

Exploring the self through fictional others: The relationship between creating fan content, sexual orientation, and gender identity

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Abstract

One of the main purposes of fan works is to transform a preexisting piece of media into something new. Fans create works of art, novel-length stories, videos, music, and comics about their favorite characters and romantic pairings. The intention of the current project is to identify the relationship between the work of fan creators and their personal sexual and gender identities. I collected data using an online questionnaire posted to several places content creators frequent on the internet. Creators of fan works may be unconsciously creating a demand for underrepresented groups in traditional media. Because of this, I hypothesize that the individuals creating this fan content will have similar sexualities and gender identities to the new forms of media that they create, exemplifying a demand for representation.

Introduction

Technological advancement is fast becoming a key instrument in participatory culture, as the Internet continues to conceive opportunities for a more globalized society (Grazia, 2015). In addition, the number of different opportunities for interpretation of traditional media has increased dramatically. Computer network globalization and the multitude of platforms for self-expression have given rise to the creation of more transformative works. Many under represented groups have taken to online social platforms as a way to more easily access those with which they share similar social experiences (Pande & Moitra, 2017).

Most fan content is in some way transformative, meaning fan creators take what they like and disregard the things which they do not to create something new. Several researchers have investigated fan culture (e.g., Gonzalez, 2016; Hamner, 2013; Jenkins, 2013; Pande & Moitra, 2017), but not what aspect of one's personal identity could influence a fan creator's need to change narratives from their original context.

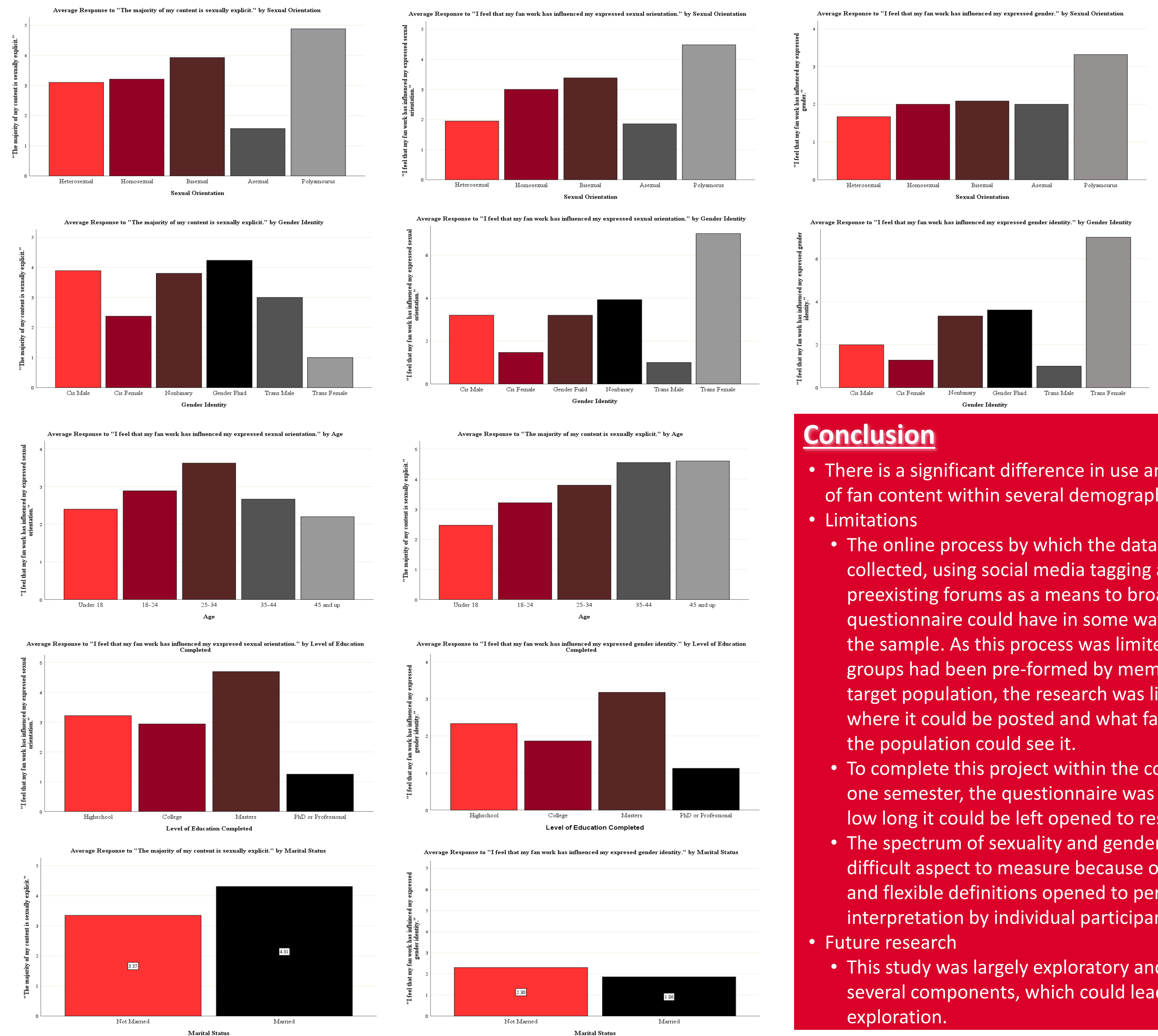
With this study, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire about their experience as fan creators to attempt to demonstrate the extent to which licensed material is used as a catalyst for self-exploration, and how the creation of this material relates to the demographics of the creators.

Materials & Methods

Methods

- 150 participants completed the online questionnaire.
- 2 participants did not agree to participate, and 6 said they did not create fan art of any kind. Thus, these 8 participants proceeded immediately to the end of the questionnaire.
- 1 participant answered all questions with insincere responses and was thus removed from the data set.
- Participants answered 18 questions about their experience creating fan content, as well as 7 demographic questions (e.g., gender identity, sexual orientation, age).
- Participants were asked about the characters and content they chose to create works about, as well as what media platform the characters and content were produced from.
- Participants were also asked about the nature of their content, how much they felt their works strayed from the original content, and if they felt their work had any effect on their sexuality and gender.
- After completing the survey, all participants were thanked for their participation and given the researchers contact information in case they had questions.

Results



Conclusion

- There is a significant difference in use and creation of fan content within several demographics.
- Limitations
 - The online process by which the data was collected, using social media tagging and preexisting forums as a means to broadcast the questionnaire could have in some ways distorted the sample. As this process was limited by what groups had been pre-formed by members of the target population, the research was limited in where it could be posted and what factions of the population could see it.
- To complete this project within the confines of one semester, the questionnaire was limited in low long it could be left opened to responses.
- The spectrum of sexuality and gender is a difficult aspect to measure because of its fluidity and flexible definitions opened to personal interpretation by individual participants.
- Future research
 - This study was largely exploratory and has several components, which could lead to further exploration.

