
Article:
Gerrard, Y. (2022) Rethinking women's guilty pleasures in a social media age: from soap opera to teen drama series. The Journal of Popular Television, 10 (2). pp. 185-198. ISSN 2046-9861

https://doi.org/10.1386/jptv_00078_1

Rethinking Women's Guilty Pleasures in a Social Media Age, from Soap Opera to Teen Drama Series

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Abstract:

Fans of teen drama television series often feel that their pleasures are devalued. The history of research into soap opera fans (the genre from which teen drama series derive) tells us that this is unsurprising, as women's popular pleasures have long been denigrated. Gaining global popularity in the mid-2000s, teen drama fandoms have almost exclusively played out on social media, and this article asks how fans' experiences of their 'guilty pleasures' might have changed in a social media age. The article argues that two things remain unchanged: (1) the stubbornness of gendered and classed assumptions about 'acceptable' forms of culture and (2) the policing of behaviour within fandoms. But a noteworthy change lies in the norms themselves; that is, laborious and emotional fan practices are now more valuable than 'Likes' and other social media metrics, a shift which undoes decades-old understandings of acceptable attachments to popular cultures.

Keywords:

Fandom; social media; popular culture; television; teen drama series.

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Introduction: New Technologies of Fandom.

Meet Amanda. Amanda is a forty-something year-old woman who lives with her husband and two teenage children in North America. She holds a Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree and works part-time in events management, organising events at her local convention centre. But unknown to most people in Amanda's life - her friends, work colleagues, and some family members - she also runs a series of highly successful social media fan accounts for the popular television show *Pretty Little Liars* (2010-17) (often abbreviated to 'PLL'). *Pretty Little Liars* is a teen drama television series, a genre that derives from soap opera (Davis and Dickinson 2004; Ross and Stein 2008) and which gained global popularity in the early-2000s following the US 'teen TV boom' (Woods 2013:17). Although the shows' narratives differ, US teen drama series like PLL tend to discursively position themselves as what Hills (2004) calls 'Quality Teen TV', borrowing norms that are derived from 'higher' cultures and depicting 'aspirational, upper-middle-class' lifestyles, 'glossy aesthetic[s], beautiful actors and hyper-articulate protagonists' (Woods 2013:18). Although teen drama series are targeted at *teenagers*, they are enjoyed by teens and adults alike; indeed, I admit that I was surprised to find so many adults in teen drama fan communities.

Amanda's pseudonymous social media identity is central to her PLL fandom. To use Amanda's words, 'people think I'm a teenager' as she borrows the identity of one of her children to participate in the fandom. Amanda and no doubt many other adult fans do this careful identity work for two related reasons: (1) because their identities as adults fall outside of the show's core demographic and as such they feel embarrassed to be fans, and (2) because they understand that women's popular texts, *especially* those aimed at teenage girls, are culturally devalued (amongst others, see Harris 2004). Indeed, teen drama series' 'quality' (Hills 2004) attributes provide useful validation for fans like Amanda (Woods 2013).

Feminist researchers told of the tensions – the *guilt* – experienced by female soap opera fans and audiences (Ang 1985; Hobson 1982; Geraghty 1991; Brown 1994; Harrington and Bielby 1995; Baym, 2000). Women's guilt came from a combination of factors, including their guilt at indulging in a feminine, popular, and therefore devalued pleasure, guilt at enjoying their leisure time at all, and their guilt at abandoning unfairly allocated domestic duties like motherhood and housework to engage with the wrong kinds of popular culture (amongst others, Coward 1984; van Zoonen 1994). For these reasons, feminised popular objects are often referred to as *guilty pleasures*. The research on which this article is based reveals a striking resonance between the guilt felt by my respondents and those quoted in research by Ang (1985) and others. But unlike soap opera fans and audiences, teen drama fandom has almost exclusively played out on social media. This article thus asks how the 'guilty pleasures' described by soap opera researchers might have changed for teen drama fans in a social media age.

