

Vulnerability and Trash

Divisions within the Stucky fandom

Alen Ríos and Diego Rivera

Abstract

In this article we focus on the construction of the Other within the Stucky fandom. Contemporary fandoms are spaces that have been conceived as homogenous, or communities in which differences are not seen. Moreover, they are an articulation of subjectivities that encompass and allow several mechanisms of governmentality; they can be capitalized upon and exploited, but also produce their own logics of resistance. This paper analyzes how certain fanworks and fan practices on the social network Tumblr constitute an Other in relation to the general fandom of Stucky. The methodology used was a virtual ethnographic approach using participant observation and ethnographic interviews. According to our results, the Stucky fandom utilizes trigger warnings as a political rationality to construe a vulnerable Other in order to prevent and warn about activities, topics, or experiences that may heavily upset them, as well as converging in the creation of a segregation of those experiences via tags. This phenomenon also occurs in the parts (*sides* ad verbatim) of fandom that do not move or uphold the same values or hegemonic perspectives within the fandom, generating an Other that should be moderated. We suggest framing and understanding these practices as power relationships that are constantly changing, due to the platforms, the fans and the discourses that surround them. Therefore, divisions and othering in fandom should be understood as a contingent product of relationships both inside and outside the fandom.

Keywords

Otherness, fandom, slash, ethicopolitics, trigger warnings

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Introduction

Fandom studies initiated as a subsection of audience studies (Roque 2015), understanding fandom as a community of fanatics, an irrational and pathological mass with an illogical affection for some form of popular culture (Jenkins in Meyan & Tucker 2007). Or as Stanfill (2011) puts it, fans and nerds in general were framed as a form of failed white masculinity: they appeared as childish, feminized bodies unable to perform their expected role, needing to outgrow their hobbies to be able to do so. These notions were challenged in 1992 by Henry Jenkins, who proposed thinking about fandom not as a pathological activity, but as a communal activity that allowed the articulation of discourses outside of the hegemonic mainstream (Jenkins 2005). This was followed by studies done by academics researching the field as fans, mixing both their role of academic and fans, as “acafans”, increasing the complexity of their studies (Jenkins in Meyan & Tucker 2007). From there, fandom studies expanded from the conception of fandom as only an activity of resistance, exploring its heterogeneous nature and the ways it relates to hegemony,

¹ The authors would like to eagerly thank Baird Campbell (bcc4@rice.edu), candidate to Ph.D. in Anthropology at Rice University, who generously proofread our manuscript, helping us to edit our article.

and they also changed with the gradual decline of stigmatization of fandom and its growing role in the entertainment industry (Roque 2015). At the same time, the organization of fandom was reshaped with the widespread use of the Internet, taking the already virtual communities of fandom and settling in new sites that allowed larger communities and a new form of synchronicity (Jenkins 2006). This movement allowed new forms of organization. For example, in the South Korean fandom, it gave rise to new forms of cyber-activism organized by fans both in charitable drives and the moral policing of both stars and other fans (Sun 2012).

The term fandom is a neologism that combines the word *fan* and the suffix *dom* (Reid 2012; Roine 2013) and can be defined as a community of fans working with reciprocal sharing around a specific narrative work (Turk 2014), as a community who “understands” the fanworks related to a given product (Stanfill 2013), amongst other definitions. Production is one of its central dimensions (Fiske 1992). For Jenkins ([1992] 2005), fandom appears in relation to a text, filling the gaps that the author leaves with guesses, discussion, and fans’ own production. This production implies a constant give and take from both the fans and the fandom, forming a gift economy where the fans give their products, be they fanworks, discussion, infrastructure or others, and receive the products of other fans as part of the fandom (Turk 2014). This production, as we already mentioned, appears both as resistance towards hegemony and also as a part of the same (van de Goor 2015).

In our study it is important to note that we will work with the concepts of hegemony and resistance as components and results of power relationships. According to Ibañez (1983), they relate to a decentralized power, which no longer resides in one person or institution, but exist as a dissemination constituted, reproduced, and transformed by each everyday interaction. They might be viewed as total possibilities, but impossible to grasp as a relationship. These power relationships, or social relationships, work around norms and mechanisms of verification, surrounding supposed knowledge and truths to compose the instances

of the definition of hegemony and resistance, without certainty about the result of the interactions. Therefore, in our case, hegemony and resistance will be products of these relationships and be defined in their everyday presences, according to the discursive and non-discursive practices present in fandom.

As a consequence, when regarding fandom as a community, which would be a group formed either by practices (community of practices) or shared beliefs (imaginary community) (van de Goor 2015; Leverich 2015), it is important to note how, even in the most closed and minimal group of fans, there will be fissures and divisions due to discordances in practices or beliefs, turning a seemingly homogeneous community into a divided one. These possible divisions have often been dismissed by scholars, who instead suggest that there is one sole and all-encompassing fandom of certain products (Leverich 2015; van de Goor 2015). This is mostly due to the fact that practices are policed and agreed upon by members, as well as disregarded, disagreed or ignored; ships² can split fans into different 'factions' which do not necessarily cross paths, and crossover fandoms are liminal by definition in their activity, which can also set them apart from other fandoms (Leverich 2015). Thus, even while considering that fandom shares beliefs concerning what fan behavior is, what a community is and the sense of belonging therein, their practices contribute to othering and segmenting (van de Goor 2015), constituting communities when those sectors have "their own sets of boundaries, rules and hierarchical structures that may not necessarily conform to the wider fan community" (Chin 2010, p.119).

