

# **Laugh Out Loud In Real Life: Women's Humor and Fan Identity**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

The emerging field of fan studies has, until recently, been defined only by the research that has taken place within it. Almost universally, this research focuses on self-identified fans. However, scholars are beginning to examine and debate what the limits of the field should be. This study argues that self-identified fans are not the only group that ought to be examined under the heading of fan studies. It also highlights the fact that humor is rarely discussed in fan studies, and argues that this is a major lacuna.

In order to accomplish these goals, this study turns to three examples. The first example is an online discussion community for the *Twilight* novels, Twatlight, which does not define itself as a fan community but nevertheless exhibits all the characteristics of a fan community and is in conversation with self-identified fan communities. The second example is humorous images produced by the Twatlight community, which use jokes to make serious arguments about the *Twilight* books. The third example is humorous fan vids produced within the mainstream media fandom vidding community; fan vids have been traditionally treated by fan studies as purely melodramatic artworks. The study concludes that fan studies should define itself as the study of people who are affectively engaged with texts in the context of critical communities.

Thesis Supervisor: Henry Jenkins III

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# Table of Contents.

<b>Introduction.</b>	<b>6</b>
I. Early ideas about fans.	6
II. Re-examining fans.	8
<b>Chapter 1. Fans, non-fans, anti-fans, and lolfans.</b>	<b>10</b>
I. Twatlight.	12
II. Twatlight's positioning.	18
III. Lolfans.	23
<b>Chapter 2. Macros &amp; Medusa.</b>	<b>24</b>
I. Macros on Twatlight.	26
II. "You gonna get loved tenderly."	27
III. "Why don't you have a seat over there, Quil."	33
<b>Chapter 3. Funny fan vids.</b>	<b>39</b>
I. Vidding.	39
II. Comparison: macros and vidding.	42
III. "Star Trek Dance Floor."	45
IV. "It Depends on What You Pay" & "Don't Cha."	49
<b>Chapter 4. The invisible and the risible.</b>	<b>57</b>
I. Women fans.	57
II. Resistant women fans.	60
III. Funny women.	65

IV. Funny fans.	69
<b>Conclusions.</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>Glossary.</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>Appendix: A summary of the Twilight series.</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>References.</b>	<b>83</b>

# Introduction.

Who is a fan?

We use the word “fan” easily, assuming that everyone knows what we mean. “He’s a total *Trek* fan,” we say. “Yeah, I’m a fan of Lady Gaga.” “Stop fangirling Habermas!” “I can’t stand the way *Twilight* fans took over Comic-con this year.” But what *do* we mean? How do we know who a fan is? When we seek to study fans, whom are we studying?

## I. Early ideas about fans.

In early works that might be classified as belonging to the field of fan studies, “fans” were constructed loosely, elliptically. Rather than attempting to define the term “fan,” scholars simply focused on particularly intense audiences. They thereby sketched an outline of what would, in future, be considered “fans,” perhaps without intending to.

*Watching Dallas*, by Ien Ang, might be considered the first work of fan studies. Yet it rarely (if ever) uses the term “fan.” Ang’s study consisted of analyzing letters written in response to the following advertisement in a Dutch women’s magazine:

I like watching the TV serial Dallas, but often get odd reactions to it. Would anyone like to write and tell me why you like watching it too, or dislike it? I should like to assimilate these reactions in my university thesis. Please write to...<sup>1</sup>

Ang’s query did not specifically demand people who felt one way or another about *Dallas*; rather, it sought participation from anyone with a strong opinion. She discovered that there were many

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<sup>1</sup> Ang, *Watching Dallas*, 10.

people who had strong opinions - and that those opinions were not purely “*Dallas* is a wonderful show” or “*Dallas* is horrible trash.” The people who responded to her survey all had affective relationships to *Dallas*, but they did not all love it - or hate it.

Henry Jenkins’ *Textual Poachers*, after a gap of some years, dealt with a rather different group of people. While Ang’s work focused on individuals that were not necessarily organized into *Dallas* fan clubs or discussion groups, Jenkins looked specifically at the subculture of “media fandom.” Yet Jenkins also found, and explicitly discussed, the fact that “the fans’ response typically involves not simply fascination or adoration but also frustration and antagonism.”<sup>2</sup> Throughout *Textual Poachers*, he highlights fans’ criticism of and discontent with their favorite texts, even as he defines them by the love of those texts. Unlike Ang, he does not hear from people who find certain texts *primarily* frustrating; those people would be unlikely to come to fan conventions! However, like Ang, he does not privilege positive reactions to texts over negative ones.

While Ang’s and Jenkins’ works continue to be widely read, some aspects have fallen out of discussion. Studies of fans have tended to focus on established communities of people devoted to discussing a particular text in a generally positive light. While their discussions and cultural productions are still viewed as potentially “resistant,” potentially subverting the initial or intended message of the original texts, they do not typically take the same radical stance as Ang’s work and embrace those who have deeply conflicted views about the text itself as well - even those who might not *identify* themselves as fans, but who *behave* in ways that are very like fans of the same text. For

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<sup>2</sup> Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 23.

example, in *Fan Cultures*, Matt Hills declines to define the term “fan.”<sup>3</sup> However, he privileges the idea that people who are fans *claim a fan identity*, and throughout his book assumes that the natural object of fan studies is, of course, self-identified fans. Cornell Sandvoss, who also expresses uneasiness with the definition of “fans,” describes the regular, repeated consumption of a text as an “affection,” and while his definition of “fandom as the regular, emotionally involved consumption of a given popular narrative or text” seems to include emotional involvements that are not purely positive, the rest of *Fans* does not explore the possibility of frustrations and animosities towards a given text.<sup>4</sup>

## II. Re-examining fans.

In this thesis, I hope to explore some of the ways that scholars have complicated the simple category of “fan,” and propose further complications of my own. I am interested in who is included, and who is left out, of a field that calls itself fan studies. In chapter one, I will reference a *Twilight* discussion community to show that there are groups of people who do not define themselves as fans - yet who are clearly in conversation with mainstream fan culture. In chapter two, I will explore fan-created macros to show that even as humor complicates fandom, it can serve as a vehicle for serious arguments and critiques of texts. In chapter three, I will prove that the fan vidding community - a well established subject of fan studies - has a humorous tradition, while emphasizing the frustrations that fan vidders communicate through their vids. Finally, in chapter four, I will

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<sup>3</sup> Hills, *Fan Cultures*, xii.

<sup>4</sup> Sandvoss, *Fans*, 8.



examine the root reasons why conflicted attitudes towards source texts in general, and fans' humor about themselves and their source texts in particular, have been so roundly ignored by the academy. Ultimately, I will argue that as a field, fan studies needs to examine more than just self-identified fans.

## Chapter 1. Fans, non-fans, anti-fans, and lolfans.

Why should a field that refers to itself as *fan* studies look at people who do not define themselves as fans? Jonathan Gray provides a compelling account in “New Audiences, New Textualities.” He introduces the term “anti-fan” with the observation that “anti-fans and non-fans could provide a lengthy and impressive in-depth analysis of *The Simpsons*. This commentary differed from their fan counterpart, and thus clearly was not ‘borrowed’ from the fan.”<sup>5</sup> By “anti-fan,” he means people who dislike a particular text, whether they have consumed it regularly or not; by “non-fan,” he means people who are indifferent to a text but still occasionally (or even frequently) consume it. He argues that “textuality shifts according to viewer engagement level, and it is therefore not possible to read an anti-fan’s or non-fan’s text off a fan’s.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, studying anti-fans and non-fans can potentially teach us a great deal about how texts are received. *Textual Poachers* made claims about active audiences by looking at fans; now, Gray suggests, we might make other claims by looking at anti-fans and their peculiar ways of viewing texts.<sup>7</sup>

Gray’s call has been taken up by other authors. In “We Hardly Watch That Rude, Crude Show” and “The Other Side of Fandom,” Diane Alter explores the relationship of class to disliking certain texts, arguing in part that choosing to dismiss and denigrate a text can be a performance of class positioning. In *Beyond the Box*, Sharon Russ cites another of Jonathan Gray’s works - which explores antifandom on the *Television Without Pity* forums - to highlight the fact that fans and

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<sup>5</sup> Gray, “New Audiences, New Textualities,” 65.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> He goes on to do so in another article, “Antifandom and the Moral Text.”

anti-fans both interact with TV producers. In “Untidy,” Melissa Click explores the changing relationship of Martha Stewart viewers of all stripes over the course of the ImClone scandal.

Jonathan Gray and authors that follow him envision a text and its readers as an atom, with the close reader in the nucleus, the fan as the proton, and the anti-fan and non-fan as the electron.<sup>8</sup> When it was first proposed, it allowed for necessary critique of media and cultural studies’ narrow focus on fans. However, it is now being taken up in wider use – it pops up in fans’ own discourses on occasion, for instance. Does this model accurately depict the landscape of audiences? If it does not, is it still useful as a tool to think with, despite its flaws?

When I began posing these questions to myself, several possible challenges to the fan/anti-fan/non-fan schema came to mind. As a long-time *Harry Potter* and *The X-files* fan, or rather as an acafan, I have often observed fellow self-identified fans express extreme negative opinions about the texts they simultaneously claim to love. Often, these contradictory statements take place over time as a series of texts continues: the person who loved *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* may hate *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince*. Furthermore, I have encountered many people who self-identify neither as fans nor as anti-fans, and yet who engage with particular texts far too consistently and intensely to be slotted into the category of non-fan. How can these people be accounted for within the tripartite logic of fan/anti-fan/non-fan? Is there some reason why these people are significant, or are they merely natural outliers?

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<sup>8</sup> Gray, “New Audiences, New Textualities,” 68-76. The notable exception is Melissa Click, who complicates this model but does not do so explicitly.

## I. Twatlight.

In order to answer these questions, I decided to delve into a site that seemed potentially problematic to the fan/anti-fan/non-fan division. After casting around online for potential research sites, I discovered [Twatlight](#), a site founded for discussion of *Twilight*.<sup>9</sup> *Twilight* and its sequels are teen vampire romances written by Stephenie Meyer; they have spawned a large and enthusiastic fan culture.<sup>10</sup> Twatlight - as might be gleaned from the name - is *not* intended as a site for veneration of the *Twilight* books. Yet it is affiliated with [Lion & Lamb](#), a very large *Twilight* fan site. As if that were not contradictory enough, it is also affiliated with [Twilight Sucks](#) and [I Hate Twilight](#), sites whose relationship to the *Twilight* novels is quite adversarial. I found these facts intriguing, and soon found myself embarking on a nine-month study of Twatlight, including participant observation, textual analysis, and interviews with participants.<sup>11</sup>

Twatlight is a challenging site to study. It has over 6,000 members at the time of this writing, with perhaps 1,000 members contributing actively each week. The members call themselves “twats.” According to extensive, if non-scientific, internal polling, most members are white, female, and middle-class, although some of the most active members are people of color. They are typically from the United States, Canada, Britain or Australia, and all speak English with

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<sup>9</sup> Twatlight is also often referred to as “ONTD Twatlight” - the “ONTD” standing for “Oh No They Didn’t.” However, in casual conversation the “ONTD” is typically dropped, and I have preserved that convention in the body of my thesis.

<sup>10</sup> See the appendix for a short summary of the *Twilight* novels.

<sup>11</sup> Upon looking into it, I learned that Twatlight’s relationship with Lion & Lamb is not nearly as straightforward as simple “affiliation” might suggest: one of Twatlight’s moderators is friends with a Lion & Lamb moderator, but most members of Lion & Lamb loathe Twatlight. Similarly, Twatlight mods sometimes add sites to their affiliates list merely to antagonize them. These nuances, however, are not immediately clear to an observer.

fluency. Twats range in age from early teens to mid-forties, and most (though not all) are college students, graduate students, or professionals. They produce literally thousands of posts and comments a day, discussing not only *Twilight* but also every other aspect of their lives. Often, they illustrate these posts with pictures, animations, and audio files.

These thousands of contributions are possible because Twatlight is essentially an enormous, semi-private group blog. It is hosted on LiveJournal, and is more properly referred to as a “LiveJournal community.” Those who wish to take part in Twatlight must first join LiveJournal, then fill out an application to become a member of Twatlight itself. The application is relatively short, but applicants who do not appear to be active, long-term LiveJournal members are dismissed out of hand as potentially disruptive to the community: the [complaints page](#) states that “we have a selection process [for members] to keep out trolls and misguided twihards.”<sup>12</sup> Once one has been granted membership, one can view the Twatlight site unabridged, post to it, and generally take part in the community’s activities.

The community is maintained by a team of moderators, who rule by fiat. At the time of this writing, the moderation team consists of Baroness, Darkbloom, Muckymuckerson, Plethora77, Tothestars, and Vulva - community members, including the moderators, use both usernames and “real” names interchangeably, with more involved members more likely to use their given names.<sup>13</sup> They handle a multitude of administrative tasks and smooth over any problems that occur on the

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<sup>12</sup> See glossary for “twihards.”

<sup>13</sup> For simplicity’s sake, I will refer to all Twatlight members by their usernames, unless they have requested to be anonymous or use another name.

community, including policing posts to make sure that members are practicing good internet safety and not getting into flame wars. When I decided to examine Twatlight, my first step was to contact the moderators and ask permission to conduct participant observation in the community. This task was made somewhat easier by the fact that I was, in fact, already a member of Twatlight: I had casually joined several months before, but had never taken part or read more than one or two posts there.