As Baym (2010) explains, it is often tempting to ask how new technologies might 'affect' social phenomena like fandom, and while this article re-evaluates women's experiences of feminised fan cultures, the research was not developed on the assumption that new technologies of fandom, specifically social media, would be the causal agents of change. What I became interested in was how the norms and values that get attributed to social media – including its 'constant contactability' (Gregg, 2008:290), its imperative that users 'self-brand' or communicate an identity in some way (Duffy and Hund, 2015; Abidin, 2016), and its equation of metricised 'social buttons' (Gerlitz and Helmond, 2013) with affect – are tied up with fans' experiences. In this article, I explore two noteworthy changes to fans' pleasures in a social media age: (1) my respondents suggest that it is not desirable for fans to outwardly value 'Likes' and other seemingly superficial social media metrics. Instead, more laborious, emotional and thus feminised pursuits designate a person's identity as a 'true' fan. This

undoes decades-old understandings of acceptable attachments to popular cultures, wherein it is considered 'abnormal, and therefore dangerous to be attached to popular, mass-mediated objects (fandoms)' (Jenson 1992: 20), and (2) the imperative of self-branding on social media means fans spend a great deal of time running fan accounts, leading them to frame their practices as a form of labour. On the one hand, this enables them to describe their pleasures using rational and masculinised terms relating to paid employment (van Zoonen 1992), helping to create a culture of acceptability around their fan practices. But on the other hand, fans increasingly value traditionally feminine forms of engagement, disrupting long-held theories about finding respectability through masculinity. In short, *too much* investment into fandom now seems to be valuable.

While this article discusses why such changes have occurred, it also recognises what remains *unchanged* in fan cultures; specifically, the policing of fan behaviours by other fans, a process Stanfill (2013) calls 'intra-fandom' dynamics. I address the changes and continuities in women's popular pleasures in what follows, but start by sharing details of the ethical and methodological approach to the research on which this article is based.

The Ethics of Social Media Fan Studies.

The methods I used in this project were largely dictated by the ethics of social media research (see also Gerrard, 2020). My initial intention was to explore how fans of contemporary teen drama television series use social media, and the research was theoretically grounded in the work that emerged from the 'turn to pleasure' in 1980s feminist literature, such as Ang's (1985) *Watching Dallas* and later Baym's (2000) *Tune In, Log On*. As such, I was aware that my research participants might experience derision from certain people in their lives and might use social media to engage in 'secret' acts of fandom. What I did not expect to find was the *extent* of secrecy and identity manipulation that the fans engaged in. My three main

qualitative research methods – (1) fourteen in-depth, semi-structured Skype interviews, (2) eight structured typed interviews (via email, Facebook Messenger, or Twitter Direct Messenger), and (3) seventeen social media observations – were therefore adapted to ensure my twenty-two participants, who already used pseudonyms across various social media platforms, were re-pseudonymised. This research received approval from the University of Leeds' Research Ethics Committee (UREC).

I took various measures to preserve my participants' pseudonymity. For example, when I describe my interactions with fans, I do not say which participants directed me to others through the snowball sampling method as I do not want them to be able to identify each other through any published materials. Perhaps controversially, if my participants identified as being underage (under the age of eighteen) I did not seek their parents'/carers' consent for them to participate in the research. This is because adolescence is a time for secret acts precisely like teen drama fandom (boyd 2014), but I requested in the consent form that underage participants present their parents/carers with a copy of the information sheet. I also did not ask participants to give me their 'real' identity markers, such as their ages or genders, and instead allowed them to emerge through our conversations, if indeed they emerged at all. Although having full demographic information would have been very useful, I took this decision to protect participants' privacy and increase their comfort levels when talking to someone who was essentially a stranger. Finally, unlike a wealth of other social media research, I do not quote directly from my participants' social media accounts as this would risk re-identifying them, and I recorded the observations through hand-written field notes instead of a digital methods tool to avoid capturing the data of those who had not consented to be researched. I agree with Zimmer's argument that 'just because personal information is made available in some fashion on a social network, does not mean it is fair game for capture and release to all' (2010: 323). I also sought participants' consent for me to

observe their social media fan account(s) for a three-month period immediately following the date of our initial interview. Five of my twenty-two participants did not administer their own accounts and described themselves as 'lurkers' who participate in other fan accounts (Baym 2000).

