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Fan studies and/as feminist methodology

Briony Hannell

University of East Anglia, Norwich, United Kingdom

[0.1] Abstract—Feminist cultural studies and feminist theory in genealogies of fan studies are taken for granted. However, the implications of feminist methodological and epistemological frameworks within discussions of fan studies methodology are more often inferred than directly stated—or cited. Examining the parallel debates taking place around knowledge, power, and reflexivity within feminist theory, feminist cultural studies, and fan studies illustrates how key methodological approaches within fan studies are deeply grounded in feminist epistemology and ontology. Building on theorizations of the dual positionality of the acafan alongside feminist theorizations of self-reflexivity permits an exploration of how acafandom aligns with feminist methodological frameworks regarding researcher fragmentation and reflexivity. Emotion and affect are important concerns for acafan scholarship to address, as they align fan studies with feminist traditions of personal and autobiographical writing that privilege subjectivity as a legitimate source of knowledge. Explicitly reframing fan studies within this theoretical and methodological context augments the understanding of many of the fundamental beliefs and principles underpinning the production of knowledge within fan studies, and helps refine the critical language used to frame and describe scholarly methodologies.

[0.2] Keywords—Acafan; Affect; Autoethnography; Epistemology; Feminism; Reflexivity

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> [0.3] Most of the academic work we see and read is the end product of a long process, but we rarely have any understanding of this process. The representations of knowledge as a final product mask the conditions of its production…If we have done research we all know that it is a difficult, messy, fraught, emotional, tiring, and yet rewarding process; we know all about the elements involved, but how does anyone else get to know? All they usually see is the clean, crisp, neatly presented finished product. Intellectuals may excel in describing other people's implicit assumptions, but they are as implicit as anyone else when it comes to their own.
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> —Beverley Skeggs, *Feminist Cultural Theory* (1995)

1. Introduction

[1.1] While the feminist valences of fan culture have been widely explored by fan studies scholars over the past three decades, particularly through examinations of fannish practice as a form of social and cultural critique (e.g., Bury 2005; Busse 2005; Coppa 2008, 2011, 2014; Derecho 2006; Hellekson and Busse 2006, 2014; Jenkins et al. 2016; Lothian 2012; Lothian, Busse, and Reid 2007; Ng and Russo 2017; Warner 2015; Wills 2013), the feminist methodological and epistemological underpinnings of the

methods used to examine these very cultures and practices are often inferred but not explicitly stated or cited. Many scholars working within fan studies have an antipositivist and antifoundationalist feminist "orientation" (Ang 2006, 175) to their research, and to their broader approach to the politics of the production of knowledge, yet they do not make explicit justifications for using feminist approaches to the production of knowledge or for concentrating primarily on female-identified and/or queer fans in their research. There are, of course, some notable exceptions, such as self-identified feminist fan studies scholars Stein, Scott, and Busse. More broadly, however, the lack of explicit exploration of the connections between feminist and fan studies methodologies may well be in part because, as Evans and Stasi (2014) note in their overview of methodology within fan studies research, in-depth discussion of methodology within fan studies is often lacking. Indeed, it is telling that the first issue of *Transformative Works and Cultures* dedicated to explicitly theorizing methodologies within fan studies comes over a decade after the journal's first issue.

[1.2] Throughout this article, when I refer to the term *methodology,* I am following Harding's (1987) understanding of methodology as a theory and analysis of the research process. I understand the term *method,* by extension, as the practices and techniques of gathering and analyzing research material. Additionally, I understand the term *feminist methodology* as a certain intellectual-political orientation to the research process and towards academic practice rather than a fixed or static "paradigm" (Ang 2006, 175). Indeed, as Black feminist theorists such as Patricia Hill Collins (2000) have argued, no singular feminism exists, and, as DeVault (1996) notes, feminist methodologists do not use or prescribe to a unified set of practices and principles or any single research method. It would be misleading to suggest that feminist methodology is a homogenous and cohesive enterprise. Its practitioners often differ both philosophically and politically in a number of ways (Harding 1986, 2004). However, feminist methodologists are more broadly united through their shared commitment to questions of power, knowledge, and subjectivity. Indeed, fan studies is itself characterized by a rather eclectic range of research methods, and yet our scholarship seems to be governed by a common sense understanding of a certain methodological orientation to the research process, often in line with the tradition established in *Textual Poachers* (Jenkins 1992)—a tradition which, I argue, was built upon feminist methodologies emerging from feminist cultural studies.

[1.3] While scholars such as Louisa Stein (2011b) have in recent years pointed to the crucially interrelated nature of feminist and fan studies scholarship, the interrelated nature of the methodological frameworks underlying this scholarship has not been explicitly mapped in any great detail. As Scott (2018) highlighted in her recent overview of the field, the conception of fan studies as a feminist discipline is "too frequently taken for granted" (73). Throughout this article, I frame these issues through the lens of the politics of storytelling and citation, and attempt to reverse these gaps and silences in our understandings of the methodological origins of fan studies by making the feminist orientation of the discipline explicitly visible (note 1). Firstly, I examine a number of parallel debates taking place within feminist cultural studies, feminist theory, and fan studies regarding questions of subjectivity, hierarchy, and reflexivity to reveal how fan studies is deeply grounded in feminist methodological frameworks and in feminist epistemology and ontology. Secondly, building upon theorizations of the dual positionality of the acafan alongside feminist theorizations of self-reflexivity, I explore how acafandom aligns with feminist methodological frameworks regarding research reflexivity and the "fragmented" feminist researcher (Brunsdon 1993, 314). I then argue that the central importance of emotion and affect to acafan scholarship aligns fan studies with feminist traditions of personal and autobiographical writing that privileges subjectivity as a legitimate source of knowledge. Finally, I reflect upon the broader implications of the taken for grantedness of feminist methodological frameworks within fan studies through an examination of the ways in which the gaps and silences of white and Western feminist methodologies may have structured the "blind spots" of fan studies (Scott 2019, 228).