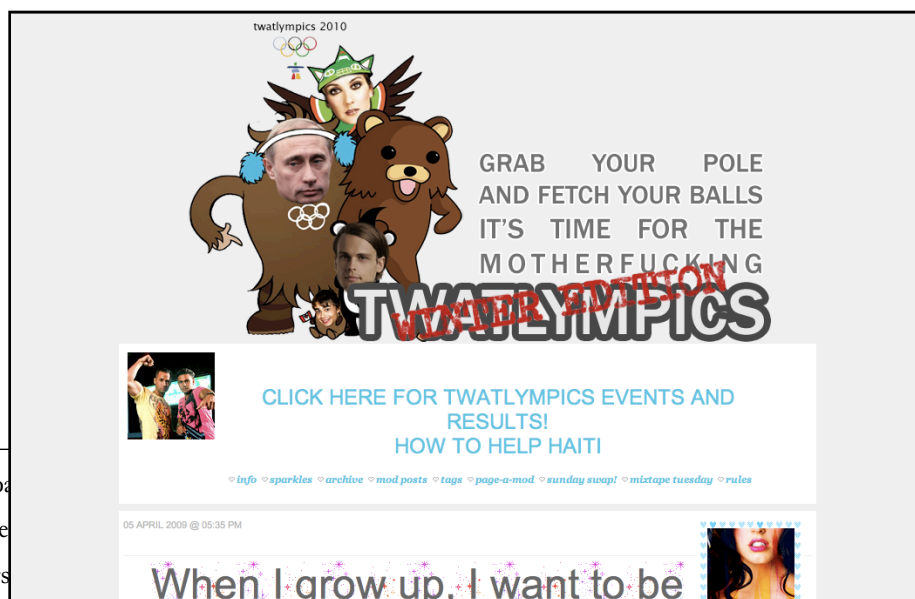
As a new member, the site is overwhelming. While the main page's design is changed regularly, it almost always features clashing colors and flashing animations, involving various celebrities, particularly members of the *Twilight* movie cast. People frequently post songs set to automatically play when the page loads, sometimes creating cacophony when several songs play at once. The written entries themselves use multiple font sizes and often emphasize important words by setting their backgrounds as yet more animations. Many include polls that members are invited to take part in. They use acronyms peculiar to their corner of the internet: "FYT" and "FMT" in particular are confusing.<sup>14</sup> The posts, as well, rarely seem to be on the topic of *Twilight*. On a random day, the first five posts were: a discussion of an opinion piece in the Sunday Times, new red carpet pictures of Kellan Lutz (a member of the *Twilight* cast), a list of items community members had most recently purchased, a comparison of members' plans for the upcoming weekend, and a series of comments and tips on veganism. This is not an uncommon spread of topics for Twatlight. Unlike most fan sites, Twatlight encourages off-topic posts.

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<sup>14</sup> See glossary.

After receiving permission from the mod team to study Twatlight, I settled in to watch quietly and begin to make sense of what was going on. One mod, Vulva, was assigned as my primary point of contact; she eventually became what an anthropologist might call my “key informant,” describing the community to me in her own words and helping connect me with others for interviews and discussions. When I decided to begin conducting interviews, she helped connect me with interviewees, making it clear that I was not a creep operating under a false name and that I could be trusted.<sup>15</sup> Ultimately, I conducted interviews with thirteen longtime members of Twatlight, sometimes over the course of several days, in multiple formats - e-mail, voice chat, instant messaging, and even in one case face-to-face. These people volunteered to take part, and were generally sympathetic to and excited by the project.

From interviews and old posts, I learned that the story of Twatlight’s beginnings goes back over several sites.<sup>16</sup> Its ultimate genesis was the celebrity gossip community Oh No They Didn’t



<sup>15</sup> This was a post in which a person was revealed as a member in person.

<sup>16</sup> Without interviews, it would have been nearly impossible to piece together the history of Twatlight. Many of the LiveJournal communities that presented Twatlight were shut down or hidden their content away, and early posts on Twatlight are useful but difficult to piece together.

(ONTD), the largest community on LiveJournal. ONTD frequently inspires spin-off communities that focus on subjects of particular interest: [ONTD Star Trek](#), [ONTD Muse](#), even [ONTD Feminism](#). The *Twilight* movies were more than popular enough to spin off a sub-community. The result, ONTD Twilight, only lasted a few months before it a group of members peeled off and decided to form the “anti-ONTD-Twilight,” calling it Twatlight. They complained that ONTD Twilight’s moderators were taking things too seriously and ruling the community too strictly. Apparently, ONTD Twilight’s moderators were making members who liked the *Twilight* series as a whole feel unwelcome - and making members who *disliked* a particular character, Jacob Black, feel unwelcome as well. The members who felt ostracized decided to take their ball and go home; they migrated to Twatlight. Within a few months, ONTD Twilight had closed, and Twatlight had grown exponentially.

In addition to learning Twatlight’s history, I also learned the formal layers on which the site operates. It is too simple to merely address the posts that appear on the main page, even if one includes the comments. Rather, Twatlight operates as a community of interpretation on multiple levels, which can and should be subject to formal analysis. While I will not be able to fully explore each level in this thesis, I will lay them out for future reference, and to provide context for those which I *can* delve into deeply.

Twatlight’s **graphics and layout** change regularly. However, its basic aesthetic remains the same across iterations. It is a strange combination of recent design trends, internet meme culture, images from popular culture, and a significant dose of girly, sparkly bling (see figure 1). The



aesthetic, then, is a mixture of the hyperfeminine and the masculine. Some of the hyperfeminine aspects of it hearken back to the *Twilight* books themselves: Edward sparkles in the sun, and much of the text on the Twatlight site also sparkles. Other aspects, such as the color palette, seem to refer to Lisa Frank, the grand doyenne of little girls' stationery. Sparkles, rainbows, hearts and stars - often all animated, and twinkling madly - on the same webpage as Pedobear make a striking contrast.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, the layouts often bring in other pieces of pop culture - the Olympics, Céline Dion - and juxtapose them riotously against each other. They can only be described as "super-heightened gender-bending bricolage."

**Posts' content** - the actual text, images, videos and audio clips posted in each entry - varies widely, as I have previously discussed. The text elements of the posts are only the beginning. Twats gather various media clips from their lives - from around the internet, from their own cameras and cell phones, from physical magazines and newspapers - and post them, with commentary, to Twatlight. The media flow through Twatlight is deeply interesting, and could make a fruitful study: where do these scraps of media come from? Where do they go to? Who brokers these exchanges?

Of course, **macros and other explicitly humorous productions** are a major part of Twatlight, and I will examine them in more detail in chapter 2. Funny pictures, parodies of fan fiction, and other pieces of media generated by twats to get a few laughs are all important parts of Twatlight, and should be taken on their own terms.

To fully understand Twatlight's humor, however, one also needs to analyze the "secret language" of twat - that is, their peculiar **slang and forms of discourse**. While

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<sup>17</sup> For further discussion of Pedobear, see page 33.

Twatlight members assiduously use common internet slang, they also have their own peculiarities of speech: the aforementioned “FYT” and “FMT,” for instance. Then, too, there are particular phrases that have developed more meaning for twats than they might seem to possess to the casual reader. These nuances of speech and writing are a key part of understanding Twatlight.

Finally, the actual **behavior patterns** that appear on Twatlight are worth examining. For example, twats may respond back and forth to each other in a comment thread, but include absolutely no content in their responses: the only content is the icon that they have chosen to represent themselves, which they change to suggest different states of mind and reaction. Or, twats will “spam” each other, repeatedly posting the same thing. These behavior patterns are not unique to Twatlight, but they are relatively rare, and they are fascinating to explore - and understand in context of the other sites where they also appear. In order to form a complete picture of Twatlight, purely formal analysis must be tempered with an understanding of the context in which the community was formed and continues to exist.

## II. Twatlight’s positioning.

Twatlight began as a site that was intentionally different from other *Twilight* sites. This has remained true. Other humorous sites about *Twilight* are relatively small; larger sites tend to be more serious, and their members’ attitudes towards the books uniform - either positive or negative. (There are a good number of *Twilight* hate sites.) In comparison, twats have a wide range of opinions about the *Twilight* books, from love to loathing and everywhere in between. Though they

were brought together by *Twilight*, they generally don't stay in the community for the sake of engaging with it. Their community is much more about friendships and cliques than it is about any particular object of fannish adulation. Nevertheless, they always seem to return to *Twilight* in the end - if nothing else, it provides excellent fodder for humor.

In fact, Twatlight probably has less in common with other *Twilight* sites than it does with sites like [4chan](#). 4chan, an imageboard, is most famous for its /b/ board, where all posters are anonymous and almost anything may be posted. 4chan and /b/ are generally considered the home turf of "Anonymous," which is described either as a "loose confederation of online troublemakers" or as a "terrorist group," depending on who you ask.<sup>18</sup> Whether their actions are interpreted as malicious or not, however, they certainly are the online center of a particular type of humor: lulz. Lulz is defined by the [Encyclopedia Dramatica](#) - another lulz humor site - as "laughter at someone else's expense."<sup>19</sup> The *New York Times* says that lulz means "the joy of disrupting another's emotional equilibrium."<sup>20</sup> Some infamous lulzy moments include a raid on Habbo Hotel, a virtual reality, wherein members of Anonymous wore identical avatars, refused to allow others to use a virtual pool "because of AIDS contamination," and arranged their avatars to form a giant swastika.<sup>21</sup> They thought it was funny; others weren't amused.<sup>22</sup> In other incidents, 4chan has selected particular people and decided to follow them all over the internet - either mocking them or (as in

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<sup>18</sup> Singel, "Palin Hacker Group's All-Time Greatest Hits." When not simply referred to as "Anonymous," people who take part in the /b/ board are often called "/b/tards."

<sup>19</sup> <http://encyclopediadramatica.com/Lulz>; however, be careful - the link may not be safe for work!

<sup>20</sup> Schwartz, "The Trolls Among Us."

<sup>21</sup> Singel, "Palin Hacker Group's All-Time Greatest Hits."

<sup>22</sup> Anable, "Bad Techno-Subjects."

the case of Tay Zonday and his song “Chocolate Rain”) supporting them for no reason at all. More than their sense of humor, though, 4chan and sites like it are a bricolage of grainy photos, porn, inexpertly digitally painted pictures, and quixotically punctuated and capitalized sentences that may or may not mean anything to an outside observer. Their aesthetic is recognizable across the web, signaled both visually and through a written tone that alternates between irony, earnestness, and utter rudeness. It has a lot in common with Twatlight.

The twats recognize this connection as well. One of my interviewees, Zoe, explicitly likened “Twat[light] to the 4chan of the *Twilight* community.” Another, *woah\_what*, pointed out that “I know myself and a few others do frequent 4chan.” Several pointed out that Twatlight might be loved for being a community, but it can turn on people; several times Twatlight has found a particular *Twilight* fan they found pathetic and mocked them mercilessly. Twats search the internet for any foibles their quarry might have committed, then post them as objects of humor: that embarrassingly bad karaoke YouTube video might become the center of a Twatlight post. Occasionally, they have driven people to delete their usernames and leave the discussion entirely. When a twat is the object of this kind of derision, and leaves the community over it, the community members call it a “flounce,” and particularly memorable flounces are sometimes recounted with glee.

Flounce posts were actually a point of tension among the twats I interviewed. Some found them hilariously funny: “my favorite event ever in twatlight was when this one member got banned... it was for breaking minor rules multiple times, but right after the ban there was a post ‘in

memory' of her and we talked about all the ridiculous things she did," one twat reported. Others complained that the community pushes out less-liked members and makes fun of them like schoolyard bullies. Whichever perspective is more accurate, twats' mockery certainly has much in common with 4chan's more infamous, and more illegal, forms of persecution.

Twats do not only see Twatlight as a site in conversation with 4chan and other centers of lulz; they also see Twatlight as a site in the greater context of *Twilight* fandom. Many of my interviewees described coming to Twatlight through other sites, especially Lion & Lamb. One, milesaway, was a *Twilight* fan until the fourth book in the series, *Breaking Dawn*, came out; she had been a member of another online community for *Twilight* called [Phases](#). When *Breaking Dawn* was released, the members of Phases generally disliked it; milesaway transferred her focus to Twatlight. Others explicitly defined their membership in Twatlight as a *rejection* of other sites; topofmylungs commented that "I never was into lion\_lamb, everyone is so serious about it. I hate that." As was mentioned earlier, even Twatlight's profile situates itself in the context of other *Twilight* fan sites. It lists fifty-four affiliated websites at the time of this writing, including fan sites Lion & Lamb, [Kristen Stewart Fans](#) and [Pattinson Life](#) - but also including Twilight Sucks, [Twilight Fanfic So Bad It Dazzles You](#), and [Team Hobopattz](#) (a lulz site dedicated to Robert Pattinson, playing off the common joke that he looks like a hobo at most of his press appearances).

The twats themselves had various opinions on the books. Some of them talked about how they liked the books. "i enjoy the books because they use really descriptive language - i equate them to junk food books, they're not really something i'll read all the time," woah\_what wrote. "I'm not

an anti-fan. I like some of the characters from it [*Twilight*] still,” topofmylungs reported. Another Twatlight member flatly stated, “The books suck, I’m not a fan at all and I really dislike them.” Zoe seemed to sum it up when she wrote,

we [Twatlight] have the hardcore ‘serious business’ fans who cosplay and go to comic con panels, the hardcore anti-fans who want to punch Stefanie Meyer and people like me, who don’t really care one way or another. Twat makes it work! As long as you have a sense of humor it’s cool!

In other words, my interviewees all agreed that Twatlight succeeds as a third space, interested in *Twilight* and yet neither fannish nor anti-fannish.

My interviewees also all agreed that humor was the organizing principle of the community, and that it was what brought them to Twatlight.<sup>23</sup> “[Twats are] people who also have a sense of humor about a book, even if they’re ‘serious business’ about it,” Zoe stated. “[When I joined] i thought it was going to be one of those communities that everyone would join for a laugh and to make fun of twilight, and it pretty much was that,” woah\_what wrote. Another fan said that the appeal of Twatlight was that it “was more about humor than the other community [an anti-twilight community she was in], which was just full of people angry and pissed off at the books. I don’t like them either but I don’t want to sit and hate on them for hours at a time.”

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<sup>23</sup> Many of them also stated that they no longer remained at Twatlight for the sake of humor, but rather for the sake of the friends they’d made there. However, as mmmm\_whatchasay pointed out to me, this probably has to do more with the natural life cycle of a community than anything else: new members, whom I did not interview, were in her experience still being drawn to Twatlight for the sake of humor.

### III. Lolfans.

The best description of people like my interviewees, who may have strong feelings about the *Twilight* books but only really want to engage with them on a humorous level, actually comes from outside both Twatlight and the ranks of academia. Cleolinda, a parodist and author of *Movies in Fifteen Minutes*, coined the word “lolfans” specifically as a description of Twatlight members and their ilk. She says that lolfans are “the kind of people (i.e., me) who read these books for the sole purpose of snarking on them and yet cannot stop oh God please send help [sic]. Levels of the affection for the subject matter may vary.”<sup>24</sup> While many twats didn’t start out as lolfans, they all got there eventually. Several identified themselves as lolfans in our interviews – Cleolinda’s “movies in fifteen minutes” are very popular, and her summaries of the *Twilight* movies are perhaps the most popular of all, well known to the members of Twatlight.

The concept of “lolfans” is not an idea that has sprung from scholarship. No work on fan studies posits their existence. The term was coined by someone actually enmeshed in the community – a Gramscian organic intellectual. If we accept the term, it breaks the schema of fan/anti-fan/non-fan. More than that, though, it breaks the logic of fandom – at least, as fan studies has constructed it. Lolfans do not merely pose a challenge to Jonathan Gray’s work. They pose a challenge to the way fandom is constructed by the academy as a whole.

