the modern age of social media, fandom epicenters are increasingly found on Tumblr, Twitter, and Facebook, whose socially oriented designs make it effortless for large groups of people to share and discuss information, news, fanworks, and commentary. As a result, participating in fandom is easier than it ever has been. Unfortunately, the danger of these social media sites is that their unique functionalities can easily lead to skewed perceptions and the unquestioning obedience to doxa that was originally described by Bourdieu in 1977.

First, many of the most popular social media sites are built around the feed—also known as the dashboard on Tumblr, the timeline on Twitter, and so on—which is displayed immediately upon logging in and which consists of everything that has been posted or re-posted by the people in a user’s network of friends. What is noteworthy about the formation of these networks is that users tend to “use technological tools to look

for and identify people who are similar to themselves,” meaning their feeds are more likely than not to demonstrate homophily (Brummette et al. 503). Homophily—i.e., a community of like-minded individuals—is not inherently harmful, but on social media it is easily taken to a dangerous extreme. Once a social network is formed on one of these sites, the feed/dashboard/timeline offers an effortless method through which to share information to a potentially large number of people in a short amount of time, leading to a kind of hyper-homophily or echo chamber. Whether a user is reblogging something on Tumblr, retweeting something on Twitter, or sharing something on Facebook, the mere click of a button will instantly spread that content to everyone who “follows” or is “friends” with the user. Those followers or friends can then reblog, retweet, or share that same content just as easily, passing it on to another web of users, and so on, and so on, so that a single piece of information can spread to dozens, hundreds, or thousands of users depending on the popularity of the individuals involved. Additionally, because people generally tend to seek news outlets that confirm rather than oppose or question their beliefs, the content that is being shared so rapidly and with such far reach is probably adding more of the same into an already homophilous space (Wojcieszak 531).

Just as important as the speed at which content travels is the fact that this content can be paired with commentary that then travels along with it. For instance, if User A adds a comment to a link before sharing it, everyone who sees the link from A will now also see that commentary—and if any of *those* users share the link, A’s commentary

will continue to travel with it. This can have a drastic effect on how the content is then read and interpreted by subsequent groups of users. If, for instance, A's commentary is an inaccurate or unrepresentative critique of the article on the other side of the link, users who only see A's commentary and do not read the article itself will have an inaccurate understanding of what they are seeing and possibly even sharing. On top of this, most social media sites provide users with some kind of option for blocking content they deem unforgivably offensive or undesirable. On Tumblr and Twitter, for instance, users can "mute" key words, terms, or names, which means any content containing those words will be hidden from the user's dashboard or timeline.

The result of these two functionalities is a highly curated feed/dashboard/timeline experience in which selective information is disseminated rapidly while undesirable information is weeded out. This leads to "the development of echo chambers, which occur when inaccurate information is delivered to users through algorithms and cognitive systems that reinforce their current beliefs and ideologies" (Brummette et al. 503). Though members of an online community may interact with each other in harmony thanks to their similar ideologies, their perceptions of and feelings towards people outside of their community can become dangerously skewed due to the lack of exposure to conflicting ideas. One such symptom of skewed perception is false consensus: the erroneous tendency to believe that one's views are shared by the majority. Thus, while a particular idea may in fact be shared by other members within a specific community, this commonality might

not be reflected in larger cultural, societal, or geographical contexts. For instance, in a study that examined the extent to which a group of neo-Nazis' tendency towards false consensus was influenced by various factors both on and offline, Magdalena Wojcieszak found that participation in homophilous online spaces influenced false consensus so strongly that it completely mitigated any positive effects that came from interacting with dissimilar views offline and through divergent sources of news media (538-539). Another symptom of skewed perception is biased assimilation: the tendency to interpret information as supportive of one's beliefs even if this is not necessarily the case. Dandekar et al. found that while homophily alone is not enough to cause polarization, homophily combined with biased assimilation is sufficient to do the job (5796). This is most likely because, as the name implies, the information being examined is *assimilated* into the person's existing worldview; that is, rather than changing the worldview to fit the new information, the information is changed to fit the person's biases. In Bourdieu's words, biased assimilation makes "the world conform to the myth" (167). In this way, two people with completely different political leanings can read the same piece of information, and both can conclude that the information supports their respective ideas (Dandekar et al. 5791).