[1.4] With this in mind, the problems I identify throughout this article are by no means unique to fan studies. Feminist methodological frameworks are unfortunately elided by many disciplines (see, for example, V. T. Collins 1999; Weatherall 2012; Keddy, Sims, and Stern 1996). Moreover, many feminists of color have written of the structuring force of white and Western epistemologies within the academy more broadly (P. H. Collins 2000; Lugones 2010; Narayan 2004). Nevertheless, to investigate the taken for grantedness of feminist methodologies within fan studies is essential, I argue, not only to improving

the academic rigor of the discipline but also to improving the critical language with which we discuss issues of methodology, epistemology, subjectivity, hierarchy, and reflexivity within fan studies.

2. (Re)situating fan studies: On storytelling and the politics of citation

[2.1] In the interests of transparency, it is first worth noting how my approach to this article, as well as my argument more broadly, came to be. My approach emerged, in part, in response to a series of questions I encountered during the beginning of my time as a PhD student about the theoretical and methodological position of my research: "Is this thesis fan studies or feminist cultural studies?" One thing I struggled to grapple with during these conversations was the way in which a dichotomy between fan studies and feminist cultural studies was being established when, to me, the two were intimately intertwined in both theory and practice—for me, it was less a case of fan studies *or* feminist cultural studies but rather fan studies *and/as* feminist cultural studies. This is something that I felt to be true at both an empirical and a methodological level. However, I soon became acutely aware that, despite its feminist underpinnings, the conception of fan studies as a feminist discipline is often taken for granted or overlooked. It remains inferred or implicit. Many of my colleagues working outside of fan studies report a perception of fan studies as a predominantly white, cis, and male field, much in line with Stanfill's (2011) research on the discursive constructions of fandom within contemporary culture. However, this perception of the discipline is entirely incongruent with my experience as an early career scholar within fan studies. I feel that this predicament has much to do with the stories we tell about fan studies.

[2.2] While fan studies is an interdisciplinary and eclectic field, the tradition of scholarship that emerged from *Textual Poachers* (Jenkins 1992) has undeniably shaped understandings of what we see as fan studies and, by extension, what we see as a certain methodological orientation to the research process within fan studies. Despite an insistence on the position of fan studies as an "undisciplined discipline" (Ford 2014, 54), existing genealogies of fan studies produce a markedly singular and linear narrative of the emergence of the field centered on media and cultural studies and the publication of *Textual Poachers* in 1992 (note 2). This is captured most saliently by the April 2014 issue of the *Journal of Fandom Studies* dedicated to reflecting upon the impact of *Textual Poachers* on the formation and development of the field over the past three decades (Larsen 2014). Indeed, like many scholars working within fan studies, my first interaction with fan studies was through *Textual Poachers,* and it has had a formative influence both on my intellectual development as an early career scholar and on my orientation towards fan studies more broadly. That being said, I am concerned that the canonization of *Textual Poachers* has a number of implications for the stories we tell about the origins of fan studies and the impact these stories have on the ways that we theorize (or, rather, do not theorize) key methodological approaches within fan studies.

[2.3] In a 2014 article exploring the origins of fan studies, Henry Jenkins traces the academic origins of fan studies to, most notably, the work of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. Crucially, he admits that, while fan studies was undoubtedly influenced by the work of Hebdige (1979) and Hall and Jefferson (1976), who examined the resistant practices of subcultures, as well as Hall's (1980) groundbreaking encoding/decoding essay, it was the feminist interventions of scholars such as McRobbie ([1980] 1991) in cultural studies which helped to recenter ideas about resistance and appropriation in the study of fandom (see also Brunsdon 1996). Furthermore, McRobbie's orientation to the production of knowledge was significant in that it adopted a feminist methodological framework to question the positionality of the researcher in relation to these communities. McRobbie strongly advocated for the importance of recognizing the "close links between personal experience and the areas chosen for study" (18), an approach to researcher reflexivity which would come to have much significance for fan studies, as I will discuss in more detail later. More broadly, the early audience research produced during the 1980s by feminist cultural studies scholars such as Brunsdon (1981), Ang (1985), and Hobson (1982), which sought to reclaim soap operas and their audiences from decades of cultural disparagement, operated as a crucial "step towards studying fandom" in the 1990s (Jenkins 2014, 92). The work of these feminist researchers, which "combined the personal, the political, and the methodological" (Hermes 2006, 170), gained feminist cultural studies a strong and enduring reputation

for engaged social criticism and theory grounded in actual audience practice (see also Nightingale 1996).