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<sup>24</sup> Cleolinda, “Glossary.”

## Chapter 2. Macros & Medusa.

Despite the fact that lolfans exist in the interstices of current definitions of “fans,” they produce many transformative or derivative works. In this way, they are very much like the fans that most scholars choose to study. The difference, of course, lies in the fact that lolfans’ productions are all about humor – and not necessarily *parodic* humor, either. Lolfans are prolific in their production of funny images, jokes, and pranks, and these provide as rich a subject for analysis as more traditional fan productions (fan fiction, fan vids, cosplay).

Perhaps the most typical type of joke on the Twatlight site is the macro. This form of joke, familiar to many internet users, involves a image with a caption superimposed over it, usually set in the font Impact in either white or black. The caption subverts the meaning of the picture, brings it into conversation with another (often seemingly unrelated) topic, or otherwise provides pithy, humorous commentary. Most internet users are familiar with the most famous macros: lolcats (figure 2). However, there are a variety of subcategories of the genre. There are also other images that are passed and reinterpreted; popular on Twatlight is the “rage comic,” which is any comic made in lo-fi style where the final panel is a particular image of an angry face yelling



Figure 2. One of the most famous lolcats, “I can has cheezburger?”



“FFFFFFFFFFFFFFUUUUUUUUUUUU!” (figure 3). Other images and animated gifs (often simply referred to as “gifs”) are similar to macros in their production and their role in online discourse, but they rarely have the same degree of humorous content – gifs, for instance, typically express an emotion rather than a joke.



Figure 3. One example of a rage comic.

Macros’ provenances are hard to determine. They’re passed around the internet freely, and because variants are often made on one particular theme, it’s difficult to define who the “author” of a macro is. In fact, most macros are posted by people who did *not* create them.

While macros were originally made by hand, there are today a variety of different macro and meme “machines,” that is, sites which provide simple online tools to meld images and captions without the need for image editing software on one’s own home computer. Gifs are slightly harder

to produce, and therefore they do not proliferate nearly as much: while one might see fifty variations on one macro, one is only likely to see one or two variations on a particular gif. However, the barriers to entry in the production of and use of macros and gifs are very low. They are increasingly becoming common parts of life online.

## **I. Macros on Twatlight.**

Twatlight in particular is a site of production and distribution of macros. Both macros and gifs are extensively used in the course of posts and the subsequent comments on Twatlight. As elsewhere online, they are used for punctuation, illustration and humor value. My interviewees all agreed that macros are usually used to inject humor, whereas gifs express emotion: for instance, a gif of Michael Jackson eating popcorn is often used to express that the person who posted it is just sitting back and watching a flame war (or other interesting, amusing conversation) play out. However, this is not a hard and fast rule: depending on context, macros can be used to express emotion and gifs to provide humor, and often gifs or macros are used to perform both tasks simultaneously.

Whether they produced macros themselves or not, my interviewees almost all enjoyed them and even saved their favorites to their home computers. “I love macros! I have an entire folder saved to my computer with macros I’ve collected,” one such interviewee wrote. Several of them narrated the growth of a macro referred to as “beep beep fatty,” and one used the metaphor of an “outbreak” of illness to describe the way fads for different types of macro sweep the community. Almost all the

interviewees who had never created a macro expressed their admiration for those who had: “I’m just really not clever or original enough to come up with anything good, but I do love using them,” milesaway wrote, and many others echoed her.

Out of all the *Twilight*-based macros I observed in use on the Twatlight forums, well over three-quarters of them specifically questioned the forms of masculinity that the *Twilight* books model. Furthermore, rather than echoing the cultural expectation that “men act; women are acted upon,” they fixed the men of *Twilight* directly in their gaze.<sup>25</sup>

## II. “You gonna get loved tenderly.”

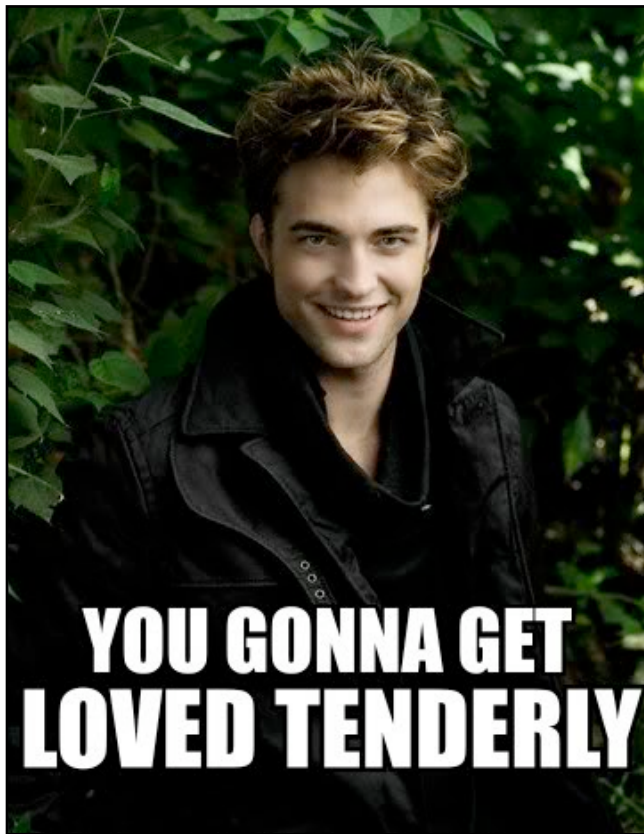


Figure 4. “You gonna get loved tenderly.”

One macro that many of my interviewees cite as a favorite is often referred to as “You gonna get loved tenderly” (figure 4). It was originally produced sometime in 2008 or 2009 and posted to Twatlight. It is a picture of Robert Pattinson, presumably from a photo shoot (although no one I spoke to knew the origin of the image), wearing a black leather jacket and smiling. All in all, it is a traditional portrait, reminiscent of “casual” high school graduation photographs.

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<sup>25</sup> Gamman & Marshment, *The Female Gaze*, 1.

Superimposed in white Impact font across the bottom is the statement “YOU GONNA GET LOVED TENDERLY.”

The Robert Pattinson macro seems to be a spinoff of a more popular macro: an image of a bearded black man staring out from a heavy hood in a way that might be perceived as threatening, with a caption reading, “YOU GONNA GET RAPED” (figure 5). This macro has existed since at least 2004 and possibly as early as 2001, and its origins are unknown; one site claims that it originated on *Something Awful*.<sup>26</sup> Leaving aside the various troubling and racist overtones of the macro,

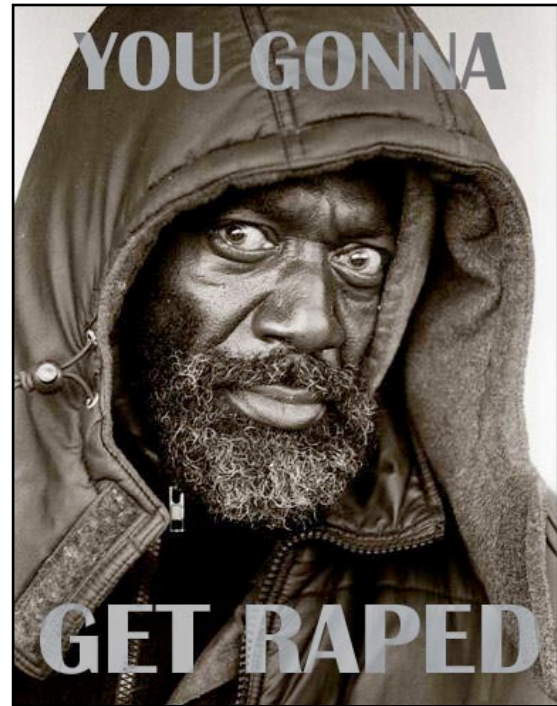


Figure 5. “You gonna get raped.”

as well as the issue of whether it is funny or not, it sparked numerous spin-offs, and “you gonna get raped” today is a catchphrase meaning something along the lines of “I’m going to completely dominate you.” It is used in any competitive or argumentative context.

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<sup>26</sup> The earliest instance of the macro I was able to confirm was from 2004, but several sites claim that the image dates back to 2001. The most elaborate of these sites, *Know Your Meme*, claims that the photograph is of a man named William Todd, and that it appeared in a coffee table book published in 1997 (<http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/you-gonna-get-raped>).

The “loved tenderly” macro, then, plays off the previously-existing “gonna get raped” macro, assuming that the audience is familiar with it.<sup>27</sup> Structurally, the macro functions the same way. The threatening man in “gonna get raped” is replaced by Robert Pattinson (or, rather, Edward Cullen), smiling in a potentially creepy way. However, while the original meme warns the viewer that they’re “gonna get raped,” the *Twilight* meme warns the viewer that they’re “gonna get loved tenderly.” The “gonna get raped” macro plays on viewers’ perceptions of black men and particularly homeless black men (the subject is widely referred to as “homeless” in posts using and discussing the macro). The “gonna get loved tenderly” macro, on the other hand, plays on twats’ perceptions of Edward Cullen and Robert Pattinson.

Most of the members of Twatlight whom I interviewed, including those who professed to enjoy the *Twilight* books, agreed that Edward Cullen is “abusive.” One interviewee, cause\_iyeah, commented that Edward must be “mentally ill or something.” Others, like woah\_what, said that they stopped enjoying *Twilight* when “people started taking the book literally as a guide for -true love-.” Many of my interviewees explicitly identified themselves as feminists, and viewed Edward’s behavior throughout the books as controlling and anti-feminist. Milesaway points out:

Edward forbids her [Bella] to see her friends and in the end she agrees because she ‘loves him.’ ...Bella is being suppressed constantly, she has no life outside Edward, and she is okay with that fact. That’s not love; that’s self-denial. There are a million tiny examples of how Edward controls and manipulates Bella emotionally, and how she lets him, even enjoying his doing so. ...If he really loved her, he would let her be free to do what she wants. ...[And I object to] the

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<sup>27</sup> This should not be taken to imply that twats would find the original macro unproblematic. It is not in wide use among the Twatlight community, and it is highly unlikely that they would find it appropriate, given the general atmosphere of Twatlight.

cheesy lines or how creepy they would be if they were coming from someone who's [sic] breath doesn't intoxicate you...

Other twats had similarly harsh opinions of Robert Pattinson. Topofmylungs wrote, "He's greasy, a terrible actor, he has poor grooming habits, he's an alcoholic. He talks shit on everything he takes part on. He is unattractive. And yet girls still fling panties at him." Indeed, twats often refer to Robert Pattinson as "looking homeless" and being a "creeper," sometimes lovingly and sometimes vitriolically, depending on the context. ("There's a running joke about Robert Pattinson being a hobo ... his hair is all greasy and he dresses like it," one of my interviewees said.)

The twats' perception of both Edward Cullen and Robert Pattinson is at great variance with the intended, or popular, perception of them. The *Twilight* novels are based on the proposition that Edward Cullen is the perfect romantic hero, worth dying for - and worth living forever with. The



Figure 6. Robert Pattinson in *Details* magazine.

media's portrayals of Robert Pattinson all underscore that he is a teen idol, a movie star, for whom

young women line up around the block. Describing fans lining up for an autograph signing, the *New York Times* reports that when Pattinson finally appeared, “the crowd didn’t see an actor. They saw Edward Cullen, the perfect boyfriend who just happens to live on blood.”<sup>28</sup> He is depicted as surrounded by nude women, unmoved by their charms (figure 6). In short, Robert Pattinson is portrayed as a lust object; Edward Cullen is portrayed as the perfect man. Neither of these perceptions matches up with the twats’ opinions.

Enter the macro. Through its relationship to the widely circulated “you gonna get raped” macro, the “you gonna get loved tenderly” macro makes an argument about Edward Cullen’s behavior. It’s funny because of the cognitive dissonance that’s set up – Edward Cullen, perfect boyfriend, and Robert Pattinson, heartthrob, juxtaposed against threatening potential rapist – but the very juxtaposition that makes it funny is what gives it analytic punch. By aligning Edward with a rapist, and aligning rape with being “loved tenderly,” the viewer of the macro is forced to think about Edward’s actions in a new light. Is Edward’s behavior coercive? Is it manipulative, even emotionally abusive? Edward is not a literal rapist in the books, but by aligning his behavior with the behavior of a rapist, the “loved tenderly” macro argues that his seductions aren’t romantic or sexy; they’re creepy and scary.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Carr, “The Vampire of the Mall.”

<sup>29</sup> Another famous take on this critique shows up in [“Buffy vs. Edward,”](#) the Webby-nominated remix video in which scenes from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* are intercut with scenes from the *Twilight* movie to depict Buffy explaining how creepy Edward is and finally killing him. While “Buffy vs. Edward” was not produced within the Twatlight community, or in fact within any fan community at all, it has become very popular there.



The critique of Edward as a potential rapist is somewhat hard to swallow for a fan of the *Twilight* books, or a fan of Robert Pattinson. However, it is easier to accept when it is embedded within humor. It's rare to see explicit critiques of Edward's actions on *Twilight* fan sites, and yet macros are widely circulated; most *Twilight* message boards have threads specifically for documenting macros, for instance.<sup>30</sup> A funny macro can travel where a serious critique cannot.

Make no mistake, however: the “loved tenderly” macro is a serious critique, even *as* it invites laughter. The macro invites its viewer to stop Edward in his creepy, stalkerish tracks by laughing at him. In the photo, originally released (without commentary) as an object to be looked at and lusted after, Edward ever-so-slightly looms towards the viewer, smiling in a way that is half-goofy and half-menacing. The caption contextualizes the photo: Edward warns you that “you’re gonna get loved tenderly.” But because this is a macro, the viewer is given the power to say “no,” to reject him and laugh at him. Unlike a traditional novel, where the reader takes a back seat and must simply be carried along for the ride, the experience of “reading” a macro is not complete until the viewer reacts, with humor, disgust or befuddlement - and ideally the viewer reacts with humor. The “loved tenderly” macro, as silly as it may seem, embodies

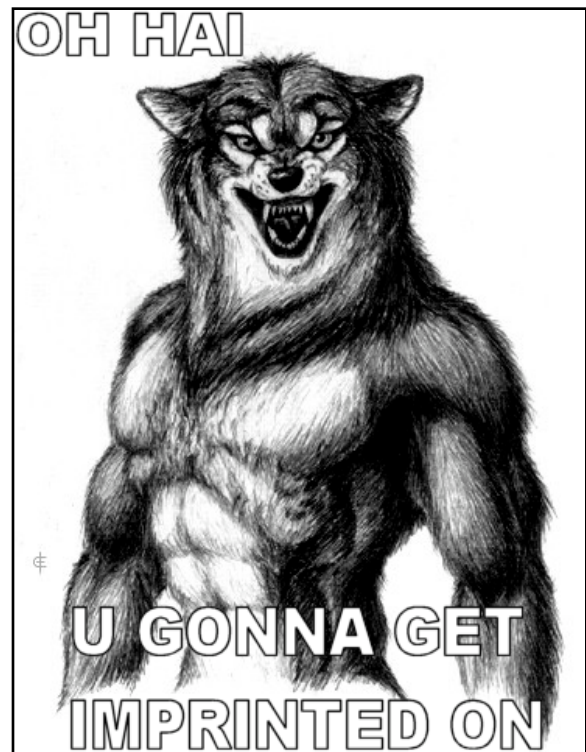


Figure 7. “Oh hai / you gonna get imprinted on.”