Another important issue scholars increasingly face is the threat of being 'trolled' or targeted on social media. Because I contacted my participants exclusively via online channels such as email or social media, I needed to represent myself in a way that both assured my participants that I was a legitimate, trustworthy researcher but also protected me and my connections from potential harm. I contact potential participants through my university email address, my Twitter account, and my Facebook profile. Although Twitter is a non-academic social networking platform (unlike academia.edu or similar), I consider my account to be for professional purposes; however, I did not create a separate academic account on Facebook to recruit participants. I took measures to protect the privacy of my own Facebook friends by, for example, restricting the visibility of my friends list to 'only me' and limiting the audience of past posts.

I now share some of my data, beginning with a discussion of the conflicting pleasures of Likes and other metrics within social media fandoms.

The Conflicting Pleasures of Likes and Other Metrics.

Teen drama fans – and perhaps fans of other popular cultures – outwardly devalue Likes and other social media metrics, instead prioritising more laborious and 'quality' contributions to fandoms, undoing decades-old understandings of acceptable attachments to popular culture. As Jenson explains, what designates a 'fan' from someone who has, say, a 'hobby', involves a cultural hierarchy wherein fan objects are typically forms of popular culture, meaning fans' 'obsession[s]' are:

> […] deemed emotional (low class, uneducated), and therefore dangerous, while the obsession of the aficionado is rational (high class, educated) and therefore benign, even worthy. […] Reason is associated with the objective apprehending of reality, while emotion is associated with the subjective, the imaginative, and the irrational. Emotions, by this logic, lead to a dangerous blurring of the line between fantasy and reality, while rational obsession, apparently, does not. (1992: 21)

It has long been unacceptable to be *too* invested in popular cultures, as this suggests a person who is 'emotionally immature' (Gorton 2009: 38) and unable to critically evaluate and intelligently consume media texts. Yet the dominance of what Gerlitz and Helmond (2013) call 'social buttons' on social media has shifted what fans consider to be valuable and worthy forms of fan participation. Social buttons allow users to 'share, recommend, like or bookmark content, posts, and pages across various social media platforms' (Gerlitz and Helmond 2013: 1351). Crucially, they often show 'the total number of activities performed on the object' (Gerlitz and Helmond 2013: 1351), meaning users' participation in social media is transformed into metrics. Although metrics have had an 'ordering role in the social world for quite some time' (Beer 2016: 3), Beer (2016) and Kennedy (2016) argue that their importance is intensifying.

Gerlitz and Helmond consider how the metrification of user engagement transforms their affective responses, which in turn makes Like and other button counts 'comparable' (2013: 1358). I argue that comparable social media metrics produce conflicting pleasures for teen drama fans, who compare and measure their counts against a subjective ideal and yet simultaneously discount this form of pleasure as being unrepresentative of 'true' fandom. This conscious separation is significant in revealing a complicated understanding of Likes,

such that they see value in them *and* recognise the problems inherent in metrics. There are also some important gender dimensions to unpack here. For example, if Likes and other metrics might be viewed as masculinised frameworks, given their promotion of rationality over irrationality, and of objectivity over subjectivity (Hill et al. 2016), it is significant that female fans now feel comfortable dismissing them. To dismiss masculinised practices in favour of feminised ones – relational engagement, quality of interaction, and creativity of content (Baym 2018), as opposed to numbers of Likes – tells a powerful story of shifting gender relations in fandom and beyond.

Although my participants self-identify as fans, some explain that they have attracted their own fans through their participation in teen drama fandoms. They have become, in Abidin's words, 'influencers' within fandoms: the 'everyday, ordinary Internet users who accumulate a relatively large following on blogs and social media' (2016: 3). For example, Amanda told me that 'I call my followers fans now because I think I've earned them'. The pleasures of fandom are partly tied to fans' perceptions of their own reputation, defined by Hearn as a 'personal attribute generated entirely by the perception, attention and approval of others' (2010: 423). Social media metrics play a dominant role in fans' reputations as they often judge the success of their own and other people's fan accounts based on the number of Likes that their social media content attracts. For example, Reesa – a Central European university student and make-up artist who 'role-plays' as one of *Pretty Little Liars*' female characters – explains that posting content on the official *Pretty Little Liars* Facebook page was integral to obtaining most of her Likes:

> Reesa: A lot of times I would post things on the main PLL page and they would share my edits. So that's pretty much how I got most of my Likes, I would say. Um... I

> would get up to, say, a thousand Likes when I got shared. So yeah, that was it mainly. But lately I haven't been doing things like sharing anymore.
>
> Interviewer: Is there a reason for that?
>
> Reesa: I dunno. I guess maybe when you reach a certain number, you don't really care that much about, you know, how many people Like your page. I would much rather see people – more people commenting on the things I post and having conversations with me and stuff like that, than to get more Likes.