In particular, one subset of fanworks and the community that surrounds it has been used to illustrate the capacity to produce non-hegemonic discourses of fandom and the articulation that occurs therein. Slash is a branch of fanworks

² Romantic or sexual relationship between two or more fictional or non-fictional characters, canonical or not (definition from shipping wikia). It is usually coded as Character 1/Character 2 or Character1xCharacter2.

focusing on same-gender romantic/sexual relationships between characters. Sometimes the definition excludes lesbian relationships, making them part of a different sub-genre called femslash (Thurman 2015, Brennan 2013b). Slash traditionally has been conceptualized as a feminized space, for example to Jenkins ([1992] 2005) slash appeared as a primarily women activity that served to conceptualize romantic relationships outside of a heteropatriarchal regime. This was done by using the romantic relationship of two men as a way to blur the limitations of masculinity and its relationship with femininity; creating a relationship where both characters are equal. Such conceptualizations, which define slash as the creation of fictional spaces as a critique of a patriarchal society, have been adopted by many authors, who take slash as a strategy to blur the boundary between women and men subjects in a multiplicity of combinations (Willis 2016); or conceptualize it as a “place of female queer possibility”, arguing that the elements of their narratives and the community that forms around slash allow the articulation of queer identities (Lothian, Busse & Reid 2016). On the other hand, Brennan (2013b) discusses that scholars have focused too much on the critical side of slash and the women in it, shunning both the existence of men slashers and the conservative elements (Brennan 2013a) that exist inside slash communities, in particular how certain users attack producers of content if they cross certain boundaries, either of content or visibility. For Brennan (ibid), slash cannot be understood exclusively as a transgressive space as he finds that certain parts of it are rooted more in the fantasy of gay relationships than in the relationships themselves and so, when the content becomes more visible or touches on sensitive topics, the fantasy risks being broken.

Fandom and slash, as mentioned above, have been construed as spaces where otherwise marginalized individuals produce their own discourses, their own spaces, and communities and yet also reproduce some of the same hegemonic logic that excludes them. Thus, in this paper, we will examine how some boundaries are

constructed, what norms and mechanisms are used to uphold said boundaries, and what kinds of subjects are constructed through those boundaries.

Between the broad scope of slash communities, Stucky was selected because it was one of the more popular ships on 2016 on Tumblr. It originates from the characters and universe of Captain America, specifically Steve Rogers and Bucky Barnes (Stucky being a portmanteau of the characters' names). Captain America, as a franchise, appears as part of bigger multimedia franchise and deals with themes such as patriotism, identity and culture within the USA (Steinmetz 2008; Stevens and Bells 2009; Mercille 2013), while being a product of marketing practices that involve fanification (Burks 2016).

The Stucky community moves across platforms and websites, as most fandoms do, using Tumblr, AO3, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and others to create, share and find content of interest. While moving on those platforms, fans learn to moderate their actions by acquiescing to others actors' actions, depending on their paths in fandom. Those dynamics help to construe guidelines or agreements about how to behave in different *sides* of their fandom.

Methodology

This research was done with a qualitative focus since the object of study was the practices of certain subjects and how they constitute themselves and their social reality (Piper 2007). This qualitative focus allowed us to work with the contradictions and breaking points of those socially constructed objects (Denzin and Lincoln 2005).

The data was produced through virtual ethnography (Hine 2000), conducted between July 2016 and January 2017, via participant observation, documented with screenshots and field journals. Three ethnographic interviews were conducted with differently positioned participants in the fandom of Stucky: a writer fan, a collector

fan, and a lurker fan.³ Virtual ethnography (Hine, 2000) is used as a way to produce ethnographic knowledge about online relationships, understanding it as a cultural artifact and therefore a product of the culture it is inserted in. As a consequence, the field of this approach appears not as a predefined space but as a place in constant fluctuation. Thus, the field expanded to other websites and areas insofar as they seemed relevant during the fieldwork.

For this research, the field was defined as a place where interactions in fandom were visible and traceable, which led us to the social network of Tumblr. Inside this platform, content is classified and observed according to the number of responses, quantity of users interacting, relevance of the contents and timing. This content was followed according to their use of tags and their interaction with the fandom of Stucky. Tumblr was selected because it works as a social network that connects to other platforms, allows posting and subscribing to content and interaction between their users. AO3⁴, another site for fandom, was sporadically visited when links to the site appeared in Tumblr.