<sup>30</sup> One example on the site Twilight Twenties: <http://twilighttwenties.proboards.com/index.cgi?board=twilightetc&action=display&thread=308>



Hélène Cixous' "laugh of the medusa" in its most vicious and warlike sense. Edward is drowned out beneath the viewer's laughter.

This opportunity is not a one-time thing. Macros can be used many times without becoming considered boring and stale - in fact, the entire *point* of a macro is to use it many times. My interviewees took great glee in describing how people spam Twatlight with macros. One, milesaway, said that one of her friends would spam her comments with the "loved tenderly" macro "since she knows how creepy I find Robert Pattinson and this just plays right into Edward's creepy stalker watching you sleep bit," and that in response, she would spam back with a macro reading "OH HAI / U GONNA GET IMPRINTED ON," superimposed over the image of a muscle-bound wolf-man (figure 7). In some cases, a particular macro is posted on almost every entry over the course of weeks. On the one hand, the purpose of reposting macros is to increase the humor via repetition. On the other hand, every time the macro is reposted, its argument is made once more.

### III. "Why don't you have a seat over there, Quil."

The "gonna get imprinted on" macro refers to another circumstance in the *Twilight* books that many twats find disturbing. In the *Twilight* series, the Quileute tribe of Native Americans includes some members that can shape-shift into wolves. These particular members also "imprint" on their soul mates. That is, when a shape-shifter first sees the person whom he is destined to be with, he experiences a complete change of heart and are thereafter utterly devoted to this person. He and his soul mate are absolutely fated to be together, and this bond breaks all previous

relationships - in one case, a woman was engaged to another man, and is forced to break the engagement when she is imprinted upon.

While rather strange and involving more than a few questions about free will, the real aspect of “imprinting” that most twats take offense to is the fact that it can occur at any age. All of the wolf shape-shifters are in their teens - the onset of their powers seems to coincide with late puberty. The women they imprint upon, however, can be of any age. Early in the books, the shape-shifter Quil Ateara imprints upon a two-year-old, Claire. Stephenie Meyer takes great pains to enumerate that “there’s nothing *romantic* about it at all, not for Quil, not now,” that he will be “more understanding, trustworthy, and reliable than anyone else she knows,” remaining the same age as she grows up to an appropriate age for them to be married.<sup>31</sup> She even tries to head off protests that Claire doesn’t get a choice by explaining, “why wouldn’t she choose him [Quil], in the end? He’ll be her perfect match. Like he was designed for her alone.”<sup>32</sup> Meyer is so vehement about this point because at the end of *Breaking Dawn*, after the lead character Bella has a baby, Jacob - once a romantic interest of Bella’s - imprints on the newborn child.

The members of Twatlight do not generally accept Meyer’s statements about the “imprinting” system. One of my interviewees, toposmylungs, explained that Jacob never behaved in a reasonable way towards Bella, and claimed that the last straw was how “then he ‘imprints’ on her child. It’s so creepy.” Others shared the opinion: milesaway said that she bought *Breaking Dawn* on the day it came out, and quickly became so “upset about the whole pregnancy bit, the imprinting

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<sup>31</sup> Meyer, *Eclipse*, 176.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

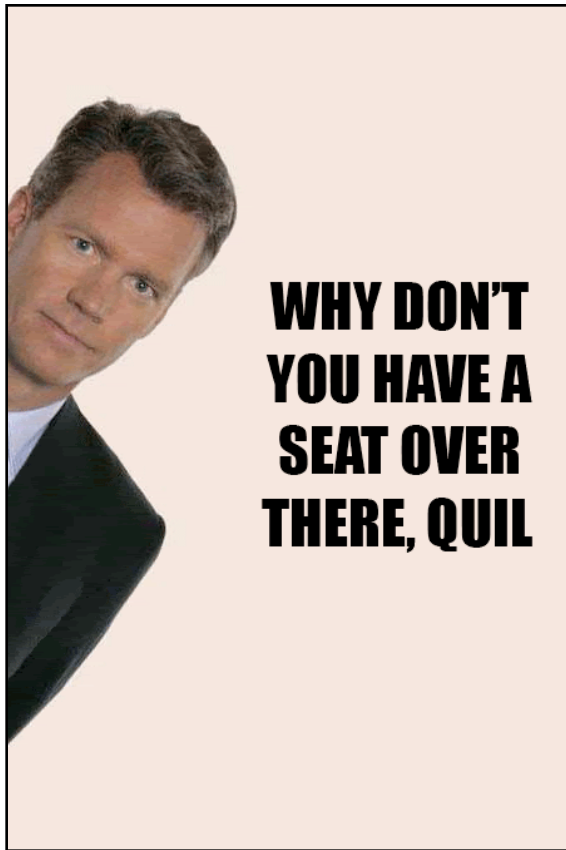


Figure 8. “Why don’t you have a seat over there, Quil.”

on a baby, etc etc” that she reevaluated the rest of the series and decided that it didn’t mesh with her feminism. “Imprinting is just straight up creepy,” she concluded. It’s not a surprise, then, that the idea of imprinting shows up in Twatlight macros quite frequently. The “gonna get imprinted on” macro is only the beginning.

One such macro reads “WHY DON’T YOU HAVE A SEAT OVER THERE, QUIL” (figure 8). The image is of a white man peering into the frame - Chris Hansen, the host of Dateline NBC’s *To Catch a Predator*. Like the “loved tenderly” macro,

the “seat over there” macro requires a good deal of knowledge about prior macros to be sufficiently contextualized. Yet, once it has been parsed, it directly reflects twats’ stated views about the concept of “imprinting,” and it makes a strong argument that the characters of Quil and Jacob are, if not pedophiles, at least the next best thing.

Chris Hansen, the person who forms the basis for the macro, was the host of the television show *To Catch a Predator*. The show, which was canceled in 2008, consisted of video of undercover sting operations conducted with the help of underground watchdog group Perverted-Justice. While the sting operations supposedly targeted “predators” rather than using the more specific term

“pedophiles,” it was popularly considered to target pedophiles in particular. Typically, actors played young teenagers in sexually explicit chat rooms. When men approached them for sexual purposes, they encouraged the men to come meet them in person. There, they would be videotaped and set upon by the crew of *To Catch a Predator*, and Chris Hansen would confront them, attempting to interview them at length about their actions and requesting that they “have a seat over there.”

This catchphrase is echoed in the macro, casting Quil Ateara as the predator/pedophile who has just been caught imprinting on two-year-old Claire by *To Catch a Predator*. But it would be a mistake to assume that this is the full significance of the macro. In fact, part of what makes the macro effective is that it puts Twilight into conversation with 4chan and specifically /b/, the infamous imageboard. On /b/, Chris Hansen is a favorite figure, probably because he provides a foil to another favorite meme: Pedobear.

Pedobear is a cartoon bear, probably based on another character from 4chan’s ancestor imageboard 2chan. On /b/ and across the internet, Pedobear is exactly what he sounds like: a pedophilic bear. He is often placed into situations where he is being caught by Chris Hansen, slaving over “delicious lolicon” (underaged girls), often accompanied by the taglines “I see what you did there”



Figure 9. Pedobear.

and “why don’t you have a seat in the corner?” Pedobear and Chris Hansen (well, people pretending to be Chris Hansen) both regularly appear on /b/ (figure 10). Part of why they are so popular is



Figure 10. “Pedobear” and “Chris Hansen” interacting on /b/.

that, as an anonymous image board, /b/ often is flooded with illicit content, sometimes including child pornography or images that look like they *could* be child pornography (images that appear to involve teens, for instance). They’ve become widely associated with this kind of content, and have

even gone so far as to prank Oprah, claiming to be a “pedophile network” in order to induce her to read the phrase “nine thousand penises” on air.<sup>33</sup>

Ironically, 4chan’s members have often acted to expose and harass pedophiles, even entrapping them in ways extremely similar to Chris Hansen’s on *To Catch a Predator*. They are also famous for their “Project Chanology” campaign against Scientology.<sup>34</sup> In both cases, Anonymous found something humorous – the implication of pedophilia, the way that Chris Hansen appears to essentially be a real-life griever, Tom Cruise’s crazy antics in defense of Scientology – but took action when those humorous things became too serious for their taste. Once the Church of Scientology began an aggressive, even censorious public relations campaign, members of 4chan decided to begin organizing protests; similarly, once they identified an *actual pedophile*, they shifted their focus from joking about Pedobear to catching the predator out. Chris Hansen and Scientology are both regarded as jokes around 4chan – except for when they’re deadly serious.

In much the same way, the macros found on Twatlight are funny – until they’re not, because they’re cutting so close to the heart of the problem. Out of my interviewees, those who were *most* adamant about their loathing of the *Twilight* books seemed to find macros the most appealing and most funny. Several times, an interviewee described what a horrible stalker Edward was, and how it was horrible that he would *ever* be marketed to young girls – and then burst into laughter as she showed me macros that dramatized this fact. The mere fact that these macros are funny, frivolous, does not mean they do not do serious work surrounding serious topics.

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<sup>33</sup> Winfrey.

<sup>34</sup> Barkham, “Hackers Declare War.”

## Chapter 3. Funny fan vids.

One might draw a close comparison between the way that macros *should* be treated by scholars and the way that fan vids *have* been treated. Like fan vids, macros require specialized knowledge to be read as intended, they are passed around within closed communities, and they are often misunderstood or dismissed as frivolous by the casual viewer. While there are also significant differences between fan vids and macros, it is worth considering why (primarily non-humorous) fan vids have been extensively dealt with in works on fan culture, whereas macros and other forms of fan humor have been overlooked.

### I. Vidding.

Francesca Coppa provides an excellent introduction to the world of vidding in “Women, *Star Trek*, and the development of early fannish vidding.” She describes what a vid is: “a form of grassroots filmmaking in which clips from television shows and movies are set to music.”<sup>35</sup> These videos are widely understood to have developed from within *Star Trek* fandom in the 1970s. They have always been primarily produced by women; they are both produced and consumed primarily within a particular subset of fans. The skills needed to create and interpret vids are passed on primarily through mentorship within the community.

Vids’ visual language has grown out of this particular, somewhat closed environment. As Coppa notes, outsiders to vidding culture often make assumptions about how to read vids,

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<sup>35</sup> Coppa, “Women, *Star Trek*, and the development of early fannish vidding,” 1.1.

presuming that they are collections of clips intended to illustrate a piece of music, not vice versa. However, fanvids are actually intended primarily as textual criticism, “a visual essay that stages an argument.”<sup>36</sup> While traditional music videos often reference outside texts, vids are largely unintelligible without a deep understanding of their source texts. The images do not comment on the music: rather, the music comments on the images, and the images themselves comment on the source text from which they are derived. Vids are intended for a small subset of people who can appreciate them – who have learned to read them in much the same way that a student of literature learns to read a highly allusive and formalized novel.<sup>37</sup>

The need to learn to read vids in a peculiar way is best illustrated by the example of the vid “Closer.” Many articles about vidding discuss this particular text, partially because it has come to the attention of people outside the vidding community.<sup>38</sup> “Closer,” by T. Jonesy and Killa, uses the Nine Inch Nails song of the same name for its music.<sup>39</sup> It takes for its source text the original *Star Trek* series. The vid opens with the question: “what if they hadn’t made it to Vulcan in time?” – a meaningless sentence to anyone who is not familiar with *Star Trek*. The vid continues: footage from *Star Trek* colored and distressed to match the original Nine Inch Nails video, cut and re-sewn together from many different episodes to build a new, remixed, fantasy episode. But “fantasy” is not

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> This is not to say that alternate readings of vids, as traditional music videos or otherwise, are invalid. However, they are not reflective of the way that vids are intended to be read. One may read a novel in a purposely perverse way – cutting it up into poetry, for instance; this is a valid reading, but not reflective of how the novel was intended. Reading fan vids as music videos is a similar behavior.

<sup>38</sup> This vid is most fully discussed in Coppa’s article, but also appears in Busse & Stein’s article “Limit Play.”

<sup>39</sup> T. Jonesy & Killa, 2003.



the right word: a *Star Trek* fan knows that if “they hadn’t made it to Vulcan in time” for Spock to complete the Vulcan mating ritual of *pon farr* with another Vulcan, the consequences would be



Figure 11. A frame of “Closer” in which Spock sexually assaults Kirk.

disastrous. With the pounding, menacing Nine Inch Nails song as its organizing principle, the vid re-orders *Star Trek* episodes to show Spock sexually assaulting Kirk (figure 11). As Kristina Busse and Louisa Stein have noted, “Closer” reworks *Star Trek*’s images of violence into images of sex, building a narrative which comments on the (perhaps nascently sexual) relationship between Spock and Kirk, our culture’s proximation of sex and violence, and the limits of what the *Star Trek* producers were willing to film as opposed to what they were willing to imply.<sup>40</sup> While the song

<sup>40</sup> Busse & Stein, “Limit Play,” 203.

“Closer” is important to the construction of the video, it is only one piece of the work, and it primarily serves the greater purpose of commenting on *Star Trek* and society at large.