[2.4] In the early 1990s, fan studies emerged out of this tradition of a feminist audience studies that pushed back against the ideological dismissal of women's tastes, consumption practices, and cultural forms. Early fandom studies were an attempt to represent and rehabilitate images of fans, in Fiske's (1992) words, "associated with the cultural tastes of subordinated formations of the people, particularly with those disempowered by any combination of gender, age, class and race" (30). Fandom, Fiske argues, was typically associated with popular cultural forms that the dominant value system denigrates. Early fandom scholars of the "first wave" (Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington 2007, 1) of fan studies subsequently foregrounded predominantly female fandoms (Tulloch and Jenkins 1995; Fiske 1992). The early work of scholars including Bacon-Smith (1986, 1992), Penley (1992, 1997), Jenkins (1988, 1992), Lamb and Veith (1986), and Russ (1985), for example, examined (white) women's engagements with conventionally masculine genres such as science fiction. The emergence of fan studies therefore aligned with feminist efforts to take seriously the study of cultural forms, their pleasures, and their audiences, especially those which were routinely denigrated, devalued, and pathologized in terms of hegemonic values which govern the production of knowledge. As Scott (2019) notes, from the field's inception "fannish pleasures and feminist politics were conceptually intertwined" (28). And yet, despite this, the legacy of feminist cultural studies, its theories, and its methodological frameworks in the origins of fan studies is markedly absent in many of the stories we tell about how fan studies (and, by extension, our methodologies) came to be. Instead, the emergence of the discipline is more often than not attributed to cultural studies more generally rather than feminist cultural studies specifically. Jenkins (2014, 93) himself admits this, noting:

> [2.5] The early fandom scholars were reading these [feminist] writers—engaging with their theories, circling around their examples, struggling with their methods…To some degree, we took this context for granted, but these writers were certainly informing our work, whether or not they showed up explicitly in our bibliographies…We cannot understand what fandom studies have become without acknowledging these roots, especially the ways in which feminist interventions in the study of subcultures, audiences and readers pointed researchers towards fandom as an important site for understanding gendered relations within popular media.

[2.6] What is most significant here is Jenkins's admission that, while highly influential, the work of feminist cultural studies scholars produced during the 1980s was often not explicitly cited by early fandom scholars in the 1990s. What impact have these citational silences thus had on the stories we tell about the origins of fan studies and the development of our methodological frameworks? Feminist critical theorist Ahmed (2013 ¶ 4) has described citation as "a rather successful reproductive technology" (¶ 3) which both produces and reproduces disciplines. Citation practices operate, she argues, as "techniques of selection," and as ways of making "certain bodies and thematics core to the discipline, and others not even part" (Ahmed 2013). They are an acknowledgement of "our debt to those who came before" (Ahmed 2017, 15). Citation practices are, in a Foucauldian sense, productive rather than descriptive narratives of the recent past, and, as Hemmings (2011) writes in *Why Stories Matter,* they "produce consensus" (161). The stories we tell about the emergence of fan studies, which rarely describe or locate fan studies within the context of feminist cultural studies and its methodological frameworks, produce a consensus which severs fan studies from its origins in feminist scholarship and feminist methodologies.

[2.7] What might these gaps and silences within our bibliographies mean for the discussions we have about fan studies methodologies? Starting from attention to silences in the history of fan studies, I suggest several ways of revealing the feminist approaches to methodology that often underpin our discussions of methodology within fan studies. In doing so, I hope to make visible the influence of feminist theorists whose work, words, and broader orientation to the research process have undoubtedly shaped key methodological frameworks used widely within fan studies.

3. Feminist reflexivity and the fragmented acafan

[3.1] Feminist methodology calls attention to the partiality, fluidity, and situatedness of knowledge and seeks new ways to approach the process of producing and interpreting knowledge. Feminist methodologies recognize that the researcher is engaged in a process of interpretation and representation which is intimately bound up in power relations and imbalances, and feminist knowledge production therefore seeks to address and interrogate these power imbalances (P. H. Collins 2000; Cook and Fonow 1986; Maynard 1994; Naples and Gurr 2014; Stanley and Wise 1990, 1993). Attention to the power relations inherent within empirical research has subsequently driven many, if not most, feminist critiques of research methodology over the last four decades.

[3.2] In an effort to recognize the political and social dimensions of the production of knowledge, feminist scholarship has long attempted to challenge masculine conventions of academic practice through opening up spaces for explicit connections to be made between theoretical questions and personal, subjective experience. McRobbie (1991) argues that much academic work exhibits a silencing of the self and a denial of the importance of the personal to the production, selection, and interpretation of knowledge. Feminist researchers, she argues, recognize the close links between personal experience and the areas chosen for study, and as a result, autobiographies and personal experience inform a great deal of what is written. After all, our understandings of, and investments in, the subjects of our research correspond to the "subjective limits" (de Lauretis 1986, 5) produced by our specific histories and personal experiences.

[3.3] Feminist researchers have therefore been at the forefront of discussions about the urgent need to both be reflexive and be open and honest about the research process (Maynard 1994). For many feminist researchers, the need to situate the production of knowledge within "wider social relations of production" (Skeggs 1995a, 3) has not only a political but also an ethical dimension. Oakley (1981), for example, argues that the traditional, masculine, positivist, research model, in which the researcher gives nothing away about themselves—or rather, as McRobbie (1991) describes, in which the researcher "silences the self" (18–19)—objectifies and depersonalizes research participants, which subsequently reinforces the power held by the researcher. Reflexivity provides a way for feminist researchers to account for their personal biases and examine the effects these biases may have on the production and interpretation of knowledge, and on the relationship between the researcher and her research participants. Feminist methodologies are therefore highly compatible with self-reflexivity because their central concern is to address power relations and hierarchies between researchers and their research participants. This concern plays an important role in critically situating researchers in the contexts they are analyzing and interpreting (Carrington 2008).