In summary, constant exposure to extremely limited views quickly leads to false consensus and biased assimilation, warping community members' perception of reality and logic to the point that they can no longer think clearly about the larger culture or society beyond their community. In the

minds of these community members, any rational person would agree with the beliefs of the community at large, and anyone who does not must necessarily be gullible, ignorant, bigoted, or perhaps just trolling.

This is the context in which the doxa of a community takes shape. As a community forms and evolves, the members' commonly held beliefs are increasingly seen as normal, appropriate, and natural—i.e., they become “that which is taken for granted” (Bourdieu 166). At the same time, anything that does not fit the community's beliefs can be filtered out, thereby removing it entirely from the community's narrative so that what remains appears even more natural. These community narratives are able to inspire unquestioned acceptance “only by producing misrecognition of the limits of the cognition that they make possible”; in other words, they necessarily hide their own arbitrariness and limitations so that community members will not even know to ask what else is possible (164). The collective experience of the community, then, is superimposed over the experience of the average person in *any* community, further distorting the members' perception. In short, the narrative of the community comes to represent “what goes without saying,” i.e. what is perceived as natural and rational, as well as “what cannot be said for lack of an available discourse,” i.e. what members are not even cognizant of leaving out (170). All of this can occur across an entire fandom, or it can create insulated pockets within fandoms, e.g., sub-fandoms that rally around a particular character or ship.

Gamergate once again offers an example of how these phenomena can take place within and around fandom. Dan Golding

notes that in the early days of video gaming, the “technology was found mostly in masculine cultures,” so video games “accordingly developed a limited, inwards-looking perception of the world” that “became deeply bound up in assumptions and performances of gender and sexuality.” These perceptions included who should and who should not have access to games, who should and who should not have a say in the creation of games, and who should and who should not be qualified to speak from a place of expertise about games. The answer to all of these questions, predictably, was young, white, straight, cisgender, alienated men and boys. Despite the fact that the market has steadily been changing, “the gamer identity remained fairly uniformly stagnant and immobile” because it “was simply not fluid enough to apply to a broad spectrum of people.” Those people did exist, though, and they wanted to stake their own claim to the gamer identity.

Introducing Heterodoxy

If doxa is “a state in which the prevailing classificatory system,” that is, the classification of one particular group as superior or dominant to all others, “encounters no rival or antagonistic principle,” then *heterodoxy* is the change to this taken-for-granted classificatory system that occurs when a rival finally does appear (Bourdieu 164). This questioning of the natural order can be brought about in one of two ways: through “culture contact,” the exposure to a different community with a different established order, or through “the political and economic crises correlative with class division” (168). In other words,

when a doxa relies on dividing and ranking people into different classes that are then afforded different rights or privileges, political or economic crisis is an almost guaranteed eventuality as disenfranchised groups come to realize not only that the established order is unfair but, more importantly, that it can be replaced. Once the new group presents its case—or, perhaps more accurately, makes its grab—for power within the community, then “the social world loses its character as a natural phenomenon,” and the previously dominant group can no longer pretend that there is no other way for the community to operate because the new group has clearly demonstrated that, in fact, there is (169). The result is that the two groups must now compete for capital in an effort to establish a new hierarchy.