To obtain data pertaining to perspectives from people who were already fans of Stucky, we conducted three ethnographic interviews with fans who undertake different activities within the fandom. Those interviews touched on topics regarding their ways of moving within the fandom, of interacting and building it, the history they knew about it, and their own involvement with it, along with their motivations, beliefs, and compromises with the fandom, as well as with other fans, plus their experience of being a fan. All of that data complemented our own experience around fandom, giving us a deeper understanding of other findings and allowing us to better navigate and map our fieldwork. Additionally, it added some insights about

³ This data was produced for the researchers' thesis to obtain a professional degree in Psychology in Universidad de Chile, 2017.

⁴ AO3 is an "Archive of Our Own" for fanworks, created and maintained by the OTW, Organization of Transformative Works (alternative name for fanworks). In the site, fans can post and comment fanworks pertaining several fandoms. It has also compiled material from other websites, to preserve them.

some similarities and differences within the groups inside the community that were too subtle for us to notice at first. An ethnographic interview approach was selected for these reasons; we, as immersed as we were in the field, needed to access fans' understanding of the field first, in order to subsequently focus on matters more specific and pertinent to our research.

To analyze the material produced, an ethnographic analysis was completed (Hammersley and Atkinson 1994), where the information collected was reorganized critically, emerging from the work in the field, giving as a result a narrative text with categories and perspectives to reformulate the information in relation to our analytical focus.

Analysis and discussion

In this analysis, we will explore the notion of othering that occurs within the Stucky fandom, by relating it to both discourse and practices, utilizing a frame of Foucauldian conceptual tools. This fandom can be explored from within its different spaces, within which many territorial distinctions occur, singling out groups either because of their different reactions to the content of fanworks, as happened with trigger warnings, or due to the production of content that was not welcomed or valued within the fandom community, as happened with Hydra Trash Party and *dark fics*⁵, which will be explained in more detail in the last segment of the text. Both aspects are framed in an apparent contradiction with the fandom's purpose of being an inclusive space, as well as its social condition of already being an othered space (Lothian, Busse & Reid 2016), which is contested by the emergence of performances that fetishize or invalidate homosexual narratives in the form of so called *trash*. In the discussion of HTP, "trash' is slang for something

⁵ Dark fics are "fan fictions that deal with intentionally disturbing material, such as physical and emotional violence. The mood and atmosphere are characterized by a shift away from optimism, toward despair or hopelessness, or even a sort of gleeful exploration of the disturbing." (definition from whatisthehydratrashparty.tumblr)

nobody wants”. This more or less coincides with the one the library manager described as “something that's kinky or wrong”. However, “trash” is also used in the fandom to describe something as a guilty pleasure, as something that is enjoyed in spite of or even because of being problematic. These discourses and performances can be read from an ethicopolitical standpoint, both in the sense of constructing certain ‘acceptable’ forms of sexuality and the construction of inclusive spaces.

Triggering as rationality policing

To begin with, we will explain the tagging system in Tumblr. The tags in this social network function as identifiers that help viewers to select content within blogs tagged with certain words. For example, to display all of the posts tagged ‘Stucky’ in a blog, the tag must be typed in the search box, and all the posts that use it, either as a word or tag will appear, leaving out unrelated content (although this can change according to the platform’s tools). They also work as the search mechanism of Tumblr itself, or for Google results to pop out. It is due to this feature that tags can be used as a medium to split sections inside the fandom, since only similar content will appear, and all other possible content, as long as it is not tagged alongside the searched tag, will not be present in the results. This becomes relevant when browsing for Stucky-related posts or blogs, being the first step for our interviewees, and ourselves, when arriving at the fandom.

These tags are usually used to guide users both to content that they would prefer and to their associated community. Nevertheless, they are also used to warn potential readers about content that for any reason they may want to avoid. One subset of these tags is trigger warnings, which are used to warn and prevent other users from encountering concepts, ideas, feelings, or anything else that may be related to trauma or strong negative unavoidable reactions. Godderis and Root (2016), referring to the use of trigger warnings in the classroom, argue that usually

the call for trigger warnings does not come from those that should benefit from it, but from other people that consider that the content could cause suffering to someone else; in this sense, trigger warnings rest on the construction of a vulnerable Other and an attempt to police content that could harm them. But, for Lothian (2016), the use of trigger warnings in slash has a different connotation insofar as it has an added dimension as a pleasurable activity and therefore trigger warnings serve not only to help avoid unpleasant narratives but also as a tool to find them if one so wishes.