[3.4] Within fan studies, the feminist work of self-reflexivity primarily takes place through reflexive representations of the complicated and multiplicitous subject position of the acafan—a term widely used within fan studies to refer to the dual role of the academic-fan researcher. Fan studies is itself prefaced on a close link between personal experience and the area chosen for study, and this is made highly visible by the subject position of the acafan. The dual position of the acafan has been conceptualized by many as an advantageous and unique research position, and Evans and Stasi (2014, 5) argue that the acafan, as a figure who "complicates realist conventions of representation" (Monaco 2010, 102), presupposes "some form of methodological turn." *Textual Poachers* is often cited as the source of the concept of acafandom through Jenkins's reflexive declaration of his status as both fan and researcher. In an influential passage in his introduction to *Textual Poachers,* Jenkins (1992, 5) wrote:

> [3.5] When I write about fan culture,…I write *both* as an academic (who has access to certain theories of popular culture, certain bodies of critical and ethnographic literature) and as a fan (who has access to the particular knowledge and traditions of that community). My account exists in a constant movement between these two levels of understanding which are not necessarily in conflict but are also not necessarily in perfect alignment. If this account is not overtly autobiographical in that it pulls back from recounting my own experiences in favor of speaking within and about a larger community of fans, it is nevertheless deeply personal.

[3.6] While Jenkins (1992) does not position this account as autobiographical, he does emphasize that it is "nevertheless deeply personal" (5). Jenkins's effort to place himself in the same critical plane as his subject matter, as both academic/researcher and as fan/research subject, is deeply feminist in its

methodological orientation. Many feminist analyses of methodology, attentive to the innate hierarchy of the research process and the relationship between the researcher and research participants, have proposed a breaking down of this hierarchy through minimizing the researcher's superior or elite status. For example, feminist researchers such as Harding (1987) advocate for positioning researchers in the same critical plane as their participants, rejecting the object/subject binary and calling for more self-reflexive approaches to knowledge production, selection, and interpretation. Similarly, Naples and Gurr (2014) highlight that feminist researchers argue for a self-reflexive approach to theorizing in order to foreground how relations of power and status between researchers and their research participants may shape the production, selection, and interpretation of knowledge in different contexts. By making explicit the processes of the production of knowledge, feminist researchers locate and situate their knowledges and themselves, thereby rejecting the object/subject binary and the silencing of the self that permeates traditional positivist research. Knowledge building, therefore, becomes a relational process that demands sustained critical self-reflection, dialogue, and interaction. Jenkins's (1992) rejection of the object/subject binary, his insistence on situating himself within the research process, and his critical self-reflection therefore align *Textual Poachers,* as a canonical text within fan studies, with feminist methodological frameworks regarding researcher reflexivity.

[3.7] The feminist orientation to self-reflexivity within fan studies is something that Evans and Stasi (2014) highlight in their overview of methodology within fan studies. Like fan studies scholars, who exist "in a constant movement between…two levels of understanding which are not necessarily in conflict but are also not necessarily in perfect alignment" (Jenkins 1992, 5), feminist researchers also reject the assumption that maintaining a strict separation between researcher and research subject produces a more valid, objective account (Cook and Fonow 1986). Through the figure of the acafan, Evans and Stasi (2014) argue, fan studies has therefore been doing the ontological work of the crisis of representation since its conception in the early 1990s. Moreover, the field's early embrace of personal accounts aligns fan studies with longstanding feminist methodological traditions that privilege "subjectivity, personal voice, and emotional experience" (Holman Jones, T. E. Adams, and Ellis 2016, 35).

[3.8] Indeed, feminist researchers have long been at the forefront of establishing methodological frameworks to examine the process of "dipping in and out of identifications" (Brunsdon 2000, 215) as a researcher, as a feminist, and as a reader, viewer, or fan, and these frameworks have undoubtedly influenced fan studies' highly contested relationship with the concept of acafandom. In many ways, the self-reflexivity of fan studies arguably offers a corrective to earlier feminist audience research, which neglected to engage fully with a range of epistemological and ontological debates about feminist reflexivity. Brunsdon (2000), for example, notes that early audience research within feminist cultural studies constructed a notion of the critical feminist researcher in opposition to imagined others, ordinary women, be they readers, viewers, or fans. Brunsdon and Spigel (2008) write that the relationship between the feminist researcher and women in general has been a central problem for feminist audience research throughout its history. Radway's (1984) *Reading the Romance,* for example—a text which Henry Jenkins (2014) notes was, at the time of publication, "the logical next step towards studying fandom" (92)—created a false dichotomy between feminist readers and other readers that does not account for the possibility that feminists, even academic feminists, may derive pleasure from popular culture. Underlying Radway's project is what McRobbie (1982) describes, in an early essay about the politics of feminist research and knowledge production, as a "recruitist" research objective (52). In a review of *Reading the Romance,* Ang (1988) critiques the pedagogic "feminist desire" motivating *Reading the Romance:* "its aim is directed at raising the consciousness of romance reading women" (184). Ang subsequently critiques the separation between subject and object in Radway's work. She argues that Radway's failure to reflexively examine the way in which her and her participants are positioned towards each other mistakenly confines her analysis to the relationship between two parties with fixed identities: that of a researcher/feminist and that of interviewees/fans. Admittedly, reflecting on her writing process for *Reading the Romance,* Radway (1991, 5) highlighted that she ought to have made greater effort to situate and interrogate her position as a feminist researcher and her relationship with her research subject(s). As Hermes (2006) notes, feminist researchers have not always had a particularly good track record of combining analyses of texts with audiences' interpretations of and uses for them. Nor, she writes, have feminists always given due care and consideration to their text-based work; feminists have not always made it explicitly clear that we cannot speak on behalf of audiences without directly interacting with them. The reason for this, Hermes (2006) argues, is that work with

popular media "has too often kept to a modernist frame of reference in which popular texts are always dangers and possibly damaging for the less-tutored" (166).