## II. Comparison: macros and vidding.

In another article, Coppa discusses the reversal of the gaze in “A Fannish Taxonomy of Hotness (Hot, Hot, Hot),” by the Clucking Belles. Unlike “Closer,” which united one television series and one song, “A Fannish Taxonomy of Hotness” takes Buster Poindexter’s “Hot, Hot, Hot” and combines it with imagery from many different television shows and movies. In some sense, it requires less familiarity with the source texts than “Closer”: there is no re-constructed narrative, and the viewer is not asked to understand complex ideas like *pon farr* in order to make sense of the vid. However, it still focuses attention on the imagery, not the music, and it still performs a powerful critique of pop culture. As Coppa argues, “the advent of home filmmaking technology has allowed women to look, judge, select, edit, and manipulate images without any of the physical or social dangers historically connected to the female gaze,” and within “A Fannish Taxonomy of Hotness,” vidders are targeting “the recurring sadomasochism of pop culture” and drawing attention to their own widely unrecognized fetishism.<sup>41</sup>

In some sense, then, “A Fannish Taxonomy of Hotness” does similar work to the “loved tenderly” macro discussed in Chapter 2. “A Fannish Taxonomy of Hotness” encourages the viewer to objectify and even fetishize the attractive people that populate the average American’s television screen, reversing the male gaze in a very direct way. The “loved tenderly” macro also encourages the

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<sup>41</sup> Coppa, “A Fannish Taxonomy of Hotness,” 112, 110.

viewer to stare back at men, but combatively – not staring *at* male lust objects, but staring *down* a particular lust object. Both engage the viewer affectively, in one case with a peppy beat and familiar, exhilarating clips of favorite celebrities, and in the other with humor. But both pack a hidden punch, one which is non-obvious to the uninitiated – but which the initiated cannot escape.

Macros can also partake in the kind of decontextualization and construction of narrative illustrated by the “Closer” vid. For example, one well-loved series of *Twilight* macros takes series of still frames from the *Twilight* movie and captions them, suggesting new conversations that might take place with the same facial expressions and settings that the movie originally featured (figure 12). This



Figure 12. A macro re-contextualizing a scene from *Twilight*.

impulse is extremely close to the vidding impulse – but whereas most vids are serious in tone and intent, macros are *always* played for laughs. (I could determine neither the original author nor the provenance of the featured macro below, but it is popular on Twatlight.) Like “Closer,” this macro takes a scene from the source text – in this case, a scene where Edward struggles to keep himself

under control in a science class with Bella, whose scent is described as “mouthwatering” to him - and pushes it into a new direction. As “Closer” takes scenes from *Star Trek*, decontextualizes them, and recontextualizes them to a Nine Inch Nails song - yet embraces all the resonances of the images’ original context - so this macro takes a scene from *Twilight* and performs the same functions for it.<sup>42</sup> “Closer” and many macros “work ceaselessly to steal the language, rebuild it and fly with it,” reinterpreting Edward’s smoldering gaze as the obsessive staring of a stalker and Spock’s *pon farr* as the madness of a rapist - whether through humor or not.<sup>43</sup>

Macros and vids also are created within the context of particular communities that shape their conventions and the way they are read. Vids, in particular, stem from many years of community practice. Francesca Coppa points out that “because of technical difficulties and high cost - VCRs were expensive in the early 1980s, and editing VCRs could run into the thousands of dollars - vidders tended to work in collectives, which served as sites of technical and aesthetic mentoring,” allowing deep traditions to be built up: prior to the advent of YouTube, it was impossible to become a vidder without being mentored and initiated into the community’s ways.<sup>44</sup> The community that creates macros’ conventions is more extensive and porous; however, particular macro-producing communities - like Twatlight or 4chan - develop their own particular quirks. Yet even these

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<sup>42</sup> In fact, the recontextualization of still images is at the heart of the vidding tradition: what is widely considered the first fanvid, “What Do You Do With a Drunken Vulcan?” by Kandy Fong, was a still slideshow set to music. Incidentally, Fong’s vid was humorous in nature. See Coppa, “Women, *Star Trek*, and the development of early fannish vidding,” 1.4.

<sup>43</sup> Gray, *Women and Laughter*, 185.

<sup>44</sup> Coppa, “Women, *Star Trek*, and the development of early fannish vidding,” 4.3

relatively opaque macro-production communities have lower barriers to entry than the vidding community does. As Stein & Busse point out in “Limit Play,”

The increase in computer processing and Internet upload and download speeds as well as the spread of more user-friendly editing programs has allowed greater numbers of fans to try their hand at visual media. Many of these new artists might never attempt a drawing yet feel comfortable creating an icon, learning how to use PhotoShop or other imaging software in order to do so.<sup>45</sup>

Vidding, like drawing, requires many years of practice to achieve a high level of artistic competence. While there is a degree of skill required in making macros, the technical ability to paste text onto pictures is not nearly as difficult to develop as simple mother wit.

There is also a simple, but important, difference in the ways that macros and vids are deployed. Unlike vids, macros are used in the context of larger discussions to make a point. Whereas a vid is a complete argument for or against a position, a macro is a segment of an argument which can be used to respond to other forms of argumentation. Of course, the context in which vids are encountered is important too: a deadly serious vid like “Closer” seems humorous to an audience which does not know how to read it. Meanwhile, vids that are *intended* to be humorous may seem incoherent or pointless in the wrong context.

### III. “*Star Trek* Dance Floor.”

Indeed, vids that are intended to be humorous are often overlooked even by scholars – or their humor is left unmentioned, unmentionable. One such vid, “*Star Trek* Dance Floor” by Sloanesomething, has received a certain amount of attention from sites like [Political Remix Video](#),

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<sup>45</sup> Busse & Stein, “Limit Play,” 202.

but has not generally been discussed by the scholarly community.<sup>46</sup> Its message is absolutely inextricable from its humorous content, and therefore the vid can be difficult to discuss.

Much like the macros created on Twatlight, the “*Star Trek* Dance Floor” vid takes two media objects – the song “Too Many Dicks on the Dance Floor” by Flight of the Conchords and clips from the 2009 *Star Trek* movie – and places them into conversation such that they subvert and critique each other.<sup>47</sup> *Star Trek* is not a movie about women and it does not spend much time exploring ideas of womanhood and feminism, even if *Star Trek: The Next Generation* made some attempts to address them (the presence of female security chief Tasha Yar; men wearing “skants”). Similarly, “Too Many Dicks on the Dance Floor” does not actually form any kind of feminist critique. If anything, it emphasizes women as sex objects: the only reason the singer misses women is that he doesn’t want to sleep with men. While neither *Star Trek* nor “Too Many Dicks on the Dance Floor” are precisely anti-feminist, they certainly do not present any kind of feminist or empowering message to women.<sup>48</sup>

“*Star Trek* Dance Floor,” however, combines its two source texts to create a new message. The video opens with shots of all the male main characters, interspersed with images of assemblies of people (Starfleet officers, Vulcans and others) primarily composed of men and featuring phallic architectural details (figure 13). It cuts to an image of Uhura entering a bar full of men as Flight of

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<sup>46</sup> Sloanesomething 2009. As far as I know, the vid has been shown at several conferences by Francesca Coppa, but there have not been any published papers written about it to date.

<sup>47</sup> The “Too many dicks” song originally appeared in an episode of the *Flight of the Conchords* television show: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i-EN8dpAvBw>

<sup>48</sup> Actually, some in the fan community have interpreted “Too Many Dicks on the Dance Floor” as sexist; see [Seedling’s post on the topic](#).



Figure 13. Frame from “*Star Trek* Dance Floor,” complete with phallic imagery.

the Conchords intone, “Goin’ to the party / sippin’ on Bacardi / want to meet a hottie, but there’s Adam, Steve and Marty.” The vid continues in the same vein: as (male) *Star Trek* characters fight, the music informs the viewer, “it ain’t no good if there’s too much wood / make sure you know before you go / the dance floor bro-ho ratio! / Five to one is a brodeo! / Tell Steve and Mike that it’s time to go! / Wait outside all night to find twenty dudes in a conga line!” Between the music and synchronized images, the message is very clear: there are too many men and too few women featured in *Star Trek*! The final shot of the video underscores this point: as the music ends, Uhura spins to face the viewer, her face set in an expression of dismay.

The “*Star Trek* dance floor” fanvid is obviously intended to be humorous, and it was received as humorous by the fan community. It was also, however, received as a serious argument about a flaw in the *Star Trek* movie. In the 358 comments posted to Sloanesomething’s [initial](#)



[journal entry about the vid](#), most respond with laughter and with agreement. Some echo the lyrics:

“NOT ENOUGH LADIES! TOO MANY MANS!” Another commenter, Toft\_froggy, lauds Sloanesomething’s editing skills: “I loved how suddenly Uhura was at the centre of the frame in that clip of the Spock/Kirk challenge in the bridge, and so much more noticeable - genius.” Then she adds to the chorus of people repeating their favorite lyric, LOLing all the way: “NOT ENOUGH LADIES! TOO MANY MANS!” Another, Belladonnalin, cheers: “This vid is my entire radical feminist argument in... a vid. Which is AMAZING. I need to learn to be more succinct, because FOR. REAL. And ALSO hilarious!” In every comment, the humorous nature of the vid is directly tied to the critique it makes.

Some commenters on “*Star Trek* Dance Floor” are very explicit about their understanding of the purpose of the vid. For instance, Isiscolo writes, “Incisive social commentary cleverly disguised. Two thumbs up.” She is correct. Sloanesomething responded thanking her for the wonderful compliment, and agreeing that the intent behind the vid was to veil critique in humor. This practice aligns well with the way that *Twilight* macros function, although the vidding community is more vocally aware of the critical value of humorous vids than the *Twatlight* community is of the critical value of their macros. In both macros and fanvids, the humor provides the sugar to help the medicine go down.



#### IV. “It Depends on What You Pay” & “Don’t Cha.”

Of course, not every vid that provokes laughter is as lighthearted as “*Star Trek Dance Floor*.” The vid “It Depends on What You Pay,” by Gianduja Kiss, uses humor to counterbalance an extremely harsh message: that the television series *Dollhouse* is entirely founded around rapes of various sorts, but refuses to name them “rape.” In taking on such a potentially loaded topic, Gianduja Kiss’s video does not provide belly laughs and catchphrases in the same way that “*Star Trek Dance Floor*” does. Yet its humorous moments provide the leavening necessary for the viewer to stomach its powerful argument.

“It Depends on What You Pay” is a vid set to the original 1960 cast recording of the song of the same name, from the musical *The Fantasticks*. The song opens with the following dialogue:

“The cost, señor, depends on the quality of the rape.”

“The *what*?”

“I know you prefer ‘abduction,’ but the proper word is ‘rape!’”

The song refers to the classical meaning of the word “rape,” as in *The Rape of the Lock*. Since the 1960s, however, it has been excised from most productions of *The Fantasticks* because of changing attitudes towards rape and sexual assault, and the changing meaning of the word “rape.” Its bouncy, lighthearted tune is an inappropriate juxtaposition with such a loaded term.

In the “It Depends on What You Pay” vid, images from the television show *Dollhouse* illustrate various lyrics from the song. This is easy to do, because the plot of *Dollhouse* involves characters being brainwashed and re-imprinted with new personalities, allowing them to perform as an assassin one week, a lawyer the next, a doctor the next, then a dominatrix. Most of the

brainwashed characters, or “dolls,” are women, and they are often put in romantic and sexual situations in the course of the show - usually while brainwashed. These situations are almost always spectacular, and they translate well into the vid. “The rape by coach is little in request” is a doll kissing the man who hired her in a car; “you can get the rape emphatic / you can get the rape polite” is the main character, Echo, first dressed as a dominatrix and then being lovingly kissed; “a spectacular rape with costumes from the East requires rehearsals and a dozen men at least” features Echo riding a motorcycle into a pavilion, then dressed in a full kimono, then getting ready in front of a mirror, then running from half-undressed men in a hotel hallway.

The illustration of the song with images from *Dollhouse* is a straightforward vidding technique, and it serves the main purpose of the video: pointing out that while both literal and figurative rape appears throughout the television show, the actual word is never mentioned. However, these straightforward representations of each kind of rape are interspersed with another kind of illustration. Here, a character in *Dollhouse* is actually portrayed as being the narrator, the singer of the song. This character, Topher, is pictured in the television series as a somewhat self-absorbed but ultimately quirky and cute nerd. Throughout *Dollhouse*, there are many clips of him fiddling with the controls of the complex brainwashing machinery, twiddling his fingers to inaudible music. These clips are put to good use in “It Depends on What You Pay.” When the music speeds up, Topher’s finger-twiddling and gesticulating is synced to its beat; he is even portrayed as actually singing along. Finally, as the singers chant “depends a *lot* on *what* you -” Topher waggles the unconscious Echo’s head back and forth, mouthing words, clowning around as

he manipulates her helpless body. As the song's finale begins to build, Gianduja Kiss switches from Topher to image after image of violence against Echo and the other dolls - but on the final, triumphal "Olé!" we see Topher through a semitransparent screen. On the screen is projected Echo's brain; behind it, Topher lifts his hands, seeming to shout "Olé!" along with the music, making it seem almost as though he has been conducting an orchestra (figure 14). *Topher* is the one who has been describing all the kinds of rape he can accomplish, all the ways he can rape the dolls.



Figure 14. Frame from "It Depends on What You Pay": "Olé!"

There is a deep sense of pathos in the vid "It Depends on What You Pay." For one, it deals with topics that are generally considered beyond the pale, inappropriate as a topic of humor. However, at many points, Topher's finger-wiggling, singing, and hopping about provides an

injection of humor into the vid. Topher's clowning both provides a release of pressure - what otherwise would be a catalogue of horrors is interrupted for a much less distressing conjunction of image and sound - and heightens the vid's irony, reinforcing the contrast between the actual rapes of the dolls and the way those rapes are bouncily, cheerfully described in the song. "It Depends on What You Pay" uses humor, certainly, but in a different way than "*Star Trek* Dance Floor" or than the *Twilight* image macros do. "It depends on what you pay" may be a *vid that uses humor*, but it is not a *humor vid*.

It is interesting, then, that "It Depends on What You Pay" has received so much more critical and scholarly attention than vids that are genuinely *humor vids* - including another of Gianduja Kiss's videos, "Don't Cha." Set to the Pussycat Dolls song of the same name, "Don't Cha" is an expertly cut vid which constructs a narrative set in the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer / Angel: the Series* universe.<sup>49</sup> Here, the characters of Spike and Angel are hot for each other - despite Angel's various other relationships. By setting the narrative to "Don't Cha," Gianduja Kiss both makes viewers laugh and makes them consider her textual argument.