In the case of Gamergate, the catalyst for this heterodoxy was the 2013 release of indie game developer Zoe Quinn’s *Depression Quest*, a text-based video game based on Quinn’s personal experience with depression. *Depression Quest* received generally favorable reviews, including one from the popular website Kotaku, but shortly thereafter, Quinn’s ex-boyfriend Eron Gjoni published a series of invasively detailed blog posts in which he revealed personal information about Quinn, posted screenshots of conversations they had had online and via text, and, most damningly, accused Quinn of having an affair with Kotaku writer Nathan Grayson in order to elicit a positive review for *Depression Quest* (VanDerWerff). Though an investigation by Kotaku would later reveal that Gjoni’s allegations were false, the initial news spread too rapidly to be contained. Incensed

gamers, many of whom would go on to call themselves Gamergaters after Alec Baldwin’s coining of the hashtag #GamerGate, took to harassing Quinn in the name of “ethics in game journalism” (VanDerWerff).

Meanwhile, feminist media critic Anita Sarkeesian had already been facing harassment for her YouTube series *Tropes vs. Women in Video Games*. When she posted a new installment within days of Gjoni’s blog post about Quinn, Gamergaters latched on to Sarkeesian and began attacking her with as much fervor as they had been attacking Quinn. Sarkeesian, Quinn, and other journalists and celebrities who spoke in their defense—the majority of which were women since most of the men who spoke out against Gamergate were, tellingly, spared—had their personal information posted online and were subjected to constant, graphic threats of violence, rape, and murder (VanDerWerff). Sarkeesian was even forced to cancel a speaking event at Utah State University after the school received an anonymously written letter threatening mass violence against not only Sarkeesian but also the audience of the event, the students of the school, and the staff of a nearby women’s shelter (“‘Montreal Massacre’ threat”).

Ostensibly, the point of all of this was to bring attention to the “corruption” that was taking place in the gaming community, with women like Quinn allegedly trading sex for favorable reviews—though, again, this was proven to be false—while other critics and journalists tried to undermine video games and game fans by cherry-picking evidence against them (Johnston). Although Gamergaters shielded themselves behind the oft-repeated rallying cry of “ethics in game

journalism,” what they actually succeeded in drawing attention to was “the profound irony that one woman who dared point out some of the misogyny in video games was so deluged by misogynistic threats over how there is no misogyny in video games that she was driven into hiding” (Johnston).

So, what happened? If Gamergaters were as concerned with ethics as they claimed to be, how did their “movement” devolve so quickly and so shamelessly into rampant abuse? In an examination of 4chan, the social media site where Gamergate first began, Erika Sparby sheds light on how the format of the website and the interactions that take place there affect the behavior of its users. 4chan is markedly different from more mainstream social media sites in two major ways: first, its boards are entirely anonymous, and second, its users seem to pride themselves on the website’s notorious reputation as “the Internet Hate Machine” and “the Rude, Raunchy, Underbelly of the Internet” that serves as home base for users who “depict themselves as outsiders lacking a social conscience” (87). Sparby speculates that this anonymity may in fact be partially or largely responsible for the users’ behavior: “Despite, or perhaps even because of, an absence of individual identities or a tool that allows individuals to connect or communicate privately,” 4chan users have developed “a paradoxically monolithic, stable collective identity that follows certain norms and patterns of behavior” (87). This can be seen, for example, in the way users refer to themselves in the singular third person—e.g., “4chan does this”—as if they are no more than mouthpieces for the website itself. Because of this collective identity, “any individual action conforms so

strongly to the expectations of the collective that it can be indistinguishable from other individual actions” (87).

Essentially, the members of this community have become “influenced by the interface’s technological design, ethos, and collective identity” in such a way that they act almost exclusively via “memetic recapitulation of how other users have historically behaved” and of “what they think is the appropriate way to act” within the boundaries of the community (86). Sparby’s reference to “memetic recapitulation” echoes what Bourdieu describes as “mimetic representation,” which he defines as “acts and symbols that are intended to contribute to the reproduction of nature and to the group by the analogical reproduction of natural processes” (Bourdieu 167). In other words, by carrying out these behavioral responses, community members are participating in the self-replicating process necessary for the maintenance of doxa as that which is taken for granted. In the view of the community, members act out these behaviors because they are normal, but the reality is that the behaviors are “normal” precisely because they have been so comprehensively adopted by the community.