[3.9] Fan studies emerged from an intellectual context in which these methodological debates and dilemmas regarding the position of the researcher and the role of appropriate critical distance/closeness took center stage (note 3). Fan studies inherited a foundation of core insights into these dilemmas and a rich vocabulary of methodological approaches to working through them from the earlier work of feminist audience researchers. The discipline is therefore deeply indebted to "the self-reflexivity of feminist scholarship" (Scott 2018, 72), and it is possible to establish a number of thematic links and connections between the concept of acafandom and feminist approaches to self-reflexivity. For instance, the concept of acafandom, and the complicated positionality of the acafan, mirrors Brunsdon's (1993) notion of fragmented feminist researchers who must negotiate the significance of their identities as feminist researchers with a whole range of other formative identity categories, social locations, and subject positions. Like fragmented and multiplicitous acafans, feminist researchers are constantly moving between involvement and analysis, between closeness and distance. They, too, like Tompkins's (1987, 169) "two voices" or Radway's (1997, 12) "divided subject," are able to at once claim the (sub)cultural capital of familiarity with the popular and the symbolic capital of academics' ability to critically analyze these forms (Ng 2010). They are at once distanced yet engaged, "living on both sides of the us/them divide" (Kuhn 1995, 100) and "wandering on both sides of the boundary that separates fan from critic" (Brown 1994, 15). The concept of acafandom, I argue, is therefore deeply underpinned by feminist methodological frameworks regarding self-reflexivity, and the figure of the acafan exists in dialogue with that of the fragmented feminist researcher.

4. Up close and personal: Affect, autoethnography, and acafandom

[4.1] Numerous fan studies scholars have expressed ambivalence about both the figure of the acafan and the broader incorporation of the personal into academic writing within fan studies. Hills (2002), for example, suggests that while there is some scope for personal accounts within the discipline, some critical distance must be maintained so as to adhere to the "regulative ideal of the rational academic subject" (28). Scholars must take care not to present too much of their fannish enthusiasm or investment within their academic writing. Respect, he argues, is aligned with the imagined subjectivity of the good and rational academic who is expected to remain detached. Further, he adds, respect is not given to those who deviate from the academic norms of so-called rational and objective academic writing or performance (11–12). What is admittedly absent from Hills's account of the cultural practices and norms regulating academic work is that these norms and practices are, in their elevation of the rational and distanced academic researcher, deeply masculine (Jaggar 1997).

[4.2] Despite the growth of autoethnographic approaches and the wider challenges levied by many feminist scholars at the fallacy of academic objectivity, the intellectual use of the personal, as S. Holmes, Ralph, and Redmond (2015) note, presents particular risks for women scholars, and especially early career scholars (note 4). This, they note, is in part due to the regulatory norms Hills identifies, which pose a threat to the cultural legitimacy of certain disciplines. The academic disdain for personal, emotional, and autobiographical accounts, Tompkins (1987) argues, reflects historically gendered divisions between public and private, splits that assign women the task of dealing with affect and emotions and men the task of dealing with abstract ideas. Scott (2019) notably highlights that debates within fan studies about the theory and practice of acafandom have notably fallen along "gendered lines" (42), wherein men have derided acafandom as a scholarly position (Bogost 2010) or questioned the overall utility of the concept (Gray in Stein 2011c), while women have staged defenses of its connection to the politics of identity and feminist modes of knowledge production (Stein 2011a, 2011b; Coker and Benefiel 2010).

[4.3] More recently, the status and meaning of the concept of acafandom, and what it means to be an acafan within the academy, has been undergoing a period of reassessment, particularly through recent self-reflexive and autoethnographic work from scholars including Driessen and Jones (2016), Garner (2018), Hellekson and Busse (2006), Monaco (2010), and Phillips (2013, 2010). Approaches to

autoethnography are relatively diverse but are largely characterized by the use of personal experience to explore the relationship between the personal and the social. Autoethnography emerged from a context in which a range of theoretical and disciplinary voices—including feminism—were contesting issues of truth, power, voice, subjectivity, and representation. Crawley (2012) argues that autoethnography largely emerged out of feminist standpoint epistemologies (note 5). Indeed, feminist researchers have long emphasized that researchers are always implicated in the research process, and that their personal histories inevitably become part of the process through which the selection, interpretation, and understanding of the research subject is reached and through which knowledge is produced (P. H. Collins 2000; McRobbie 1982; Skeggs 1997; Stanley and Wise 1990, 1993; Thornham 2000).

[4.4] Holman Jones, T. E. Adams, and Ellis (2016) argue that autoethnography can be distinguished from other kinds of personal work in four distinct ways. These include (1) purposefully commenting on and/or critiquing culture and/or cultural practices, (2) making contributions to existing research, (3) embracing vulnerability with purpose, and (4) creating a reciprocal relationship with readers in order to compel a response. Conducting self-reflexive autoethnographic research requires researchers to write about themselves both as researchers and as the subject of their research, disclosing aspects of their personal experiences and identities in order to theorize them. Like many forms of feminist enquiry, contemporary fan studies often hovers between autobiographical and ethnographic modes of inquiry, subjecting the self (autos) to the procedures more commonly reserved for the collective (ethnos) (Brunsdon 2000). Fan studies therefore follows an epistemologically and ontologically feminist framework in its rejections of the object/subject and auto/ethnos binaries (Monaco 2010).