The song that gives its title to the vid, "Don't Cha," is a manufactured pop ditty that reached the top 40. On BTVS/AS the characters Spike and Angel are vampires, hundreds of years old; Angel apparently has interest in nothing but moping, whereas Spike is a punk (he is depicted as listening to the Sex Pistols and other similar bands). Neither Spike nor Angel would *ever* listen to "Don't Cha." In fact, the one character on BTVS/AS who might listen to it is Buffy herself - Buffy, who forms the third leg of a love triangle with Spike and Angel. To a BTVS/AS fan, then, it's

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<sup>49</sup> Hereafter, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer / Angel: the Series* will be referred to as "BTVS/AS."

ironic and more than a little funny that a Spike/Angel vid would be set to “Don’t Cha” in the first place.

Gianduja Kiss doesn’t take the “Don’t Cha” vid too seriously, either. While the first few shots of the vid are straightforward - establishing Spike as the narrator, connecting Spike’s habitual swagger to the swaggering tone of Nicole Scherzinger’s voice in “Don’t Cha” - she veers off the beaten path by intercutting scenes of Angel pacing around his lover Drusilla with scenes of Angel pacing around Spike in exactly the same way. Since the music’s lyrics at this point are “Don’t cha wish your girlfriend was hot like me? / Don’t cha wish your girlfriend was a freak like me?” the comparison between Spike and Drusilla is clear - and the humor inherent in the suggestion that Spike could be Angel’s “girlfriend.” Throughout the rest of the vid, Spike’s suggestion that Angel wishes his girlfriend was “raw like me, fun like me” is punctuated by clips wherein he lasciviously licks his lips, rolls his eyes, grins and gesticulates in obvious sexual invitation. In their original context, these clips typically came from fight scenes, where Spike was taunting his opponent; here, the taunting takes a different form, and serves to underscore the point that Spike is “fun” and “raw” in comparison to Angel’s other dalliances.<sup>50</sup> What’s more, the performance now connects him to Nicole Scherzinger as well, conjuring incongruous images of Spike dancing with Busta Rhymes.

The idea that Spike could be Angel’s girlfriend or a Pussycat Doll is not the only joke about genderbending in “Don’t Cha,” however. Nearly two minutes into the vid, the viewer is accustomed to seeing clips of Angel with his various female lovers. When a new chorus starts, however,

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<sup>50</sup> The vid also follows standard vidding practice of conflating scenes of “fucking n’ fighting” - that is, it uses shots taken from fight scenes and recut to lend the impression that the characters are actually having sex.

Gianduja Kiss introduces shots of him with Wesley Wyndam-Price - a character who is presented in BTVS/AS as somewhat effeminate, but not gay and certainly not in a relationship with Angel. By intercutting the shots of Wesley with shots of Spike, all doctored to make both appear to be in sexual situations with Angel, Gianduja Kiss makes Wesley the new butt of the genderbending joke. To add to the amusement, these shots of Wesley, Spike, and Angel are the most suggestive shots of the vid: a naked Angel knocks Wesley/Spike to the floor, and Wesley/Spike responds by making rapidly intercut, orgasmic faces as a voice wails in the background (figure 15). The combination of the pulsating, quick cuts, the throbbing music, and the faces Wesley and Spike make is nearly obscene - even though the vid uses only images and sounds that can be aired on network television. There is humor and pleasure in this sleight-of-hand, too.

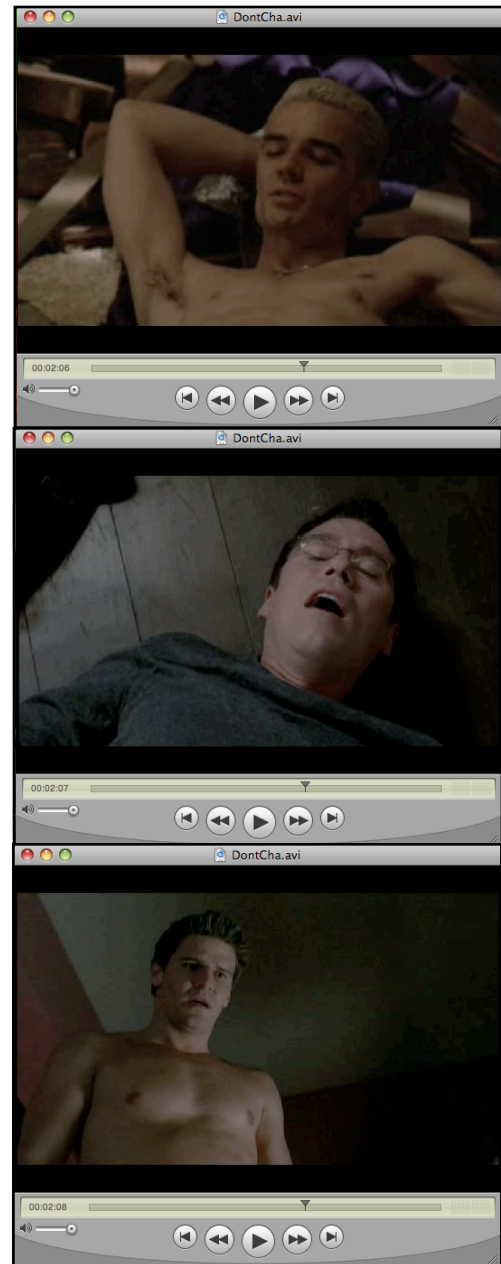


Figure 15. Intercutting between Spike, Wesley and Angel in “Don’t Cha.”

To add one final level of humor, “Don’t Cha” makes full use of visual puns. For instance, one chorus of “don’t cha wish your girlfriend was hot like me?” is illustrated by cuts between Buffy (Angel’s canonical girlfriend) at prom and Spike, sexily (and singedly) sauntering out of the ruin of

a burning building. Another intercuts images of Spike measuring off a tiny distance between thumb and forefinger with another character holding an extendable sword – presumably a commentary on the size of someone’s penis. Jokes like this are throwaways, in that they don’t provide support for the vid’s core argument – but they certainly are funny.

In “Don’t Cha,” then, Gianduja Kiss constructs an alternate reading of the television shows *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel* wherein the characters of Angel and Spike are actually secretly lust after each other – and where Angel is having an affair with Wesley Wyndam-Price. Textual poaching of exactly this sort has been explored and even valorized throughout the literature, from texts as old as *Textual Poachers* and *Enterprising Women* to the most recent issue of the *Journal of Transformative Works and Cultures* (a special edition on *Supernatural* featuring articles such as “Let’s get those Winchesters pregnant’: male pregnancy in *Supernatural* fan fiction” and “Annihilating love and heterosexuality without women: Romance, generic difference, and queer politics in *Supernatural* fan fiction”).<sup>51</sup> Despite being a vid rather than a work of fiction, despite it using humor extensively, “Don’t cha” fits perfectly within the discourse about fan works exploring concepts of gender and sexuality.

Vids like “Don’t Cha,” “It Depends on What You Pay” and “*Star Trek* Dance Floor” also fit well within a discussion of macros. In the same way that macros rely on startling juxtapositions of text and image to be humorous and make their points, these vids rely on startling juxtapositions of music, lyric, and moving image. Although “Don’t Cha” plays with gender and sexuality in the same way that classic *Star Trek* fan fiction does, it uses conventions more common to macros to do so.

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<sup>51</sup> Åström, “Let’s get those Winchesters pregnant”; Flegel, “Annihilating love and heterosexuality without women.”

Indeed, even the fan community's responses to vids like "*Star Trek* Dance Floor" have macro-like patterns: the caps-locked repetition of "NOT ENOUGH LADIES, TOO MANY MANS" spammed throughout the comment section of the original post, for instance. There is a deeper relationship between macros and fanvids than one might initially suspect - and not merely on a formal level.



## Chapter 4. The invisible and the risible.

“Humor is when the joke is on you but hits the other fellow first - before it boomerangs.”

- Langston Hughes, “A Note on Humor,” *The Book of Negro Humor*

Why is it, then, that no study of fan productions has ever taken macros into account?

Perhaps they are too new, too transgressive - but then, why has no study of fan productions ever taken humor into account in a serious way, even when it appears in a relatively standard and comprehensible fan vid like “Don’t Cha”? Why is it that our understanding of what a “fan” is has developed to exclude humorous engagements with texts, engagements that are not easily categorizable as purely positive or purely negative? Perhaps part of the problem lies in *popular* understandings of fans - and popular understandings of women, as well.

### I. Women fans.

One can hardly fail to notice the fact that popular culture dismisses fans as losers, crazed obsessives, deviants. One can turn to the movies: *Swimfan*, *Misery*, *The Incredibles*, *The Fan*, *The King of Comedy* and many more present fans as villains, seeking to kill or maim the object of their desire. News articles never fail to mention if they find someone attractive at a fan convention - they are shocked, *shocked* to find that anyone with the option to have a more “acceptable” social life might choose to hang out with such nerds. Even fan-favorite television shows like *Buffy the Vampire*

*Slayer* have featured fan-villains.<sup>52</sup> As Joli Jenson wrote in a classic article, “by conceiving of fans as members of a lunatic fringe which cracks under the pressure of modernity ... we tell ourselves a reassuring story – yes, modernity is dangerous, and some people become victims of it by succumbing to media influence or mob psychology, *but we do not*.”<sup>53</sup> Whether Jenson is right, whether the stereotypes surrounding fans are symptomatic of a general unease with modernity or not, the concept of the “lunatic fringe” is ever-present.

Furthermore, the popular understanding of what a fan is depends on what *gender* the fan is. The word “fan” does not reveal gender. However, the stereotypes that surround fans do. While both male and female fans are understood as either the “obsessed individual” or the “hysterical crowd,” to use Jenson’s categories, those stereotypes take on different flavors according to the gender of the fan involved. While the male fan may be viewed as violent (football mobs) or comically socially inept (the forty-year-old virgin), the female fan is sexually driven, incapable of separating fantasy from reality. Female fans, in the popular imagination, are Beatlemaniacs or Baby Jane Holzer. And female fans *are* in the popular imagination. Memoirs such as *I’m With the Band*, *Blue Jean Baby* and *The Beast* and novels such as *Groupie* all illustrate the fact that “the female spectator herself becomes an erotic spectacle for mundane male spectators while her abandonment of any distance from the image becomes an invitation for the viewer’s own erotic fantasies.”<sup>54</sup> Even when there is relatively little evidence that a woman is a fan, the moment that she expresses an interest in some topic or

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52 Buffy is a particularly interesting case, wherein the authors clearly intended to discipline their unruly fanbase through their narrative choices; see Johnson, “Buffy vs. the Evil Trio.”

53 Jenson, “Fandom as Pathology,” 24.

54 Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 15.

celebrity, she may be labeled one. As Cheryl Cline complains in her essays, “Rock critics seem to feel [that if] every woman from the Tenderloin bag lady to Princess Diana has the *potential* to be a groupie – then she already *is* a groupie, sort of. (She would if she could so she probably is).”<sup>55</sup> For illustration of this phenomenon, one only need look so far as Nadya Suleiman – “Octo-mom” – and her purported obsession with Angelina Jolie.<sup>56</sup> Women, whether obsessive fans or not, are portrayed as potential maenads.

While not prone to the excesses of the press, academia is hardly innocent of dividing fans into tidy “male” and “female” categories, either. In the past fifteen years it has become less and less acceptable to dismiss fans out of hand, and stereotypes about both male and female fans have become less common in academic writing. Yet, as Robin Anne Reid points out, “many fan studies deal in gender essentialisms,” and these essentialisms ignore important dimensions of identity – including race, class, sexual orientation and ability.<sup>57</sup> Whether they are understood as obsessed individuals or members of the hysterical crowd, male fans are generally thought to be interested in encyclopedic knowledge, parodic humor and technical mastery, whereas female fans are thought to be interested in extending stories, exploring environments, and discussing their day-to-day lives through the filter of their fandom.

Yet despite the dangers of essentializing “male” and “female” fan behaviors, there is one point with regard to which one can definitively divide male and female fans: though all fans are

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55 Cline, “Essays from *Bitch*,” 80.

56 Suleiman has denied any particular interest in Jolie. Nevertheless, the press frequently alleges that her multiple births and supposed plastic surgery are driven by obsession. See Thomson; also Hedley; and NBC New York.

57 Griffin & Reid, “Gender and fan studies round three.”

marginalized, female fans are marginalized not only by virtue of their fannishness but also by virtue of their gender. Whether one labels the problem with the relatively non-confrontational “sexism” or whether one brings in the more radical concepts of “patriarchy” and “rape culture,” it is undeniable that female fans are perceived differently than male fans, both as fans and as women. Whether it is better for a male fan to be stereotyped as a potentially violent football obsessive than it is for a female fan to be stereotyped as a hyperventilating, hysterically sexual groupie or not, they are different stereotypes which activate different cultural understandings. While both male and female fans may be “resistant” to various aspects of mass culture, they are rarely resistant to the all the *same* aspects.

## II. Resistant women fans.

How, then, has the resistance of women fans been historically understood?

“If real pain can be converted into the fiction of power,” Camille Bacon-Smith writes, “then the fiction of pain can be converted into real power. ...Suffering, made unreal by its perpetrators, is remade in the fiction. Remade, it denies the power of the oppressor to unmake the experience of the sufferer.”<sup>58</sup> Bacon-Smith is writing of *Star Trek* fan fiction. She sees the function of *Star Trek* fan culture – particularly fan fiction writing – as one of escape from and resistance to an oppressive, patriarchal world. In Bacon-Smith's view, women “needed a safe harbor against the day-to-day battle to survive”; therefore, they cloak their subversive activities in the trivialities of

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<sup>58</sup> Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Women*, 279.

fandom.<sup>59</sup> By producing fan fiction and discussing *Star Trek* and other fan texts, women can discuss their own oppression without being shut down by patriarchal control – because fan activities are culturally constructed as frivolous, childish, and therefore unworthy of notice. Fan culture both provides a space wherein women can hide from the reality of patriarchal oppression, the reality of a rape culture, and also a space wherein women can radically reclaim their experiences of pain through their fiction. Bacon-Smith implies that the fan cultural space performs the same function as women's centers ideally ought.

Bacon-Smith is far from alone in seeing fan cultures as a site of resistance to patriarchy. Her understandings of *Star Trek* fan culture echo Janice Radway's earlier work on romance novel readers; Radway claims that romance fandom is a "minimal but nonetheless legitimate form of protest" carried out by "people who are not satisfied by their place within it [the social fabric] or by the restricted material and emotional rewards that accompany it."<sup>60</sup> Radway sees romance readers as achieving mastery over their fears of rape, protesting men's inability to understand women, and even expressing opposition to the dominant socio-economic system (as the heroine draws the hero away from the public sphere).<sup>61</sup> Radway is deeply concerned with whether the fan space can ever grow to include more active protest against patriarchy; however, she does not deny the limited resistance value of romance fandom, which hides in plain sight on grocery store bookshelves everywhere.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 290.