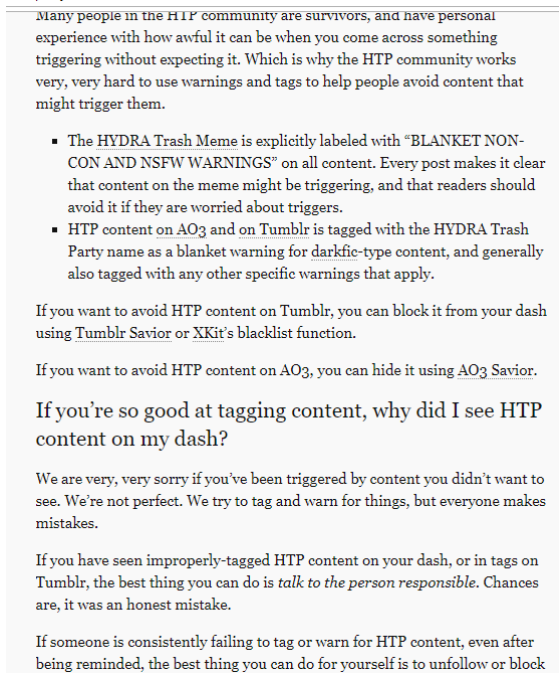
This framing of certain content as dangerous for some subjects marks a particular way of being and demonstrates how to relate to certain experiences. For Foucault (quoted in Tassin 2012) subjectivity consists of the way we make the experience of the self, appearing as a positive product of a matrix of power relationships in society and the economy of truth associated with it. This is part of a dynamic process of tension, transformation, and renewal that extends to both the macro political and micro political (Ares 2010). When considering the practice of offering trigger warnings, it is important to highlight the role that discourse plays in the constitution of knowledge, power, and relationships. It is due to the discursive practices of tagging that actual spaces emerge and disappear in fandom, within the possibilities of wording, taggable ideas, and the relevance of the contents to distinguish them from other matters (Foucault quoted in Domínguez and Tribalsky 2011).

Trigger warnings function as a discursive tool to other, since their use is heavily dependent on words, phrasings, and written codes, and ultimately speak of written content that may harm an Other. In this sense, this othering is rooted in discursive practices that are related to hegemonic or marginal discourses; after all, trigger warnings behold the intention of preventing and caring for an Other who is a peer.

In this manner, trigger warnings build a discursive Other that is rational, disabled, and similar to oneself, but with different experiences, translating to the fandom in a disaggregation of emotions, either uniting them in PTSD or positioning them in a lesser position to rationality. Additionally, they construct an Other that has acceptable and understandable problems, with which they can sympathize and try to amend their ways to include them without causing them more troubles. The fandom establishes this space where this Other can navigate safely. Since the warning was already given, the space to discuss the correctness or adequacy of the content is not expected to arise; rather, it is assumed that the content is at least tolerated, and that a debate will not occur unless there are other points of conflict surrounding it. They give fandom broader limits for its narratives, and help avoid unwanted responses. They also offer the benefit of being ‘fair’ to people who might get upset, and therefore give the impression of an understanding, empathic fandom while policing feedback and debates about Stucky and its fanworks.

An example of this is how the HTP *side* considers itself in regards to tags. As referenced below, this *side* appears to be unwilling to subject people to their presence, suggesting blacklisting⁶ to avoid seeing content one did not desire or does not like. Nonetheless, they also mention that people who submit, create or repost HTP contents are not always efficient in their tagging, which would mean that people can still encounter the products they do not want to see. In those instances, it is recommended to mention the slips to the original poster (OP), assuming they will correct their mistakes when pointed out.

⁶ A function of Tumblr to block undesired content from your own dashboard and searches via blocking their tags.



In the screenshot above, the advice and position one of the HTP blogs is made clear as a strict categorization of the content, so it can be blocked by users. As well as the specification that, in the event that calling out the person in question does not work, they can block or unfollow the blog producing the HTP fanworks.

These delimited spaces and subjects, are part of a broader “cultural common sense”, that is to say, statements that are shared continuously and reiteratively (Stanfill, 2011), as was argued in the literature surrounding trigger warnings (Gooderis and Root 2016; Lothian 2016). The ‘discursive environment’ that is built forms the objects of which we speak (Foucault quoted in Stanfill 2011). For Foucault, discourse is understood as that which is socially said of something, that constitutes it, a part of knowledge, which is created and transformed in the practices imbued with discourse or those that are done in a frame of possible discourses. In either case, discourse and practices are affected by one another, in a dynamic that

⁷ Site last visited on March, 2018. No links authorized for publishing.

coincides with how society utilizes and performs them as truth or reality. Practices can be related to knowledge, ethics or power, in a specific historical context (Foucault, quoted in Domínguez & Tribalsky, 2011). For Butler, discourse is maintained and created in its performance, linked to the use and management of public and private spaces, and the ways of human relationships, where a continuous and reiterative performance will sustain a discursive category, such as gender (Butler 2011).

The discourse that reifies an Other is mostly based on the practices that delimit this Other, and its qualification as such in relation to a social group. These practices are what can transform and change these categories, from either the position of either the othered or the hegemonic discourse. No practice can be undertaken outside of its particular historical possibilities and the possible performances that come with it. Trigger warnings, in this sense, encompass, facilitate, and produce an Other within the Stucky fandom that other fans seek to protect, warn, and inform, due to the content in question, and because of a more comprehensive idea of the diversity of fans that inhabit Stucky. In this othering, the purpose is to be mindful of inclusiveness, although this practice inevitably forms a segregation of these others.