Reesa demonstrates a complicated relationship with Likes here. She explains that she needed a certain number of Likes to become an influencer within the PLL fan community, but she now values quality engagement above Likes and similar, perhaps superficial metrics.

Nina, a North American journalist, and fan of *The Vampire Diaries* (2009-17) (TVD) also told me that the original owner of the fan accounts she administers 'got her start' by following other fans of TVD on Twitter and hoping that they would follow her back. Once she gained her first thousand followers, she began to unfollow accounts because: 'generally speaking, when you have a low follower to following ratio, people tend to follow you back a little bit quicker than if you were the opposite'. Once the former owner was satisfied with her follower count, both she and Nina began to prioritise the 'content' and 'quality of the posts', as Nina explains below:

> If I was following the account, what would I want to see? Particularly with me, I like to keep up with the news and some spoilers. So sometimes we'll do trivia and we'll

> do quotes, and that brings people in as well because now you have people retweeting it and getting involved and, you know, spreading out.

Here, Nina articulates a similar relationship between metrics and quality to Reesa, as she recognises that higher quality posts will attract even more retweets and involvement from other fans. This means that metrics are still of value, but their meaning changes as a fan's reputation grows. Although Reesa and Nina's perspectives on metrics are clearly similar, it is interesting to note that their follower counts are very different. While I do not disclose exact follower and similar counts in this article to preserve my participants' anonymity, this distinction shows how fans value social media metrics differently. The number of followers you reach before you no longer care about Likes is subjective and varies between fans.

Pretty Little Liars fan Amanda, who I introduced at the start of this article, articulates a similarly complex relationship between quantity and quality, though her disavowal of 'other' fans who value metrics is more explicit. For example, she claims that:

> I'm pretty strict. You know, I don't allow people to advertise on my page. Most pages do promoting and advertising. I have never. Nope, I don't do it, because it junks up your page. I want content on my page. I'm not in there to get fans. I don't advertise, I don't do any of that. So, I'm not out there trying to work for the fans, you know, work for getting Likes like everybody else – I need 200 likes a day! Or whatever. I'm like, I don't care.

'Content' is a discourse about what gets valued as acceptable social media participation. It can take various forms, but is known by fans like Amanda to be more substantive than metric-based engagement. In other words, it shows that fans value *feminised* practices –

'authentic' interaction and relationships (Baym 2018) – over more detached, objective, *masculinised* forms of engagement such as metrics.

Reesa and Nina refer to the same discourse though they use other terms to describe this form of fan participation, such as 'originality': 'If I find a good page or something original, like an original idea I will share it' (Reesa). Amanda explains that she does not engage in promotional activities and derides fans who feel that they 'need 200 Likes a day' and distances herself from this unacceptable behaviour by claiming that she does not care. Different kinds of participation are judged less kindly than others within fandoms; what Stanfill (2013) calls 'intra-fan' dynamics, a process by which fans attempt to normalise their own fan practices by devaluing others. Fans often draw on cultural stereotypes of fandom – of 'extreme' behaviours, their lack of control and confusion about 'the distinctions between fantasy and reality' (Stanfill 2013: 124) – to criticise other fans and create boundaries. On social media, on which metrics play a key, perhaps ordering role, there is an increased valuation of 'content' above metrics and other perceptively shallow forms of engagement. This is an interesting and arguably new shift. Given that teen drama fans already face harsh cultural denigration, we might expect them to not outwardly value such substantive, emotionally intense forms of engagement, but instead they value being seen as a quality content provider in their community. In an age of metric-driven social media participation, *too much* investment into fandom now seems to be valuable.