Although 4chan’s unique design makes it an unusually effective breeding ground for these behaviors, memetic recapitulation/mimetic representation happen all across social media and, indeed, within individual fandoms and sub-fandoms. In this kind of environment, ideology becomes increasingly and inextricably conflated with identity. People become so devoted to and preoccupied with their ideals, beliefs, and even interests that those things come to be

perceived as omnipresent, essential parts of the community members' personalities. Members are not merely part of the community; the community is part of *them*.

A recent example of this phenomenon on social media is the debate that sprung up around lifestyle consultant Marie Kondo, who has suggested that people who own too many books they never read can simply tear out their favorite pages and get rid of the rest. When this news went viral, book-lovers across social media reacted with bewilderment, indignation, and outrage as Kondo's suggestions were interpreted and internalized as a personal attack. In fandom specifically, similar behavior is acted out in the form of ship wars, scathing responses to "hot takes" or unpopular commentary, and verbal violence directed at members of rival fandoms. Fans of mega-popular K-pop group BTS, for instance, have earned a reputation for being overzealous to the point of verbally attacking other groups whose members "disrespect" BTS. The conflation of interest and identity even seeps into the slang that develops within fandom as fans seek and create new ways to conceptualize the experience of being a fan; when they describe themselves as "stans," or when they use hyperbolic words such as "queen" or familial phrases such as "hot dad" or "trash son" to describe their favorite characters or actors, they are signifying a personal, intimate connection to the source material.

When ideology and identity become intertwined in this way, it is easy for community members to feel threatened by anything that calls into question the goodness or legitimacy of the community itself. Any attack on the ideals of the community is thus seen as an attack on the

self, and in the face of such an attack, "a person will refuse to consider alternatives that he feels are threatening" because of "a need to preserve the stability of his image" (Young et al. 96). In other words, new ideas—like Sarkeesian's critiques—are seen not as an invitation to discourse but as an arguments both figurative and literal, and the only appropriate response is to defend and counter. Thus, when someone feels they are under attack, they are more likely to misinterpret and misrepresent the ideas they do not outright reject and are less likely to act with a sincere, good-faith effort to reach a mutually beneficial conclusion. Intensifying all of this is what Barbara Couture explains as the human need to rebel or resist. As she explains, in a culture where resisting, fighting the good fight, and taking down the Goliath are seen as acts that give life meaning, resistance is "*the* force that both carves out a person's identity and protects that identity from dissolution. Individual agency *is* the power to resist" (33, emphasis in original). All of this is as true on social media as it is offline, and in fact, arguments—or sites of resistance—are much easier to engage in online, where all one has to do is click the "Comment" or "Reply" link and type whatever comes to mind. There is no threat of physical danger, and if the argument goes awry, one or more of the people involved can simply disengage by no longer responding or by blocking the other person(s) involved.

This weaving-together of ideology and identity then creates an irresistible "us vs. them" mentality throughout the community. Because people who agree with the beliefs of the community are seen as more trustworthy, any argument that fits within

the community's narrative is less likely to be examined critically or fact-checked and is more likely to be framed in a positive light as it is spread throughout the community. Conversely, anyone with an "opposing" view—because, of course, in an "us vs. them" mentality there are no shades of grey, only black and white—is immediately cast as an outsider whose arguments are more likely to be attacked outright, held up to intense scrutiny, and misrepresented in a negative fashion when being shared. In the established order of the doxa, one group enjoyed unchallenged and unquestioned power; in a heterodoxy all involved groups must fight to seize any power they can, and actions such as call-outs or clap-backs become a form of self-defense.