Trashiness in fandom as a relegated place of ethicopolitics

As we alluded before, Hydra Trash Party (HTP) refers to a sub-genre in Captain America fanworks relating to the abuse that both Steve and Bucky could have received at the hands of Hydra: in particular, rape, brainwashing and both physical and mental torture. At the time of our fieldwork, this subgenre's existence was a point of contention inside the fandom, because it was interpreted as a fetishization of abuse, an exaltation of rape culture, and a topic that could trigger or offend victims of abuse. Regardless of the merits of such criticism, it creates a framework of what is acceptable and palatable in the fandom and what can be enjoyed within

it, limiting these narratives despite being a possible interpretation of canon. This can be read as part of an ethicopolitical framework (Rose, 1999). For the author, ethicopolitics represent a development of advanced liberal democracies in which the focus of government moves to an ethical and moral framework, relating to the obligations the subject has to itself and to others, and the techniques it should use on itself to manage them. These techniques are a subset of technologies of the self, a molecularization of power that guides the ways of being of the subject at a micropolitical and quotidian level.

In this case, the issue is presented as a moral and ethical one: HTP content should not be enjoyed or produced as it appears as inherently problematic. Fans should avoid that particular vein, since it can be related to the normalization of violence and abuse, as both anti and pro HTP blogs recognize, as showcased in these two posts below:

like i love how people are like "2/3 of women have fantasies about rape! [rape] and [torture] are totally valid kinks! it's a thing!!"

could you step aside for like, five minutes and consider the fact that just because our rape culture has helped shape psychological desires (as all things related to culture do???) doesn't mean for that those desires are "healthy" or "normal" or "okay" or that we should be content to "indulge them" without doing the work to deconstruct our learned cultural biases. there is a lot of fatphobia out there, and hey! there happens to be a shit ton of pornography about denigrating fat women! and oh wow, look at all of that racism in america! and look at all of the pornography that is produced that fetishizes black bodies! wowwwwww

(also, radical thought: have you ever considered that by producing content that glorifies and sexualizes rape, you too are participating in our rape culture????? DUN DUN DUN)

personal responsibility is a thing yo

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Yes, the HYDRA Trash Meme has an explicit, aggressively-enforced rule forbidding any kind of romanticization of rape or other violence. Any prompt or post that makes non-con, dub-con, or any other kind of problematic behavior seem unproblematic is either challenged for clarification or frozen outright. The HTP community is about bad people doing bad things, and the community is committed to being brutally honest about how bad those things are.

In fact, one of the reasons many of us prefer to explore darkfic in the HYDRA Trash Meme is *because* of this clear distinction that keeps HTP content free from romanticization of rape or abuse.

You will never see people victim-blaming, justifying the actions of abusers, or minimizing the effects of trauma in the HTP community.

But people get off on this stuff! How is that not romanticizing rape?

Remember: romanticization means making something seem better than it really is. There's a difference between sexualizing something and romanticizing it. Saying "This gets me off" is not at all the same thing as saying "I want this to happen in real life."

That's great for YOU, but what if OTHER people get the wrong idea?

The truth is, this is always a possibility. Violence in media is a risk factor for violence in real life. See "[Isn't this normalizing violence?](#)" for an in-depth discussion of this issue.

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While other users encourage taking other routes all together in order to approach topics such as rape and abusive romantic relationships, dismissing HTP content

⁸ Site last visited on March, 2018. URL: <http://annakomnene.tumblr.com/post/146555279526/like-i-love-how-people-are-like-23-of-women-have>

⁹ Site last visited on March, 2018. No links authorized for publishing.

when it is “sexually appealing to the reader”. In this manner, HTP cannot exist for the writers as anything but a mechanism to work through their own troubles, consciously and without enjoyment, rather exclusively as health/emotional work, as appears in the post below:

What I am against: fetishising and/or romanticising abusive pairings and fiction, writing about rape in a way that is sexually appealing to the reader

What I am NOT against: writing about unhealthy themes whilst ACTIVELY recognising they are unhealthy, appreciating the complexity of a villain, using fiction to work through your troubles

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Central to this moral dimension is a discussion about victims of abuse who, in spite of the content being properly tagged as such, could come into contact with it anyway, and for whom neither casual encounter or active consumption may not be appropriate, as it would not help in their ‘recovery’. In this manner, it also creates both an ethical requirement for ‘recovery’ and a demand that it may be done so only through certain content. On the other hand, HTP also constructs itself as a way to help with ‘recovery’ by exploring this content and arguing that many of its members are abuse victims for whom creating this content validates their experience and helps them cope with it. In this way this ethical requirement is not called into question, but rather only which content should be accepted within the fandom. The answers are divided somewhat between HTP fans and HTP “anti fans” (*antis*), in part due to the connection with Captain Hydra, who was very badly received, as the author and lurker fans pointed out:

“ILA: I mean (..) you just have to look at the >Hydra< Cap fiasco

E1: why do you think it was a fiasco?