[4.5] Phillips (2010), for example, interrogates Hills's early assertion that the acafan must conform to the regulative masculine ideal of the rational academic subject. Instead, he argues that embracing a personal, even "overly confessional," approach to academic writing is integral to the fidelity of his research. He suggests that such "a lean towards openness and individuality can in fact lend greater academic authority because of the personal attachment and investment to the subject." For Phillips, a reflexive, confessional approach to the research process can add to a researcher's academic authority. Phillips reflects upon his experiences as a researcher, as an academic, and as a fan to destabilize the normative value judgments academics are prone to making about an explicitly personal approach to the production of knowledge. His insistence on positioning himself as "an intentionally vulnerable subject" (Holman Jones, T. E. Adams, and Ellis 2016, 24) aligns him with feminist and autoethnographic methodological traditions.

[4.6] Feminist researcher Wilkins (1993) has similarly argued that a personal approach to one's research "can foster a sophisticated sensibility in the research setting" (93). Feminist methodology often encourages researchers to use their physical, emotional, professional, and embodied selves as a research tool to attend to and analyze emotion, interpret and select data, and build rapport with research participants (P. H. Collins 2000; Lee 1993; Oakley 1981; Sampson, Bloor, and Fincham 2008). As Carroll (2013) notes, this is an interactive process that may involve the type of self-disclosure described by Phillips (2010) alongside other acts of reciprocity and caring, such as engaging in active listening and showing emotion and empathy (Sampson, Bloor, and Fincham 2008; Wilkins 1993). For example, a common technique used by feminist researchers to improve rapport is, like Phillips (2010) and other fan studies scholars working with self-reflexive and autoethnographic traditions, to disclose narratives about ones' own personal life experiences (Oakley 1981). Therefore, doing feminist research clearly requires researchers to be reflexive and emotionally attuned to their own emotions and experiences as well as to the needs of their research participants (M. Holmes 2010).

[4.7] Walkerdine (1997) has examined the issue of emotion and subjectivity in the research process, arguing that researchers' responses to empirical materials are likely to arise out of their own autobiographies. Rather than seeing that as an obstacle to be overcome, however, she argues that we should think more carefully about how to integrate and utilize our subjectivity as an integral part of the research process. For Walkerdine, it is through researchers' examinations of their own motivations and emotions that a fuller and richer understanding of the research process and materials can be reached. As both Walkerdine (1997) and Phillips (2010) note, this confessional and personal mode of research can be a painful and at times personally embarrassing process that can open researchers up to charges of emotionality, bias, or even pathologization (Hills 2002). This is especially salient given the ways in which emotions and affect in general are disavowed or silenced within mainstream academic research

and within Western epistemology more broadly. For both Jaggar (1997) and Tompkins (1987), the disavowal of emotions, subjectivity, and affect within the process of the production of knowledge is a distinctly feminist issue as it risks undercutting women's epistemic authority. Western epistemology, Tompkins (1987) argues, is shaped by the belief that emotion should be excluded from the process of attaining, selecting, interpreting, and producing knowledge. Because women are culturally required to be the bearers of emotion, she argues, an epistemology that excludes emotions from the process of producing knowledge, instead favoring a masculine standard of rationality, undermines the recognition of women as "culturally legitimate sources of knowledge" (171). There epistemological problems are compounded when one accounts for the intersection of gender with other salient identity markers, such as race (Nadar 2014; P. H. Collins 2000).

[4.8] Feminists have therefore long rejected the polarity between emotion and reason within Western epistemology (P. H. Collins 2000; Holland 2007; M. Holmes 2010; C. McLaughlin 2003), and Jaggar (1997) argues that normative academic frameworks tend to obscure the vital role of emotion and affect in the production of knowledge. As Lawler (2000) asks, "Who is really producing value-free research? Who is researching without any engagement of their politics, their beliefs, or their emotions?" (11) All researchers are undeniably situated in their research, although in many accounts, their situatedness is silenced (Skeggs 1995a; McRobbie 1991), or rather, it is not confessed (Phillips 2010). As Skeggs (1994, 1995a, 1995b, 1997) notes, to obscure researchers' locatedness, as well as their subjectivity, emotions, and motivations, is to produce *less* rigorous research, rather than, as commonly thought within normative academic frameworks, more rigorous research. Feminist methodologies, as Patricia Hill Collins (2000) highlights, trouble the binary which "separates emotion from intellect" (282; see also Tate 1983). As Jenkins, McPherson, and Shattuc (2002) argue in *Hop on Pop,* even theory in its most abstracted forms cannot "allow us to fully escape our own subjectivity, the play of our emotions, the tug of our lived experiences" (9).

[4.9] Fan studies' reflexive elevation of the personal, the emotional, and the subjective is, I subsequently argue, shaped by the long and specific history of the use of the personal and autobiographical voice in feminist writing (Freedman, Frey, and Zauhar 1993; Wilkins 1993). This epistemological approach to the production of knowledge within fan studies, which recognizes—embraces, even—the close, subjective, and affective dimensions of scholarship, disrupts the regulatory conceptual norms of so-called rational, distanced, and objective knowledge production. The methodological frameworks used widely within fan studies are formulated on the basis of intense affects—investments and attachments, frustrations and resentments—which similarly circulate around feminist cultural studies (Stacey 2016). Fan studies, therefore, makes explicit "the ways in which locations of identity and emotional registers inform research choices and processes" (Monaco 2010, 102). Both Busse (2018) and Stein (2011b) subsequently frame fan studies' challenge to normative academic objectivity and rationality as distinctly feminist. Stein (2011a), for example, frames fan studies' affective and self-reflexive mode of scholarship, in its blend of "affect and academia," as fundamentally feminist in its methodology and epistemology, and its ontological destabilization of the object/subject binary within academic research:

> [4.10] We cannot afford to retreat to an objective academic position because acafandom threatens to be too subjective or affective. A seemingly objective position is only subjectivity rendered invisible but still implicated…Acafandom demands (or should demand) an integration of personal and professional that is, to me at least, fundamentally feminist…Acafans model the (feminist) value of affective scholarship and self-reflexive insight. (Stein 2011b)

[4.11] Fan studies, including the position of the acafan, is inherently feminist to Stein. This is not necessarily due to its focus on gender, sexuality, and other intersecting identity categories but rather to its methodological merging of the professional and the personal, the rational and the emotional, in ways that remain largely taboo within academia (Stein 2011a). Stein notes that the acafan occupies a position that crosses boundaries but unites self-reflexive scholars willing to engage with, rather than silence or render invisible (Stein 2011b), the affective dimension of scholarship. In this sense, fan studies grants us insight into the complex overlap between objective and subjective knowledge that feminist methodology has sought to examine for decades.