In the case of Gamergate, then, the opposing forces of the heterodoxy, at least as they were framed by the Gamergaters themselves, were gamers in one corner—a group of mostly straight, white men and boys who believed they had some exclusive right to video games and video game culture—and the "SJW"s and "corrupt journalists" in the other corner, groups made up of marginalized or simply open-minded people who believed that video games and gaming culture should be open to all who wish to participate. In an article written in the thick of the controversy, Leigh Alexander discusses how straight, white, male gamers came to occupy this position and what they felt they had to lose. She explains that after video games as a product were discovered by "outcast pioneers," those pioneers turned to "a generation of lonely basement kids" who suddenly "had marketers whispering in their ears that they were the most important commercial

demographic of all time." In the decades that have passed since that era, however, the market has slowly but surely changed. Video games are no longer nothing more than packages of "high-octane masculinity" targeted exclusively to pimply teenage boys; instead, games are part of "a rapidly-evolving, increasingly broad and complex medium" that year after year continues to pull in consumers from a wider range of demographic categories. For those men and boys who grew up believing that their identities depend on their personal connection to games and their alienation from the rest of society, Alexander admits that it can be difficult and truly painful for them to realize that "they don't own anything, anymore, that they aren't the world's most special-est consumer demographic, that they have to share."

Liberal critiques of video games from people like Sarkeesian, then, are interpreted not as an attempt to highlight issues in games and the gaming community but as an attack on the very idea of what it means to be a gamer. On one hand, by attempting to carve out a space for themselves as a new potential demographic, women would be erasing the traditional gamer's position as the "most special" demographic to which every blockbuster studio catering. On the other hand, if women and other kinds of players were allowed "in," traditional gamers would be forced to let go of the fantasy of the ostracized gamer, the nerd operating on the outskirts of normal society, an "identity based on difference and separateness" that originally "was constructed in order to define and unite the group" in the early days of gaming culture, when playing video games really was an

unusual way to spend one's free time (Golding). The myth of geek masculinity and the accompanying archetype of the gatekeeping nerd, whose safe haven of video games, comic books, and scifi provides an escape from the cruel "real" world of bullies and disinterested girls, would have to go if gamers were forced to admit that nothing about geek culture, from *Call of Duty* to *The Avengers* to *Star Trek*—all examples of "geek" franchises that are massively popular—is anything less than mainstream.

Faced with this heterodoxy, it is easy to see why Gamergaters felt threatened. "The gamer as an identity feels like it is under assault," Golding wrote when the controversy was still in its early stages, "and so it should. [Gamers] have astutely, and correctly identified what is going on here. Their toys are being taken away, and their treehouses are being boarded up." In their minds, they had no choice but to fight back. Their very identities depended on it.

Maintaining Orthodoxy

Once heterodoxy has been established, the once-unquestioned doxa is gone forever. Doxa relies on the perception of what is "natural," the self-evident and self-replicating acceptance of the status quo, and a naive acceptance that comes from community members who do not know what they do not know. Once the blind ignorance and acceptance have been tossed aside and another group has proven that there *is* another way to live, the only remaining option for the dominant group is to establish *orthodoxy*. Orthodoxy seeks to restore "the primal state of innocence of doxa," yet it "exists only in the objective relationships

which opposes it to heterodoxy, that is, by reference to the choice ... made possible by the existence of *competing possibles*" (Bourdieu 169, emphasis in original). In other words, because orthodoxy is created as a direct response to heterodoxy, it can no longer deny at least the possibility of other orders. Because doxa relies so heavily on blissful ignorance, orthodoxy is then a "necessarily imperfect substitute" that will never entirely succeed in restoring the naive acceptance of doxa (169). Thus, in order for the dominant group to maintain its position in the hierarchy despite its inability to ignore competing groups, it must instead find ways to de-legitimize them by "reject[ing their] heretical remarks as blasphemies" (169).