Around the time this article was being peer-reviewed, Instagram – a highly popular platform among my research participants, other fan communities, and social media users at large – announced that it would be trialling the removal of visible Like counts in certain countries (Leaver et al. 2019). The removal of Likes and the reasoning behind it – to 'focus on the photos and videos you share, not how many likes they get' (Twitter.com 2019) – certainly resonates with teen drama fans' prioritisation of more substantial forms of social

media engagement like commenting, direct messaging, and intricate post design above metricised Likes. I now expand my discussion of the shifting values within teen drama fandoms, specifically the framing of fan participation as 'labour'.

Fan Labour and the Rationalisation of Pleasure.

Teen drama fans frequently draw on the discourse of 'labour' to describe their enactments of fandom. This is partly because the production of high-quality 'content' – which, as I previously argued, is increasingly valued in social media fan spaces – requires a great deal of time and effort. The concept of labour pre-dates the current social media age but various scholars are asking if users' often unpaid, time-intensive, and immaterial participation might be described as a new form of labour (amongst others, Andrejevic 2008; Jarrett 2014; Stanfill and Condis 2014). Although this article does not measure the extent to which teen drama fandom might represent new labour relations (though it certainly inspires these discussions), it does investigate how the discourse of social media labour emerges through fans' articulations. That is; on the one hand, by describing their activities using terms like 'part-time job', 'full-time job', 'work', and 'effort', this might be read as a way for fans to foreground an image of acceptable productive labour. Because the production of 'content' requires more time and effort, this enables the fans to put a spotlight on their labour, which may (or may not) be a form of rationalisation. But on the other hand, the very description of fandom as time-intensive reveals a shift in value systems: that emotional investment is now valuable.

The overwhelming majority of my research participants in some way spoke about the amount of time that they dedicate to their social media fan accounts. The amounts are diverse, ranging from fifteen minutes per day (Virginie, *The Vampire Diaries* fan) to forty

hours per week (Emily, *Revenge* fan). Some of the fans listed below were responding to a direct question; for example, I asked my email respondents: 'can you tell me what your typical daily engagement with the page looks like?' and asked some of my Skype interviewees a similar question. Some of their responses are as follows:

> I spend about six hours a day [on it] [...]. From the second I wake up I log into my Facebook page and start working on it. (Elena, *The Vampire Diaries* fan)

> It's easily thirty to forty hours a week between all of my sites. (Emily, *Revenge* fan)

> I work on it every night for at least three hours. (Gioia, *The Vampire Diaries* fan)

> I check my page randomly, maybe once a day when I remember. (*Kat*, The Vampire Diaries fan)

> I check all the social media pages hourly. (Kate, *Revenge* fan)

> I would say it's a part-time job. So maybe about twenty to thirty hours a week, depending, fluctuating. (Nina, *The Vampire Diaries* fan)

> I would say like three to four hours a night when I am on, but then the checking and the commenting back with people, then that could be an additional hour here or there during the week, you know. (Taylor, *Pretty Little Liars* fan)

> I spend about five hours on the page per day, and I access it using my mobile and laptop. I mostly post in the afternoon. (Vicky, *The Vampire Diaries* fan)

> I can spend between fifteen minutes and one hour every day. (Virginie, *The Vampire Diaries* fan)

Although I asked many of the fans to quantify their engagement with their social media fan accounts, I did not expect them to frame their fandom as, for example, a 'part-time job' (Nina). Articulations of this kind were common across my respondents and might be tied to the politics of the interview scenario (Skeggs et al 2008), as this vocabulary resonates with forms of paid employment and might enable fandom to be viewed as a more acceptable, productive pursuit. Framing their fandom as a form of labour might thus facilities fans' pleasures both within the interview scenario and beyond. At the same time, fans frame their activities as time-intensive, a factor that might be understood as disruptive to their pleasures. Put simply, it might be a *displeasure*.