5. Whose feminism is this anyway? Intersectional feminism(s), whiteness, and fan studies

[5.1] Throughout this article, I have argued that explicitly situating fan studies within the context of feminist methodological and epistemological frameworks, particularly those emerging from feminist cultural studies, can augment our understandings of fan studies' orientations toward the production of knowledge, the research process, and academic practice more broadly. To do so is an important step towards unpacking what is taken for granted in the implicit assumption that fan studies operates as a feminist discipline. However, I also believe that to explicitly situate fan studies within this methodological tradition may help us to expose and explore other gaps and silences within the field. If feminist frameworks and orientations are indeed taken for granted within fan studies, what specific understanding of feminism is in turn taken for granted? What gaps and silences may we have inherited, and thus reproduced, from feminist cultural studies? Moreover, what might the relationship between these methodological frameworks and fan studies' blind spots be?

[5.2] While many feminists have emphasized that no singular feminism exists (note 6), feminists of color have long argued that feminist methodologies which privilege the experiences of white women from North America and Western Europe remain dominant (P. H. Collins 2000; hooks 2014). These methodologies have been criticized for neglecting to examine intersecting forms of oppression beyond gender (Crenshaw 1991) and for failing to explore the structuring force of both whiteness and Westerness to the production of knowledge (Davis 2014; Frankenberg 1993; Narayan 2004). While modes of critical intersectional inquiry (P. H. Collins and Bilge 2016), which center an intersectional understanding of power "as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other" (2), have begun to displace these methodologies, it nevertheless remains crucial that we examine the failings and inadequacies of dominant methodologies and critically reflect on how our own work might reproduce them.

[5.3] Within the context of fan studies, then, it is important to consider how the methodological frameworks established within feminist cultural studies may have informed fan studies' tendency to privilege the identities of white, Western, middle-class women. Woo (2018), for instance, notes that because fan studies was informed by feminist cultural studies' desire to push back "against the dismissal of women audiences and their tastes" (247), the (white) feminist project sensitized fan studies researchers to questions regarding gender and sexuality. These questions, he argues, soon became much more salient to the emerging field of fan studies than other identity markers such as race, nationality, class, ability, or age, therefore producing a number of gaps and silences within the field which very much reflect the failings of the white and Western feminist methodologies detailed above. As scholars including Pande (2018a), Wanzo (2015), Warner (2018, 2015), and Woo (2018) have highlighted, within both fan studies and fandom itself, whiteness often operates as an unmarked and unnamed norm (Frankenberg 1993; Dyer 1997). Similarly, scholars such as Chin and Morimoto (2017, 2015) have interrogated the Westerness of fan studies through their examinations of transcultural and transnational fandoms (see also Morimoto 2018). Pande (2018b) notes that the privileging of certain identity markers within fan studies has undeniably "shaped the development of the field" (319):

> [5.4] A crucial intersection of identity…continues to be erased and elided. That is, within this dominant paradigm, there has so far been no space to discuss…the operations of racial/ethnic/cultural identity…What remains unacknowledged in most papers, keynotes, or edited collections on media fan communities is that when "the fandom" or "fangirls" are discussed, the referents of these terms remains US- or UK-centric popular media texts and white, cisgender, middle-class women. (320)

[5.5] The consequences of the taken for grantedness of feminist methodologies within fan studies, in which feminist frameworks are often interred rather than made explicit, are subsequently twofold: not only do we fail to account for the ways in which fan studies' orientation to the research process marks a continuation of feminist epistemological and methodological frameworks, and the implications of this for our research in turn, we also fail to account for how the gaps and silences within fan studies mark a continuation of the gaps and silences within dominant white and Western feminist methodologies.

Exposing these gaps and silences may well produce feelings of discomfort, particularly given Wanzo's (2015) claim that this process may trouble some of the implicit claims "at the heart of fan studies scholars and their scholarship" (¶ 1.4), yet I would recommend that we endeavor to use this discomfort productively (Boler 1999; DiAngelo 2018) to critically examine the field, to produce self-reflexive scholarship, and to engage with more intersectional forms of critical feminist inquiry. As Scott (2019, 229) highlights in her case for an intersectional fan studies:

> [5.6] I wish to recognize the frequent failure of fan scholars (myself included) to critically examine our privileging of the identities of a few at the expense of developing a more intersectional conception of fan identity…Developing a more intersectional fan studies means checking our own privilege and confronting the issues of whose stories are told or obscured within cultural narratives of progress, who is telling them, and how they are told.