Because of the total or partial anonymity afforded by the Internet, the attacking and de-legitimizing of opposing views can quickly become vicious. In Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca's discussion of "presence"—e.g., the idea that the person, value, or topic being discussed must be present in the mind of the audience in order to be meaningful—the authors write, "The individual whom one is ready to sacrifice to the system is not only unreal *de jure* because he has lost his ontological status," that is, has been dehumanized, "but also *de facto* because he is not present" (140). This is often the case when engagements occur online: the person on the other end of the connection is not "present" or "real," and so they may be "sacrificed to the system." This willingness to "sacrifice"—or, in other words, harass in order to prove a point—can occur on the level of the individual, where one person uses these and other unsavory tactics while engaging with another person, and it can also happen on the level of the

community, with one or more people using these and other tactics to attack, discredit, misrepresent, or in other ways de-legitimize an entire rivaling community.

The anonymity of the person *perpetrating* the abuse plays perhaps an even more important role. Different social media sites offer and require different levels of transparency in creating an online persona: on Facebook, users are required to use their real names; on sites like Twitter, users have handles or screennames that are displayed alongside a “display name,” which *can* be the user’s real name, but this is not required; on Tumblr, only a user’s handle or screenname is used in most contexts; and then there are sites like 4chan where, as previously discussed, users are completely anonymous. Regardless of how much information is revealed or hidden about the person on the other side of the connection, because that person is not truly present, they are not truly “real” in the mind of the arguer, and this perceived lack of personhood makes them that much easier—that much more acceptable—to belittle, attack, harass, threaten, humiliate, and mischaracterize. As Sparby explains, Internet users who have the option of posting anonymously are “more likely to engage in cyberbullying or trolling because such behaviors cannot be linked to their real-world identities; they can say and do as they please while experiencing virtually no repercussions” (86).

Joseph Reagle adds that when people engage in discussion online, they tend to experience heightened levels of deindividuation, or “a loss of sense of self and social norms,” as well as disinhibition (94). These effects work in concert so that people posting online are much more likely

to do or say things they know are not acceptable within the normal boundaries of society. Reagle also draws on several scientific studies that examined how people’s behaviors changed when they dressed like a specific kind of person; all of the studies concluded that people tend to change their behavior to reflect what they think is appropriate for the kind of person they are dressed as. People wearing KKK-like hoods, for instance, acted more aggressive, while people dressed as nurses acted more gentle, and people dressed as police acted more authoritative (97). Calling this behavior depersonalization, or “a shift from a sense of self towards a group and its norms,” Reagle posits that when people post anonymous comments online, they experience depersonalization as they take on behavior that reflects their idea of mean-spirited Internet trolls (97).

The result of this kind of communication is, once again, an echo chamber, this time of a different sort: one where insults, misrepresentations, and gross generalizations are tossed endlessly back and forth, where no lessons are being taught or learned, and nothing has changed.

Conclusion

“Crisis is a necessary condition for a questioning of doxa,” Bourdieu wrote, “but is not in itself a sufficient condition for the production of a critical discourse” (169). Indeed, for productive critical discourse to occur, all involved parties must be willing to make a sincere, good-faith effort towards coming to understand the other groups against which they are situated. Right now, with Gamergate five years in the past but

with its effects still lingering in countless forum posts, comment sections, and Twitter threads, it is clear that for people who still cling to the identity of the traditional gamer, “what is actually going on is an attempt to retain hegemony.” Dan Golding urges readers to “make no mistake: this is the exertion of power in the name of (male) gamer orthodoxy,” yet he also notes that theirs is “an orthodoxy that has already begun to disappear” (parentheses in original). As more and more blockbuster studios work towards inclusivity and social justice, and as more and more people from varying demographic categories continue to play games and participate in other kinds of fannish activity, the climate will slowly but surely change for the better. As for fandom at large, and digital rhetoric in general, the future is not so clear. Homophily and the dangers it presents when combined with the unique circumstances of modern social media will likely remain in place for a very long time. For most Internet users and members of fandom, the best they can do is reject “the definition of the real that is imposed on them” from dominating groups (Bourdieu 169) and continue to question all claims to exclusive legitimacy, even—perhaps especially—those claims that seem most agreeable on first glance.

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