Social media plays an important role here as fans imagine it as being instantly and immediately accessible throughout the day. For example, Elena logs-in 'the second' she wakes up, Gioia checks her accounts 'on a night', Vicky in an 'afternoon', while Kat, Kate, and Virginie check their accounts over the course of the day. These fans and likely many others admit to checking their social media very frequently, and told me about the level of investment required to be a fan. Because the fans value quality forms of engagement, this takes a great deal of time and I am hesitant to read their articulations as mere performances for the interview scenario. Using terms like 'full-time job' to describe their fandom *might* be a way of rationalising their fandom during an interview with an academic researcher, as they are drawing on a gendered distinction between public (paid, masculine) and private (unpaid,

feminine) spheres of labour, ultimately privileging the former (Gregg 2009). But by admitting to their time-intensive and *emotional* investments in teen drama fandom, my respondents are demonstrating a new and as-yet undiscussed relationship to women's popular pleasures.

For example, at the time of our interview, *Revenge* (2011-15) fan Emily – a North American woman in her early-twenties – was working on twelve different social media fan accounts and managed one actor's 'official' social media presence, to borrow her term. She also had what she referred to as a 'day job' where she worked typical full-time hours after earning her Bachelor's degree, but she also referred to her fandom in the same way when I asked her how long she spends on her various fan accounts:

> I think overall, in a week... You know, it's easily thirty to forty hours between all of my sites, which is pretty much a full-time job *laughs*. Yep.

That Emily's fandom is so time-consuming leads her to draw on terms like 'full-time job' and 'work', which begs an important question: would the soap opera fans and audiences in Ang (1985) and others' research have framed their pleasures in quite the same way, given the pathologisation (Jenson 1992) of those who are overly attached to popular cultures, especially women (Enrenreich 1992)? What is it about social media that has prompted this shift? It is difficult, perhaps even unwise to pin down a singular and identifiable 'cause' of this shift, but this is nonetheless a striking revelation in the history of fan stigmatisation.

Other teen drama fans frame their activities in similar ways. For example:

I see it as work because I need to take care of it and get new photos and work on the page every day, as a real job. [...] So it's like my own job. (Elena, *The Vampire Diaries* fan)

It's not always easy to be original to avoid making my page boring [...]. Sometimes it's tiring because I have to think of everything myself. (Gioia, *The Vampire Diaries* fan)

In the beginning, I was just a kid who made the page and didn't know what to do except for posting pictures. But no one Liked or commented 'cause I had no Likes. So, then the promos started and it was a lot of work. I guess I was online two hours a day then. (Kat, *The Vampire Diaries* fan)

Like my mum supports me, but I don't think she understands all that I do on the website and stuff. People think that you just sit around and watch the show. But if you don't do your job, then people won't watch the show! They won't know what's happening and stuff, you know. (Kate, *Revenge* fan)

During the season, I would say that it's more like a part-time job. I mean, there are times when I've treated it like a part-time job, but I would say-- I would say it's a part-time job. (Nina, *The Vampire Diaries* fan)

The competition with other pages is way too high. [...] Fan pages need to stay a hobby, not a job. (Vicky, *The Vampire Diaries* fan)

Part of the imperative of social media is to convey an identity and curate your profile – your *exhibition space* (Hogan 2010) – in a careful way. Various scholars have linked this imperative to older theories of marketing and consumer culture, evaluating the extent to which social media encourages people to view their social media presence as a highly edited personal 'brand' (for example, Hearn 2010; Marwick 2013). Indeed, Duffy and Hund call self-branding an 'infectious rhetoric' (2015:3) of contemporary social media production. But curating a brand or any form of identity on social media takes time, and the fans cited above use similar terms to describe their fan activities, such as 'work', 'real job', 'part-time job', and 'tiring'. Social media's underpinning market logics of participation and self-branding are tied up with this trend, as platforms' insistence that fans contribute content and data becomes implicated in how they measure their own and each other's reputation. Each fandom also has a unique culture about what counts as 'acceptable' participation (Stanfill 2013), and the quotes above reflect some fans' compulsion to post 'every day' (Elena), avoid being '[un]original' (Gioia), spend excessive amounts of time on 'promos' (Kat), and avoid competing with other fans (Vicky). These pressures might actually disrupt fans' pleasures as their fandom becomes imagined as 'work'.