<sup>60</sup> Radway, *Reading the Romance*, 222.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 214.

<sup>62</sup> This concern is echoed in many other works in addition to Radway's, including most significantly in Hinerman, "Fans, Fantasy and the Figure of Elvis."

However, other work uncovers other fandoms which are more generative and perhaps more conscious of their resistance than the romance novel readers in Radway's study. Citing De Certeau and various fan cultures of the late 1980s and early 1990s, Henry Jenkins' classic *Textual Poachers* argues that fans, operating "from a position of cultural marginality and social weakness," are "selective users of a vast media culture whose treasures, though corrupt, hold wealth that can be mined and refined for alternative uses."<sup>63</sup> The "alternative uses" of which Jenkins writes are those of the "school girl required to read a boy's book ... the housewife forced to watch her husband's cop show rather than her soap," who "nevertheless may find ways to remake those narratives, at least imaginatively."<sup>64</sup> Camille Bacon-Smith's favorite topic, hurt/comfort fan fiction, certainly falls into this category. However, Jenkins focuses not on hurt/comfort but on slash, stories which re-inscribe queer love relationships into outwardly heterosexual texts. "Slash ... posits an explicit critique of traditional masculinity, trying to establish an homosocial-homoerotic continuum as an alternative to repressive and hierarchical male sexuality," Jenkins writes, at the end of a chapter surveying slash stories.<sup>65</sup> In the early 1990s even more than today, slash writers could not fail to realize that rewriting their favorite stories as queer love stories qualifies as a political action. Here, at last, is a clear and evident example of fans actively choosing to resist the messages of the media they consume, then rewriting those media to represent their interests and ideas.

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<sup>63</sup> Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 26-27.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 219.

The topic of slash has been a recurring theme in fan studies ever since *Textual Poachers* was published in 1992; a survey of such writing would quickly exhaust even the most patient reader. That is not to say that it has been universally accepted as an effective means of resistance; many authors have pointed out that “we can talk all day long about how subversive the genre of slash is, but its very existence only highlights and reinforces the boundaries it claims to transgress.”<sup>66</sup> Mark Andrejevic has claimed that as media corporations and fans alike move into online spaces, “the binary opposition between complicit passivity and subversive participation needs to be revisited and revised. ...Activity and interactivity need to be clearly distinguished from activism.”<sup>67</sup>

Yet despite this tension, some authors see resistance even in activities much less consciously radical than slash writing. In “Beatlemania: Girls Just Want to Have Fun,” Ehrenreich, Hess and Jacobs argue that Beatlemania was actually “the first and most dramatic uprising of *women's* sexual revolution.”<sup>68</sup> Here, the very simplest actions that constitute fandom become a way of resisting patriarchal sexual structures. “To abandon control – to scream, faint, dash about in mobs [after the Beatles] – was, in form if not in conscious intent, to protest the sexual repressiveness, the rigid double standard of female teen culture.”<sup>69</sup> Ehrenreich, Hess and Jacobs highlight Beatlemania as a site of resistance *whether or not the fans are aware that they are resisting*. The sheer spectacle, uncontrolled and flamboyantly gauche, of fans publicly and bodily throwing themselves at their idols

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66 This particular formulation comes from Karen Hellekson in Hellekson and Mittell, “Gender and fan studies round one.”

67 Andrejevic, “Watching Television Without Pity,” 43.

68 Ehrenreich, Hess & Jacobs, “Beatlemania,” 85.

69 Ibid.

is enough to constitute a significant challenge to patriarchal authority. Unlike the arguments for fan fiction authors as resistant, “poaching” readers, this argument suggests that the simple stereotype of the unruly female fan can be deployed to great effect, when used by women fans rather than men or non-fans.

Whether focused on conscious or unconscious resistance, whether discussing easily identifiable or more subtle resistance tactics, the work on resistant female fans holds one thing in common: it is all very serious. Some of it is certainly written in a playful tone, irreverent and pleasant to read; however, little of it addresses humor – even when humor is inherent in the topic it's addressing. For example, the “Filk Music” chapter of *Textual Poachers* cites many humorous filks – Leslie Fish's [“Banned from Argo,”](#) for instance – without deeply engaging with the question of humor.<sup>70</sup> While the *Textual Poachers* example is over ten years old, humor continues to be an integral part of fan culture, in my experience; for instance, [the “Potter Puppet Pals” animations](#), which feature hand puppets of the *Harry Potter* characters acting out new and funny scenes, were a minor internet sensation in the 2000s and continue to be produced today.

Nor is the academy the only culprit in ignoring fan humor. None of the common, popular-culture stereotypes of fans include the possibility of humorous engagement with one's idol. Yet many parodies require encyclopedic knowledge of the source text to be fully enjoyed. For instance, Voltaire's [“The U.S.S. Make-Shit-Up,”](#) a popular recent filk, is a send-up of *Star Trek's* nonsensical science – and is totally incomprehensible without deep familiarity with the series. At Azkatraz 2009, a *Harry Potter* convention, one of the most-desired fan-made items for sale was a

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<sup>70</sup> Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 264.



button which simply read “Snapes on a Plane!,” yet press coverage of the event tended to laugh *at*, rather than laugh *with*, the funny fans. A simple search of the omnibus fan fiction archive Fanfiction.net for *Lord of the Rings* humor and parody fan fiction stories yielded over 10,000 results: a fraction of a fraction of the total number of humorous stories hosted on that site alone. Yet neither academic nor press coverage of fan fiction sites highlights humor. Fans may be funny – that is, they may be the butt of a joke – but they are not generally understood to be humorists, even though they tell jokes and create parodies prolifically.

### III. Funny women.

Until very recently, female humorists were ignored almost as assiduously as fan humorists are. The reason for this is simple. Women are not supposed to be humorists. Good girls aren't supposed to be humorists – they're too prim and proper. Bad girls aren't supposed to be humorists – they're too transgressive for anyone to validate them by *laughing*. And feminists are practically *defined* by not being humorists: “How many feminists does it take to screw in a lightbulb? – That's not funny.” More than that, though, women are not supposed to even have the ability to make jokes. They are only the butt of the jokes: “Why couldn't Helen Keller drive? – Because she was a woman.” The situation can be put from a more psychological standpoint: “women's roles generally require discretion in the use of vigorous response... these norms limit women's production of humor. Inhibition is associated with humorlessness, and, by blocking spontaneity, self-consciousness is incompatible with humor behavior.”<sup>71</sup> Or, more simply: “humor is at odds with the

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<sup>71</sup> Marlowe, “A Sense of Humor,” 147.

conventional definition of ideal womanhood. Humor is aggressive; women are passive. The humorist occupies a position of superiority; women are inferior.”<sup>72</sup>

But it isn't as simple as that, of course. There are plenty of female humorists; there always have been. One collection of women's humor, *The Wit of Women*, was published in 1885, and one can hardly imagine that women collectively grew a sense of humor in the 1880s!<sup>73</sup> But between the publication of *The Wit of Women* and the publication of *Titters*, in 1976, there was only one other collection of women's humor published in the United States – and both it and *The Wit of Women* were so obscure that *Titters* was subtitled “The First Collection of Humor by Women.” Indeed, Nancy Walker comments that the history of women's humorous writing in America is deeply ironic, since while women are denied possession of a sense of humor and are written out of the major books surveying American humor, they “have written and published large amounts of it, often to enthusiastic public reception.”<sup>74</sup>

Perhaps women's humor is ignored because so much of it is difficult for men to understand. Humor frequently takes for its subject the commonplaces of daily life; however, in a world where women are “the second sex,” their daily life is not considered the commonplace. “Women's experience tends to be ambiguous, hidden, or lacking universality, which means that the foundation of most humor – one's own human experience – has failed to generate humor [about them],” Alice

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<sup>72</sup> Walker, *A Very Serious Thing*, 12.

<sup>73</sup> In fact, in *The Wit of Women*, we see the same concern with women's humor as we do today: the preface points out that “the male type may be an amusing wag; the female must be somber and suggest the superhuman” (vi).

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

Sheppard points out.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, the differences in the ways that men and women interact socially may cause men to fail to recognize women's humor. "To the extent that women construct different social realities and codes, humor may differ [from men's] in its functions and forms. To those outside the tradition, its message is incompletely decoded."<sup>76</sup> Taken to an extreme degree, this argument would end in "The Laugh of the Medusa," describing subversive feminine texts written "in order to smash everything ... to break up the 'truth' with laughter."<sup>77</sup> Women's humor can induce this kind of response: resistant, dangerous, a laughter that "works ceaselessly to steal the language, rebuild it and fly with it."<sup>78</sup>

Does all women's humor work in such subversive ways, however? Perhaps, and perhaps not. Some certainly does. In *Humoring Resistance*, Dianna Niebylski deals with humor which transgresses the expectations of the disciplined female body: incontinent, provocative, torpid, sick, and mutating, the fictional bodies of which Niebylski writes speak in ways that Cixous would recognize as "medusan." In *The Unruly Woman*, Kathleen Rowe highlights the ways that women have harnessed "unruliness," put it to work in a humorous setting, and used it to reveal the constructed nature of femininity and the reality of their own desires. In "Liberating Laughter," Cynthia White surveys feminist humor, discovering that it functions as a marker by which feminists can identify other

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<sup>75</sup> Sheppard, "Social Cognition and Gender Roles," 41.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 48. For an example of differing social realities with regard to humor for the two genders, see "Liberating Laughter" by Cynthia White: "What passes for playful jocularity among men is culturally defined as an example of female bitchiness among women" (76).

<sup>77</sup> Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," 888.

<sup>78</sup> Gray, *Women and Laughter*, 185.

feminists, which might well be considered subversive in itself.<sup>79</sup> But there is great debate about whether the so-called “housewife writers” of the 1950s were truly subversive. In *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan argues that they are laughing *at* housewives, not *with* them:

“Laugh,” the Housewife Writers tell the real housewife, “if you are feeling desperate, empty, bored, trapped in the bedmaking, chauffeuring and dishwashing details. Isn’t it funny? We’re all in the same trap.” Do real housewives then dissipate in laughter their dreams and their sense of desperation? Do they think their frustrated abilities and their limited lives are a joke? Shirley Jackson makes the beds, loves and laughs at her son – and writes another book. Jean Kerr’s plays are produced on Broadway. The joke is not on them.<sup>80</sup>

Friedan’s view of the housewife writers has been challenged by several modern scholars, but her basic critique remains: some humor, even humor written by women, is written by adopting a male or “superior” perspective.<sup>81</sup>

In *They Used to Call Me Snow White... but I Drifted*, Regina Barreca takes women to task for this sort of joking behavior. “The unnerving message transmitted by these self-deprecating jokes,” she writes, “is that it’s okay to be hostile as long as you make yourself into the object of the hostility.”<sup>82</sup> She warns that self-deprecating jokes are often taken literally rather than ironically by men; her anecdote of “Helen,” who worked on Wall Street and eventually made so many dumb blonde jokes that the men in the office perceived her as a dumb blonde, is a cautionary tale.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> White, “Liberating Laughter,” 88.

<sup>80</sup> Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 57.

<sup>81</sup> Jessamyn Neuhaus’ “Is it ridiculous for me to say I want to write?” is an interesting study of fan letters to Shirley Jackson that directly contradicts Friedan’s claim; in “Humor and Gender Roles,” Nancy Walker does the same.

<sup>82</sup> Barreca, *They Used to Call Me Snow White*, 25.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

Barreca is not claiming that self-deprecating jokes are necessarily *intended* to put oneself down; she almost agrees with Nancy Walker, who argues that a female humorist is “apt to be self-deprecatory as a way of acknowledging that she has difficulty living up to the standards established for her behavior.”<sup>84</sup> However, Barreca *is* claiming that men and women have different understandings of what is humorous, and therefore humor which is subversive from a female perspective may in fact not subvert anything from the male point of view.

#### IV. Funny fans.

The question of self-deprecation is an important one when discussing fans’ humor. Take, for example, “You know you’re an X-phile when,” a joke which consists of lists of moments when one might realize that one is, in fact, utterly consumed with *The X-files*.<sup>85</sup> These moments are often compiled by a discussion group or message board of X-philes. Some examples, [from the \*Television Without Pity\* forums](#): “You know you’re an X-phile when you get a work email from rstrickland and think ‘what does Ronnie want now?’”; “You know you’re an X-phile when you find out that your sister’s Jack Russell terrier has a chip implanted into the back of its neck, you instantly think that it’s the work of the Consortium. Out loud.” This is a recurring form of joke – it appears in many online fandoms – but it is entrenched among X-files fans in particular; the *Television Without Pity* forums alone yield 93 pages of it, and there are many other individual sites with their own versions. On the one hand, it is nearly impossible to parse without detailed fan knowledge: “Ronnie

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<sup>84</sup> Walker, *A Very Serious Thing*, 106.

<sup>85</sup> See glossary.

Strickland” is a minor character who appears in a single episode, for instance.<sup>86</sup> But each segment also implies that the joke-teller, or joke-author, is an inappropriately obsessed fan: that’s the point. Lists of characteristics that X-philes share (“you set your DVR to record the show whenever it reruns; you have seen every episode”) aren’t funny. Lists of socially-unacceptable characteristics that X-philes share, however, are. Fortunately, because these jokes are typically compiled within a community of X-philes, they are typically greeted with good humor and amusement as one recognizes each moment in one’s own life – “Yes, I guess I really am an intractable fan!”

Compare the example of “You know you’re an X-phile when” to the site [My Life is Twilight](#). Following in the steps of [Fuck My Life](#) and other similar humor sites, My Life is Twilight encourages users to submit their very short stories of *Twilight* obsession with the tag “MLIT.” Readers then comment and vote on whether they are entertaining or not, producing a “Top 100” and “Flop 100.” The stories are submitted anonymously, but they are presented by the site as potentially true; the site is a subsidiary of the *Twilight* fan site [Twilighters.org](#). One example reads: “Today I asked my boyfriend to hold ice to his lips for a minute before he kissed me, so I could pretend I was kissing Edward. He did. MLIT.” Some commenters obviously hailed from 4chan and were simply trolling; others took her statement seriously and commented that she was lucky her boyfriend went along with such a request.<sup>87</sup> Fuck My Life is widely perceived as a humorous site, and My Life Is Twilight initially strikes one as a joke, as well. But who is the butt of

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<sup>86</sup> Specifically, in *The X-files* season 5, episode 12, “Bad Blood.” It aired in 1998. I am quite pleased that I did not need to look this fact up.