¹⁰ Site last visited on March, 2018. URL: <http://itsbucky.co.vu/post/153834654977/what-i-am-against-fetishising-andor>

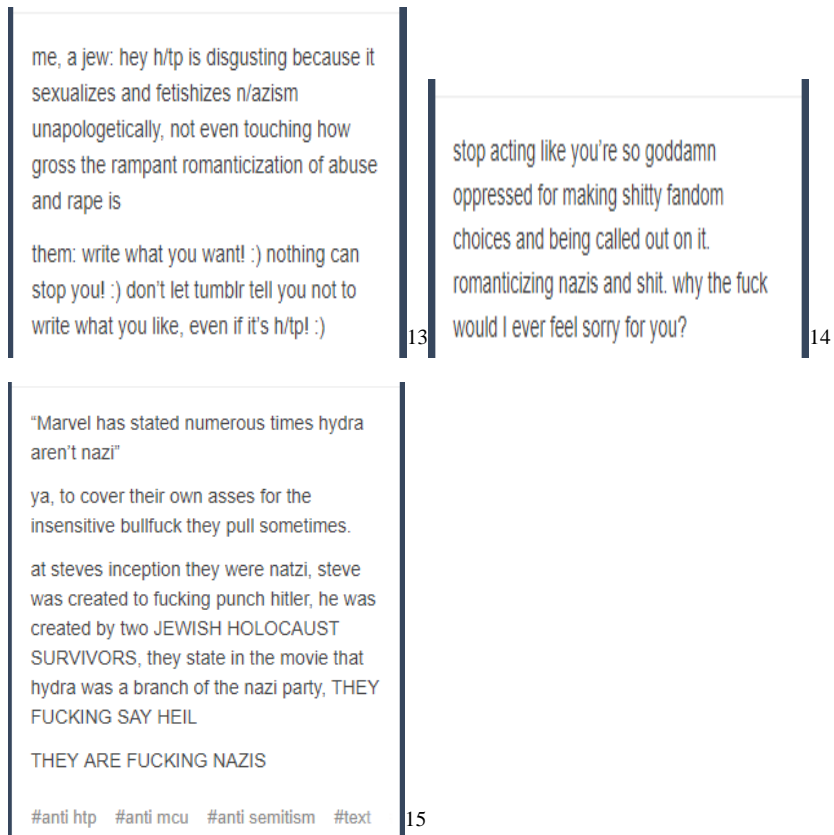
ILA: Look at how angry people were, because Captain America is a modern day myth, a story that belongs to everyone, that means so much to so many people (...) ILA: (There's not much you can do when it comes to them completely disrespecting the fundamental foundation of a character, like the HYDRA Cap thing)" (ILA, 31, 33)¹¹

"IAB: There were a lot of angry and hurt people. Not to mention the whole hydra cap mess which was disrespectful to the character and the creators who first invented the idea of captain America/Steve rogers" (IAB, 62)¹²

This particular antecedent is relevant in how the fandom treats HTP because the people who oppose it, associate Hydra with Nazism, as shown in the screenshots below:

¹¹ Interview with fan writer. November 25. 2016.

¹² Interview with fan lurker, December 2, 2016.



Therefore, any affiliation or joy involving HTP would automatically mean that the reader or writer is a Nazi sympathizer or apologist. The content that constitutes HTP would from the very beginning be wrong for personal pleasure or as coping mechanisms, since it would be read as antisemitism, and an affront to anyone affected by such oppression. Secondly, the status regarding abuse as a sexual need for readers or writers, when survivors of abuse are also present, and in a position

¹³ Credits to Nathaniel Orion, for allowing us to use this screenshot. Site last visited on March, 2018. URL: <http://jewishcap.tumblr.com/post/163575585926/me-a-jew-hey-htp-is-disgusting-because-it>

¹⁴ Site last visited on March, 2018. No links authorized for publishing.

¹⁵ Site last visited on March, 2018. URL:

<https://transboyurameshi.tumblr.com/post/151071050987/marvel-has-stated-numerous-times-hydra-arent>

where fiction affects reality, is also a reason for gatekeeping HTP from the main fandom; such reasons are showcased in the following posts:

What people say: Fandom isn't a safe space, blacklist things you don't like & move on

What people mean: I think my 'right' to ship abusive pairings is more important than survivors' feelings regarding me romanticizing their trauma. I also think fandom *is* a safe space in the respect that it should allow me to talk about how ~hot~ I find abusive/etc. themes without being called out, but if a survivor has a problem with this they just need to ignore it and pretend it doesn't exist.

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if you believe that fictional representation matters (it does, yeah) but then turn around and say "it's only fiction, learn to tell the difference" when ships you enjoy come under (legitimate) criticism then...what r u doing honestly. why.