6. Conclusion

[6.1] I contend that fan studies should not only be understood in relation to feminist methodology, it should be discussed *and/as* feminist methodology. While the field's origins in feminist cultural studies are often taken for granted, our orientations toward the research process, particularly through the fragmented subject position of the acafan, reflect the powerful influence of feminist theory on the ways in which we conceptualize ourselves as researchers and as fans. Moreover, fan studies' self-reflexive politics proposes a corrective to a number of methodological dilemmas regarding reflexivity and critical distance within early feminist audience research, yet it at the same time marks a continuation of many of epistemological and ontological principles underpinning feminist methodology and knowledge production through its sustained emphasis on power relations, the role of the researcher, and the researcher's relationship with the object, or rather subject, of study. Fan studies' engagement with the personal, the subjective, and the emotional marks a continuation of feminist epistemological and methodological frameworks that we should seek to make more explicit in our work. In highlighting the position of fan studies and/as feminist methodology, I hope to challenge the taken for grantedness of feminist methodology and epistemology with fan studies, and instead make the feminist underpinnings of the discipline explicit.

[6.2] Explicitly reframing fan studies within this theoretical and methodological context can augment our understandings of many of the fundamental beliefs and principles underpinning fan studies' orientation towards the research process and academic practice more broadly, and it can help us to refine the critical language we use to frame and describe our methodologies. It is increasingly important to unpack what is obscured by our lack of methodological discussion within fan studies, as well as the stories we tell about its origins, and the impact this has on our understandings of fan studies' methodologies. If feminist scholarship is taken for granted within fan studies and, as Jenkins (2014) admits, is not explicitly referenced in our bibliographies, can we truly claim to be acknowledging these feminist roots? Which ontological and epistemological positions are naturalized by these silences, and what might this mean for our methodological frameworks within fan studies? Does the severing of fan studies from its feminist intellectual grounding lessen the ability of fan studies to speak to what Berlant (2011) has called the "desire for the political" (224)? To what extent do our methodological discussions reproduce Scott's (2019) notion of a "potential 'disarticulatio'n of fan studies and feminist media studies" (45)? And what implications might this have for our work on contemporary fandom in this post-truth, antifeminist, and anti-intellectual cultural moment characterized, as Banet-Weiser (2018) notes, as much by popular misogyny as it is popular feminism?

[6.3] Furthermore, with the rapid diversification of fan studies over the past decade as we move even further away from the discipline's feminist origins, which practices, subject positions, and identities may subsequently be remarginalized? Or rather, more urgently still, which practices, subject positions, and identities remain marginal? To explicitly unpack common sense assumptions about the origins of the field may offer further insight into other gaps and silences in our theorizations (or, rather, lack of theorizations) of methodology within fan studies. Explicitly positioning our approaches to the production of knowledge within the context of white and Western feminist methodologies may help us to shed brighter light on how the gaps and silences within these dominant feminist methodologies may

have structured the gaps and silences within fan studies, helping us to expose the "whiteness of both cultural studies and feminism" (Stacey 2016, 173) as a structuring force within fan studies.

[6.4] These are all urgent matters to attend to, and yet I am mindful that it would be near impossible for me to do this work alone. Furthermore, I am also cognizant of the fact that fans themselves have many competing understandings of the meanings, practices, and discourses of feminism and its relationship to their identities, lives, and practices. Fans, like feminist researchers, are deeply concerned by questions of knowledge, power, emotion, and reflexivity, captured most saliently, perhaps, by the proliferation of fannish meta-analysis outside of the academy (Booth 2015). Fans routinely engage in alternative modes of feminist knowledge production and theorizing that in many ways merge Thomas McLaughlin's (1996) notion of "vernacular theory" (24) and Matt Hills's (2002) figure of the "fan-scholar" (32) with Patricia Hill Collins's (2000) emphasis on the production of feminist theory outside of academia. While the production of feminist knowledge within fan communities unfortunately lies beyond the scope of this article's specific focus on research methodologies within the structures of the academy, this is something that I am currently investigating in further detail in my doctoral research. More broadly, the process of answering the questions I have raised throughout this article should undoubtedly be a collective endeavor, and I therefore invite scholars working within fan studies to continue the project of refining and defining the critical language we use to discuss the relationship between feminist methodologies and epistemologies, fan studies, and fandom itself—to which this special issue is an integral first step.

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8. Notes

1. However, I am aware that in my attempt to reframe these histories within the context of feminist methodologies, I may inadvertently generate or reproduce particular gaps and silences myself. This is something that I examine in further detail later in this article with regards to intersectionality, whiteness, and fan studies.

2. With the notable exception of Rebecca Wanzo's (2015) genealogy of African American acafandom, which details a wide range of primary and secondary texts that have explored Black fans.

3. See Brunsdon's (2000) interviews with Geraghty, Hobson, Ang, and Seiter in *The Feminist, the Housewife, and the Soap Opera* for more information on the approaches taken by feminist audience researchers during this period.

4. Similarly, in *Black Feminist Thought,* Patricia Hill Collins (2000) highlights how these regulatory norms constrain women of color, for whom "expressiveness, emotions, and empathy are central to the knowledge validation process" (282).

5. However, as McDonald (2013) notes, autoethnographic methods share a similar ontological positioning with not only feminist theory but also queer theory. Both queer theory and autoethnography conceive of identities and experiences as "uncertain, fluid, open to interpretation, and able to be revised" (T. E. Adams and Holman Jones 2011, 110).

6. See, for example, C. J. Adams and Gruen's (2014) *Ecofeminism;* Alaimo and Hekman's (2008) *Material Feminisms;* P. H. Collins's (2000) *Black Feminist Thought;* Green's (2007) *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism;* Keller and Ryan's (2018) *Emergent Feminisms;* Lewis and Mills's (2003) *Feminist Postcolonial Theory;* Makdisi, Bayoumi, and Saydawi's (2014) *Arab Feminisms;* Marinucci's (2010) *Feminism is Queer.*

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