McLauchlin, Rachel: Queer Masculinity and Female Fantasy: Fanfiction Portrayals of Queer Men

This presentation explores constructions of masculinity present in fanfiction, primarily fanfiction written by and for straight women about queer men. Through a review of existing literature on slash (male/male) fanfiction, I both present and critique these approaches. Of the many theories put forward by fan culture scholars, I focus on three in this presentation: fandom/fanfiction acts as a safe space in which girls and women can explore their sexuality in a supportive and anonymous community context, *women* enjoy slash fanfiction *appeals to women* because of their general preference for erotica and gender-equal depictions of sex, and fanfiction *is* as inherently subversive of hegemonic power structures. I tried to unify the structure of this long sentence but it could probably be improved more. And while there are aspects of each of these theories which I find useful and accurate in the study of slash fanfiction, I also find some conflicts and contradictions between many parts of these theories and the reality of slash fanfiction and its readers.

Using a demographic study done by J. Bruner (2013), I observe the dissonance between readers' fanfiction genre and rating preferences and the second theory—the majority of readers consume sexually explicit fanfictions and also enjoy the genre Porn Without Plot (PWP) which is defined by sexually explicit scenes without substantial plot to frame or explain them. I think I know what you mean, but you lost me in this long and complex sentence. Additionally, J. Duggan (2017) observes that many slash fanfictions focus on the sexual or romantic relationships between queer male characters, but do not address the cultural reality of homophobia or oppression. In light of this, it is difficult to say that these works are subverting hegemonic power structures when they do not discuss these structures in any way, and in fact appear to outright ignore them. Also, Bruner’s study also found that a very small percentage of respondents stated that they consumed slash fanfiction for the purpose of rebelling or stating their political views about homosexuality (6% and 19% respectively).

Finally, I present Duggan’s (2017) analysis of a relatively popular fanfiction from the Harry Potter fandom, in which the two male characters, Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy, retain the traditionally masculine qualities which they possessed in the canon. Duggan argues that because portrayals of gay male characters in most Young Adult fiction are often stereotypically non-masculine, usually effeminate, fanfiction which characterizes gay characters as masculine subverts hegemonic masculinity by presenting homosexuality as not inherently emasculating. I critique this claim because the content in question, slash fanfiction, is not necessarily written to affirm gay teens or their identities, it is instead generally written for straight women and the female gaze. So, these works may in fact reinforce hegemonic structures by presenting these traditionally masculine characters as desirable to their female readers, reaffirming the value and appeal of hegemonic masculinity in our hetero-centric world, even though the works do so using non-heterosexual characters. I really enjoyed your analysis here, and you provided a good list of references.

References

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