DEC 7TH 2016, 10:13 PM / 1 YEAR AGO / 730 NOTES

by legitimate i mean if the ship is sexualising rape abuse kids etc not like just not enjoying a pairing or having a ship preference anti abusive ships anti reylo anti htp bucky says things ok to rb rape mention abuse mention

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In these posts, rape/abuse survivors' feelings are used as a moral justification to avoid producing within the HTP fandom. The legitimacy of a ship itself seems to be pending on the topic of "sexualizing rape, abuse or kids", as well as the talk about fics depicting such themes, which should never deviate to 'how hot' it is for the fan. Overall, these posts highlight the role of fandom/fanworks in regards of

¹⁶ Site last visited on March, 2018. URL: <http://itsbucky.co.vu/post/153310546552/what-people-say-fandom-isnt-a-safe-space>

¹⁷ Site last visited on March, 2018. URL: <http://itsbucky.co.vu/post/154177641552/if-you-believe-that-fictional-representation>

these topics, pointing out the voices of survivors as points to not delve into them; as well as the illegitimacy of sexualizing topics that concern abuse, rape and trauma for one's own enjoyment.

HTP identifies itself through tags, marking a difference from some other similar content that may handle the topics in a different way. It creates its own space of differentiation where content that is not approved of in other places resides. We can draft a parallel to Foucault's concept of heterotopia (1984) -a heterotopia is a place that relates to all other places, in which utopia, an idealization of society or a corruption of the same, appears as an impossible place. Heterotopia appears as a superposition of many places, either real or imaginary, becoming a superposition of those other places that are not 'here', exposing that which is not 'here' by way of contrasting or exposing and exaggerating some characteristic of the 'here'. Heterotopias for Foucault had two primary uses, first as 'crisis' heterotopias, places—where changes that had to occur 'elsewhere' happened—and second as places of 'deviancy', where those outside the required norms dwelled. Foucault (1984) considered that heterotopias needed a clear boundary to mark them as different from the places of everyday transit, to mark them as delineated places, with distinct times and rules. On Tumblr, this boundary is less concrete insofar as the site's navigation lacks concrete barriers between blogs and content, but tagging works in a similar way: it marks them as a particular space of navigation where the proscribed content resides, and at the same time allows us to imagine HTP as a mixture of all the content that could be inappropriate (and, therefore, its exposure would be prevented via the presence of those tags). In that sense, HTP appears not as a place of crisis, but as a place of deviation, where those products that we do not approve of and its readers reside. And as we mentioned, this helps characterize the rest of the fandom as a place that does not deal with or approve of that sort of content and the moral quandaries that come with them. Yet, unlike the tagged content, HTP surfaces as a more defined replacement, a community of people that

thrive on that unacceptable content and therefore, a better place for the constitution of an Other and the discursive practices that come with it. Where trigger warnings produce a potential spectator that needs to be protected, HTP creates an already present and '*problematic*' spectator and provides one particular identity and place to be identified with. Instead of a disparate group of topics, HTP works as a combination of them, and allows for a superposition with their spectators. Nevertheless, it is important to note that fandom moves fast and the way HTP was framed by the rest of the fandom was already changing by the time we were leaving the field, with the boundaries and the acceptability of content being negotiated between fans.

Slash, as we discussed previously, has been understood as an othered space, a place where women can produce narratives that exist outside of a heteropatriarchal framework, a place where identities can be articulated (Lothian, Busse and Reid 2007) and otherwise impossible relationships produced (Jenkins 2006). It is in this sense that Rambukkana (2007) argues that slash can be constituted as an alternative medium as it creates a heterotopia that stands as an othered place of possibility to the mainstream. Although, as we pointed out, the Stucky fandom is not a homogenous place; inside of it there are other divisions, other fragmented heterotopias that mark the places that readers should avoid seeing. And yet they do.

The idea that slash constitutes a space of articulation of queer identities, a place for the elaboration of topics that cannot be mentioned elsewhere, implies the constitution of that elsewhere. Foucault's (1984) heterotopias of contrast make a statement about the rest of the space, stamping it as a *not*. But, as we have argued, it is not a place without its own cartography, without its own fractures and in this sense, the construction of slash as a particular space involves sharing it with others that may be using it in other ways. Brennan (2013) noted that at least to some slashers the use of slash as a place of fantasy was not only due to those topics being forbidden elsewhere but precisely because of that prohibition. Slash served as an

impossibility that allowed for the maintenance of a separation between a fantasy-like gay sexuality and an actual gay sexuality. In other words, they construct slash as a heterotopia exactly because it is an othered place and therefore would lose its function if it stopped being so.

Following the thread of othered spaces in fandom, HTP involves wider phenomena, since *trash* is a term that has been used broadly in fandom, and it appeared also while we were exploring Stucky fandom, as well as in the interviews with fans. *Trash* refers, in the context of Stucky fandom, to content that focuses mostly on fetishizing homosexual relationships in stereotypical ways, being considered *problematic* since it borders on homophobia. This definition, although, is specific to what we observed since *trashiness* in fandom is related to several practices, interests, and identities. Nevertheless, when involved with HTP and supposedly communal values, its most akin concept would be related to how the fanwork produced or shared is a kind of *sin*. This involves how the characters are part of a homosexual relationship, and for that reason alone, how it is *smutty*, *sinful*, *shameful* and *dirty* as a product. How it is intended to exist as part of established and static tropes, portraying gay sex in predetermined settings. The practices associated with the characters are also related to this fantasized gay sexuality, as Brennan enunciates it (2013a), such as being abusive or controlling, delicate or naive, etcetera, giving a set of actions that they could perform according to this prefixed sexual positioning, that permeates all of their other contexts.