Vicky's quote is particularly interesting. She says: 'fan pages need to stay a hobby, not a job'. Here, Vicky devalues fans who treat their fandom like a 'job'. Although I have noted some shifts in how fans talk about their investment in fandom, Vicky's quote reminds us that there will always be *intra-fan dynamics*; that is, the the establishment of norms within individual fandoms. Stanfill (2013) and Busse (2013) explore how fans are derided by other fans for being *too* invested, thus re-instating longstanding negative stereotypes of those who are overly invested in popular cultures. While most of the fans I interviewed were proud to talk about the amount of time they dedicate to their fandom, there will always be ways to push your fandom towards the edge of acceptability.

The extensive time commitment that teen drama fandom seemingly requires is tied up with my participants' imaginings of social media. The above quotes evade straightforward explanations but they nod to a longer history of exploring serial drama fandoms through the lens of gender. Teen drama fans, for example, sometimes abide by traditional understandings of labour and masculinity by describing their fandom using terms related to paid employment. But at the same time, the fans were very open and proud of their time and emotionally intense commitments to their fandom, even in an interview scenario where one might expect them to have performed a classed and gendered identity in line with what they think is more culturally acceptable (Skeggs et al. 2008). This raises several questions. While these actions might work to disrupt patriarchal norms of 'acceptable' (i.e., non-feminised) attachments to popular cultures, are the fans still finding respectability through masculinity? Does the framing of fandom as labour transcend fandoms? And would masculinised fan objects or male fans describe their practices in the same way?

The new politics of guilt and pleasure identified in this article are, of course, not the only pleasures teen drama fans experience. Talking about British children's television, Holdsworth and Lury explain that television can act as a 'caring technology' (2016: 190) by providing viewers with 'small pleasures' established through their 'continual repetition of the same simple stories, characters and musical motifs, reflecting the mundane and necessary practices of care (washing, tidying, dressing, explaining, story-telling) that need doing "again, again"' (2016:193). Their work reminds us of the multiplicity of pleasures on offer to, and experienced by, teen drama fans.

Concluding Thoughts.

By and large, fandom is still not an activity a person should dedicate 'too much' of their time to, or they risk being ridiculed for their over-emotional and irrational investment with

popular, trivial objects (Lewis 1992). As Levine argues, feminised popular texts such as serial dramas continue to be, and will likely always be, 'denigrated by culture at large' (2015: 1). But the fans who participated in my research told a slightly different story about their attachments to teen dramas, the so-called 'guilty pleasures' like *Pretty Little Liars*, *Revenge* and *The Vampire Diaries*. The fans told a powerful tale of the integral role social media platforms play in contemporary fandoms and how its imperatives – that users should maintain 'constant contactability' (Gregg 2008: 290), that they should 'self-brand' or communicate an identity in some way (Abidin 2016; Duffy and Hund 2015), and equate affect with metricised 'social buttons' (Gerlitz and Helmond 2013) – are tied up with their experiences of fandom. This article serves as a reminder that many of the gendered feelings of guilt identified by Ang (1985) and other soap opera researchers continue to run through teen drama fandoms, but it also shows how fans are working out new understandings of respectability, gender, and pleasure, and two of these are as follows: (1) for teen drama fans, it is undesirable to outwardly value Likes and other seemingly superficial social media metrics. More emotional, laborious and *feminised* pursuits designate your identity as a 'true' fan who is maximizing their fan pleasures, and (2) teen drama fandom is often described as a form of labour, which might work to provide fans with a more acceptable (masculinised, objective, rational) lens through which to describe their devalued pleasures. But these articulations also tell us that substantive, laborious, emotional and conventionally *feminised* engagements with popular texts are now valuable. Social media's core imperatives – self-branding and influence, metrics, and constant connection – have led to new understandings of value within fan cultures.

While female fans might now feel surprisingly comfortable dismissing masculinised practices in favour of feminised ones, this finding does not wholly free fandom from its stubborn stereotype as a practice of 'uncontrolled, socially unacceptable desire' (Stanfill,

2013: 118). But fan practices now look and are experienced differently, and fan studies and internet researchers must re-assess how fan pleasures and identities are being renegotiated alongside socio-technical developments.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Elena Maris for offering extremely helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article; Anita Biressi, Helen Kennedy, Bethany Klein, Helen Thornham, and Nancy Thumim for guiding the research; and the participants quoted or mentioned in this article for giving such generous amounts of their time to the project.

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