<sup>87</sup> For more about 4chan, see chapter 3.

the joke, and who is laughing? It may have been initially produced by a *Twilight* fan site, just as “You know you’re an X-phile when” jokes are produced by X-philes, but it is certainly not viewed by *Twilight* fans alone. Like men listening to a blond woman tell dumb blonde jokes when she makes a mistake, the viewers of My Life is Twilight do not necessarily understand the context in which the submissions are written. A *Twilight* fan may take the stories as humorous reflections on a shared interest, or as amusing exaggerations; a non-fan or anti-fan, on the other hand, may read them to laugh at how pathetic *Twilight* fans are, or to arm themselves with anecdotes to critique *Twilight* fandom.

The example of My Life is Twilight is a particularly intriguing one because it speaks directly to the perception of female fans. The most earnest *Twilight* fan cannot escape the knowledge that her interest is widely perceived as aberrant, and herself as dangerously sexual. If she chooses to participate in the humor of a site such as My Life is Twilight, she will be unable to control the context in which her humor is understood. Even in-jokes can be taken up by outside groups and discussed grossly out of context. For example, the writers of [Twitarded](#) (a *Twilight* fan blog) received two pair of underwear with an image of Edward Cullen’s lips and mouth stitched into



Figure 16. Underwear given to the writers of Twitarded.

the crotch as a present, in jest (figure 16); the underwear became a minor internet sensation, eventually being featured in a variety of blogs as an example of creepy *Twilight* fandom. In order to enjoy their laughs – and the Twitarded authors certainly enjoyed their laughs, judging by [the comments on their site](#) – female fans who post their humor publicly must adopt an ironic, distanced tone as a sort of armor. As Richard Rorty says, ironists are

never able to take themselves seriously because [they are] always aware that the terms in which they describe themselves are subject to change, always aware of the contingency and fragility of their final vocabularies, and thus of their selves.”<sup>88</sup>

By “final vocabularies,” Rorty meant terms like “good” and “bad.” Fans, and particularly *Twilight* fans, are caught between their own enjoyment and others’ beliefs about whether their enjoyment is good or bad; there are many coping strategies, and one – perhaps – is irony.

Thus far, I have focused purely on humor that rebounds back on the fans – humor that relies on the context in which it was produced. However, there is a significant portion of fan humor that relies primarily on the core text, not reflecting back on the fans’ experience at all. For example, [“The Official Supernatural Drinking Game \(Hardcore Edition\)”](#), by Lsketch42, draws on fanvidding tradition and mashes up various scenes from *Supernatural* to make it appear that the characters are playing along with a drinking game about their own show – and sets it all to polka music.<sup>89</sup> This sort of video can hardly be called self-deprecatory; it is not clear at first glance if it was made by a woman or a man; and although its content had to be assembled by a person who knows

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<sup>88</sup> Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, 73.

<sup>89</sup> See also its sequel, “The Official *Supernatural* Drinking Game – ROUND TWO” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z4QFfRtSBkI&feature=related>



*Supernatural* very well, it can be enjoyed by those who have viewed it fairly casually. Similarly, when Leslie Fish sings that the crew of the Enterprise is banned from Argo because “our lady of Communications won a ship-wide bet / by getting into the planet’s main communications net / now every time someone calls up on an Argo telescreen / the flesh is there, but the clothes they wear are nowhere to be seen,” she’s making a joke which might require some insider knowledge and which might not go over well with every crowd – but which does not directly implicate herself as a *Star Trek* fan.

Speaking very generally, it seems that there are important parallels between fan humor and women’s humor – and fan humor often *is* women’s humor. Fan humor and women’s humor both originate from groups that have generally been viewed as “humorless”; like all humor, they both rely on specialized in-group knowledge and can function as a way to recognize other members of the in-group; they both sometimes tend dangerously to the self-deprecating, and can be misunderstood by members of the out-group as serious. The concept of the lolfan, the woman member of *Twatlight* who looks at fandom through a humorous lens, is doubly transgressive. Women and fans may be risible – but when they take the active role and begin telling the jokes, they are invisible, at least to the academic eye.

## Conclusions.

As I discussed in my previous chapter, fan studies has long been concerned with bringing the invisible to light, with celebrating the ways that the disempowered masses - fans - engage with society and politics, create their own cultures, carve out spaces for themselves. This commitment stretches back into the foundations of cultural studies. However, my research has led me to believe that the very name of the field - “fan studies” - runs the risk of silencing certain voices, overshadowing certain methods of engagement.

To quote Jonathan Gray, “My interests lie not in disputing academic interest in the fan, but in examining what this wave has unnecessarily and unintentionally pushed under, what is missing from its present thrust and what the effects of these omissions have been on the wider discipline of media and cultural studies.”<sup>90</sup> By “omissions,” Gray means the non-fan and the anti-fan. He does not look broadly enough. The current focus of fan studies leaves out anti-fans and non-fans, yes, but it also leaves out an entire swath of self-identified fans: female fan humorists. Given the discussions of fan studies, cultural studies, audience studies as feminist spaces - spaces against oppression - this omission is startling and chastening. If we explore only parody and male fans’ humor, then we are getting only half the story - and it’s half as expressed by the already-dominant group.

It is easy enough to call for more work on female fans’ humor; it is easy enough to say that, now that we have *recognized* the way that cultural expectations about women’s humor function, we can overcome them. Certainly, it would be a step forward to begin actively examining fan traditions - crackfic, humor fic, funny fan vids, funny filks - not

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<sup>90</sup> Gray “New Audiences, New Textualities” 65.

merely as transformative works but as transformative works *that employ humor*. However, these steps would not serve to solve the deeper problem, which is that the very term “fan studies” does not seem adequate to describe the people, communities, works and behaviors that the field seeks to study. Why should a young woman who enjoys *Twilight* identify herself as a *Twilight* fan when she knows that she will be ridiculed for it, that she is stepping into a role that will brand her as an absolutely feminine, absolutely silly creature? Why should a young woman who has complex feelings about *Twilight*, including affective engagement with it, identify herself as a *Twilight* fan when she knows that this label will never accurately represent her feelings on the topic? And why should fan studies ignore these young women, who may in every other particular engage with *Twilight* in ways identical to fans’ engagement?

This knotty problem cannot be ameliorated by simply adopting Jonathan Gray’s schema of fans, anti-fans, and non-fans – or even by adding the category of “lofans” to stand alongside the other sorts of people represented in his model. Certainly, fans are in conversation with those who define themselves against fandom, and the work of fan studies should reflect this. Simply creating more categories, however, only creates more complexity and more limit cases. Are “You know you’re an X-phile when” sites created by fans, or lofans? What about buttons that read “Snapes on a plane”? Is it at all useful to divide out audiences in this way?

One possible response to this problem might be to hearken back to an earlier time, to Ien Ang and John Fiske, and return to the term “audience studies.” In some ways, this is Jonathan Gray’s argument, although put forth without the crutch of complicating terms and

models. By simply claiming to study audiences, a scholar might free herself from the strictures of the term “fan” and once again be able to examine all affectively engaged, critical communities and their productions. Unfortunately, such a definition does not really describe what fan studies scholars are primarily interested in. “Audience studies” implies that one’s work will include those who are minimally engaged, or whose engagement does not extend into taking part in a community of readers or viewers or listeners. Generally speaking, this is not so. It does not accurately describe the field.

Does “fan studies” accurately describe the field, however? In this thesis, I have illustrated that it does not, or if it does, that it should not. I have demonstrated that there are large communities of people who engage with texts in fannish ways but who do not call themselves fan communities, particularly referencing *Twatlight*. I have explored their fan works, showing that these fan works have extremely interesting critical content, despite the fact that they are humorous. I have put *Twatlight*’s productions in the context of more well-studied fan productions, particularly fan vids. Finally, I have brought to light some of the reasons why humor has been such an overlooked topic within fan studies.

I have, I hope, sketched the outline of a major problem for fan studies. I have not, I fear, found any simple solution to this problem. Therefore, I can only pose it for other scholars to consider: Should our field be called “fan studies,” given the limitations of the name? If not “fan studies,” what should it be called?

## Glossary.

“Chocolate Rain”	A YouTube video by a young man named Tay Zonday, who became an online sensation when members of 4chan decided to rate his video highly, leaving positive comments and making it one of the most popular videos online.
concern trolling	Harassing people while pretending to be concerned for their well-being. “I was just <i>worried</i> about you - that’s why I hacked into your email!”
fen	Popularly, a plural of “fan.”
flame war	A discussion, held online, that has devolved into argument and (often) name-calling.
fnt	“For my time.” Often appears in Twatlight posts to designate something that the author has been thinking about lately.
fyt	“For your time.” Often appears in Twatlight posts to designate something that the author wants to show other twats.
gifs	Animated .gif files, often of extremely short clips from movies.
griefing	See “trolling.”
lolcats	Macros of cats. Originated on 4chan as a result of “Caturday” (Saturdays being a designated day when posting cat pictures was encouraged.)
lulz	Schadenfreude, or mean-spirited humor. Generally thought to be a corruption of “LOL,” “Laughing Out Loud.”

macros	<p>Pictures with words, usually in Impact font, captioning them in concise and humorous ways.</p> <p>Macros usually are iterative - that is, the same caption is applied to many photos, or many photos are applied to one caption. The term “macro” originally meant a small piece of code deployed to perform a repetitive task; the iterative nature of macros makes the comparison clear.</p>
rickroll	To trick someone into viewing the music video for Rick Astley’s “Never Gonna Give You Up,” usually through a link that appears to go elsewhere.
so i herd u liek mudkip	A meme which refers to the ‘mudkip’ Pokémon (or sometimes to the axolotl, which is a real creature that looks like a Pokémon). The root of the meme is unimportant; the image of a mudkip alone is considered funny.
trolling	Purposely being rude or irritating in an online forum in order to get a reaction, spark a flame war, and thereby enjoy the following lulz.
trolls	People who enjoy trolling.
twihard	A particularly devoted <i>Twilight</i> fan. Derogatory.
x-phile	A fan of the television show <i>The X-files</i> .

## Appendix: A summary of the *Twilight* series.

The *Twilight* series, at the time of this writing, is composed of four completed books (*Twilight*, *New Moon*, *Eclipse*, and *Breaking Dawn*), one partial manuscript available online (*Midnight Sun*), and two film adaptations of the first two books (*Twilight* and *New Moon*).

*Twilight* follows Bella Swan, a high school girl who moves to Forks, Washington. One student at her new high school, Edward Cullen, seems repulsed by her. As she investigates him, his siblings Alice, Emmett, Rosalie and Jasper, and his parents Carlisle and Esme, she discovers that his entire family are actually vampires - but noble vampires who do not drink the blood of humans. As vampires, they are inhumanly beautiful and their skin sparkles “like diamonds” in sunlight (which is why they live in the cloudiest place in the United States). Bella and Edward strike up a tentative romantic relationship, which is complicated both by his self-loathing and by another vampire coven. One vampire in this coven, James, attempts to hunt Bella down; however, Edward manages to fight him off and save Bella from vampirism by sucking poison out of her wounds.

*New Moon* opens at a birthday party for Bella, where a simple accident causes Jasper to go into a rage of bloodlust. Fearing for Bella’s safety, the Cullen family leaves Forks, and Edward ends his relationship with Bella for her own good. Bella grieves the relationship, but slowly begins to form new bonds, particularly with her friend Jacob Black, who she later discovers is a shape-shifter who assumes a giant wolf form - a trait shared by other members

of his Native American tribe. Nevertheless, when Bella realizes that by putting herself in dangerous situations she can induce hallucinations of Edward's voice and visage, she becomes a thrillseeker. Through a series of miscommunications about her adventures, Edward believes that Bella has committed suicide. Therefore, he flees to Italy, intending to provoke the Volturi (vampire royalty) into killing him and ending his grief. Bella and his sister Alice successfully reach Italy in time to stop him, but the Volturi inform them that Bella must be killed or turned into a vampire, as no human is allowed to know of vampires' existence. The Cullens support Bella becoming a vampire, but Edward is reluctant. Finally, he agrees to turn Bella into a vampire - but only if she either (1) finishes high school or (2) marries him, or ideally both.

*Eclipse* follows the tension between Bella, Edward and Jacob, whose wolf pack are traditional enemies of vampires. In complication, the clairvoyant vampire Alice prophesies that Victoria - a vampire seeking revenge on Bella Swan for her mate James' death in *Twilight* - is coming to Forks. Realizing that Victoria has raised an army of newborn vampires that are wreaking havoc in nearby Seattle, the wolves and the Cullens join forces to repel this new threat. Jacob and Edward remain out of the battle as bodyguards for Bella, but when Jacob realizes that Edward and Bella are engaged, he threatens to throw himself into battle and purposely be killed. Bella is forced to examine her feelings for Edward and Jacob both, and concludes that while she loves Jacob, she loves Edward more. At the conclusion of the book, Jacob runs away in his wolf form to escape his heartbreak upon receiving a wedding invitation from Edward and Bella.



*Breaking Dawn* is divided into three separate sections. The first details Bella and Edward's wedding and honeymoon, which is interrupted when Bella realizes that she is pregnant and that the pregnancy is progressing at an unnaturally accelerated rate. Edward attempts to convince her that the fetus is a monster and should be aborted, but Bella refuses, despite the fact that the pregnancy threatens her life.

The second section is written from the perspective of Jacob Black, who returned to his pack from the wild to attend the wedding. His pack, believing Bella's child a threat, intends to kill it (and possibly her as well). However, Jacob protests this decision and leaves, forming a splinter pack of dissidents. Bella eventually gives birth by Caesarian section, but this is accomplished using Jacob's werewolf claws and Edward's vampire teeth - because her stomach has become impervious to surgical instruments, much like a vampire's impervious skin. Edward turns her into a vampire to save her rapidly-ebbing life. Meanwhile, Jacob "imprints" on the newborn, named Renesmee. This "imprinting," common to shape-shifters, means that he will be devoted to her all his life, first as a friend and eventually as a lover.

The final section shifts back to Bella's perspective. She enjoys her new life and abilities, but they are threatened by the Volturi, who believe Renesmee to be a threat. The wolf pack and the Cullens prepare to protect themselves and Renesmee, but upon arriving in Forks, the Volturi are swayed by their arguments and agree to allow Edward, Jacob and Renesmee to live in peace.

*Midnight Sun* is a partial manuscript for a companion novel to *Twilight*, written from Edward's perspective. When pieces of the manuscript leaked online, Stephenie Meyer halted writing, and it remains unfinished. However, twelve chapters of the manuscript are available online. They do not particularly diverge from the events of *Twilight*, although they reveal a good deal about Edward's character.

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