At the same time, the line that separates this ‘trashy’ content from the appropriate content also responds to certain ethical norms about how sexualities should be depicted. Going back to Rose’s (1999) ethicopolitics, the practices around which this content is framed involve a policing of that imagery, ways in which they should be thought and desired. While the notion of ‘*trashiness*’ involves practices that construct this depiction as marginal and to some extent shameful, they are not the only ethical construction involved in their marginalization. The

construction of this brand of content as ‘fetishist’ and potentially homophobic also invites a certain brand of politicization, where instead of proscribing the content, it is asked to change the ways it represents the characters, the focus, and the roles of the characters. It involves a particular construction of sexuality where certain practices appear as inherently harmful or dangerous, and therefore they must be hidden and approached with care, even in fiction. In general, the discursive practices that were present when policing delved into territories of fantasizing sexual practices that involve non-hegemonic practices, such as homosexual ones, or their roles, and adjusting them to narratives to please the producer and reader, but not really connecting or alluding to a real homosexual community, utilizing these identities and practices as tools for pleasure. These kinds of practices are conceived as *trash* by part of the fandom because they use other people’s experiences, particularly marginal and minority subjects, to transform them into narratives that are considered unrealistic and selfish.

Considering how the discursive practices of tagging work into othering, *trash* is not part of a discourse of classifying and clarifying other people’s paths and experiences, neither there is an intended purpose of framing them into a unique discourse of homophobia, or the results of the practices do not show this. Instead, it is in the practices of participation on fandom themselves that the discourse appears, that sides are formed, and that homophobia, or rejection thereof, is present and visible for fans.

Conclusion

This paper explored the ways in which the Other is constituted inside the Stucky fandom, focusing on how the practices and discourse surrounding the ship produce an Other, in particular, the practices around trigger warnings and the management of ‘appropriate’ content and *trash*. Through both our ethnographic fieldwork and interviews, what the fans do, be it either their fanworks, their posts within

‘discourse’ or arguments, or their chats and interactions, construe spaces and mark what is expected to exist in them. This construction relies on the existence of Others who do not follow these rules, either by not classifying the content properly or by enjoying content that should not be enjoyed or, if approached and liked, should be revealed in carefully, both within and outside the fandom. While the ‘outside’ has been studied thoroughly, by casting slash as a space for particular groups of fans (Lothian, Busse and Reid 2007; Rambukkana 2007) or as a response to patriarchal norms (Jenkins [1992] 2005), the inside divisions of slash have not been studied in detail (Brennan 2013a, 2013b), nor has the mechanism that produces and sustains those divisions.

In our research, this inside othering rested on the delimitation of spaces and the control of visibility, through warnings and tags, allowing the management content and the limiting of the people who associate with it to *other* spaces, relegated from the general fandom to one particular place or subset of places. By means of trigger warnings, a particular Other that should be prevented from viewing the content is constituted while regarding the rest of the fandom as a ‘suitable’ place for them. This construction of the Other by warnings also helps to delimit certain subjects that enjoy this ‘*problematic*’ content and differentiates them from the rest of the fandom. This distinction facilitates the constitution of Stucky as a space with particular norms and sensibilities about content. In this manner, the fandom creates ethical norms about how the fans should approach certain topics and attempts to constitute slash as a queer space (Lothian, Busse and Reid 2007), and yet, these Others dispute those notions insofar as that *problematic* content can be read as part of the ‘imaginary homosexuality’ that Brennan (2013b) proposed and so the arrangement of Stucky and slash in general appears in constant conflict and negotiation. Moreover, these ethical norms can be read in a hegemonic frame of values, around censoring and invisibilization of deviant sexualities or subjects, reinforcing notions about common discourses and truths, as well as promoting a

sense of shaming or shading of practices or experiences that are not considered valuable or presentable, and hence are hidden in those particular othered spaces. Although not all the discursive practices encourage or accept this segregation, it does indeed occur, and it is often mentioned as a respectful manner of behaving rather than a complicated side of fandom.

The Stucky fandom encompasses all kinds of fans, and acts as a vast space for fans to find their preferred content. Their movements are not always meant to cross, as it is intended to happen this way with their own constructions and uses of the platforms. This is often presented as related to communal hegemonic frames of value that are present in the fandom, that self-replicate or transform according to the presence and activities of fans. These practices are in a constant state of change and negotiation, whether due to the tools a site offers or changes in how some content is perceived. In this manner, the divisions of fandom must not be understood as static but as a contingent product of the power relations both inside and outside the fandom.

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