FANS LIKE US: ANTI-SHIPPING, OTHERING, AND THE REAUTHORING OF FANDOM

by

Madison Bradburn

A master's thesis submitted to the faculty of
The University of North Carolina at Charlotte
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in
English

Charlotte

2023

Approved by:

_____
Dr. Aaron A. Toscano

_____
Dr. Balaka Basu

_____
Dr. Elizabeth Gargano

ABSTRACT

MADISON BRADBURN. Fans Like Us: Anti-shipping, Othering, and the Reauthoring of Fandom. (Under the direction of DR. AARON A. TOSCANO)

The following thesis focuses on Anti- and Pro-shipping debates, their rhetorical behaviors, and their impacts on fandom spaces. These debates center around "shipping," the act of romantically pairing characters from media in fan productions such as fanart and fanfiction. Tensions have manifested between Anti- and Pro-shippers who disagree on aspects of shipping, namely if shipping reflects a fan's moral values. As a result, arguments have broken out online and in fan spaces regarding what is and is not appropriate for fan production. Through inductive coding and triangulation, this thesis analyzes the rhetorical strategies employed by both groups as they engage in discussions regarding shipping on Twitter (X). This thesis posits that Anti-shippers alter media fandom behavioral standards by going against previously agreed-upon notions of fandom openness. This new practice is most prevalent when Anti-shippers attempt to push out creative members using vitriolic messages that label Pro-shippers as sexual criminals. These messages demonstrate a fandom paradigm shift where Anti-shippers sanction fellow fans who produce erotic content by rhetorically constructing them as immoral and inappropriate for wider public audiences. Further, by representing fictional characters as real, Anti-shipping challenges conceptions of authorship, the role of the audience, and fiction's place within the world.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend thanks to the following individuals, as without their help, this project would not have been possible: My Committee Chair, Dr Aaron Toscano, who helped me remain levelheaded throughout this project; my committee members, Dr. Balaka Basu and Dr. Elizabeth Gargano, who provided feedback, recommendations, and opportunities to talk through my thought process; Dr. Lara Vetter who guided me through the administrative aspects of this project; and of course The University of North Carolina at Charlotte's English Department which I have been glad to call home during both my undergraduate and graduate studies.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to the following individuals:

To my family — to answer your question, Mom, yes, I am alive. To my friends: Sarah, who encouraged me to study English and a subject close to my heart; Liam, whose constant pride in me has held me up even during the most stressful days; Helen, who sends me endless messages about fandom discussions, and Eden, who should write a book about how to put up with graduate students.

Most importantly, this thesis is dedicated to my fellow fans and our conversations over the years in online chat forums and private messages, in cars, on convention hall floors, and at dining room tables. Without those late-night talks and gossip sessions, I would not have come to wonder if there was anyone as curious about fandom as I was. Thank you for making me part of your communities.

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List of Abbreviations

//	trigger warning
ASOG	Anti-ship original post
ASR	Anti-ship reply
BC	because
BL	boys love
BYF	before you follow
CP	child pornography
CW	content warning
DL; DR	don't like; don't read
DM	direct message
DNI	do not interact
NOTP	not one true pairing
OTP	one true pairing
PSOG	Pro-ship original post
PSR	Pro-ship reply
RT	retweet
S.A.L.S	ship and let ship
SMTH	something
TL	timeline
TW	trigger warning
TWT	Twitter (X)
YKINMKBYKIOK	your kink is not my kink but your kink is ok

Chapter 1: Introduction

Fandoms, "a culture developed around shared engagement of an interest" (Drouin 15), have existed for decades, with members gathering online and in person to share ideas, fan works, and companionship. Within these subcultures, some fans interpret romantic chemistry between characters in fictional works and wish to consume or create content of them paired together. These fans, previously known as "relationshippers," are called "shippers" (Drouin 14). Shippers play with texts, producing fan works based on romantic pairings of characters called ships. These fan works are then shared with fandoms for fellow fans to enjoy. Looking at fan works; Henry Jenkins puts forth a crucial metaphor for fandom studies. Describing Margery William's fable, The *Velveteen Rabbit*, Jenkins sees a toy altered through a child's play as an accumulation of loving gestures. Rather than viewing audience consumption negatively, Jenkins considers fandom's enjoyment of popular culture a similar act of love (51). This viewpoint has influenced many researchers of fan studies to demonstrate the merits of fan creations. Across the field and in the day-to-day, the idea that fans want to play with media through fan works has become more commonplace (Rosenberg). However, debates have sparked within fandoms over what that play entails, particularly regarding shipping, where the pairing of characters is contested. This disagreement relates to Anti-shipping, which reinterprets shipping in fandom spaces as a reflection of a fan's morality rather than personal taste, thus challenging views on how fan works and fiction should be approached.

While fandom has been observed as a "Gift Culture" (Chin 246), where fans are encouraged to add to fan communities through the creation of fan artifacts (Jenkins 280), fans have grown increasingly vicious towards one another regarding ships within their fan works (Drouin 26). Ship wars, where fans fight over which romantic pairing in a property is best, have

happened. Take *Twilight's,* Team Edward or Team Jacob, for example. Also, fan sayings such as Ship and Let Ship (S.A.L.S) and Don't Like; Don't Read (DL; DR) reflect the desire amongst some fans to have ships be a personal matter. These sayings reminded fans not to engage with content they do not enjoy while letting those who do enjoy shipping to indulge. However, shipping conflicts, which Victor Larsen et al. describe as experiencing an increase in frequency around 2016 (11), impact fandoms as Anti-shipping hostilities push creatives away from their communities (Larsen et al. 5; Rosenberg). Unlike anti-fans, "people against a media or creator" (Larsen et al. 31), Anti-shippers seek to police the ships of other individuals. To accomplish this, Anti-shippers adopt rhetorical strategies, such as moral arguments, to exclude other fans from fan spaces through accusations.

The following thesis focuses on the rhetorical strategies present within online fandom discourse surrounding shipping observed through an analysis of 400 Anti- and Pro-shipper posts on Twitter, also known as "X." Throughout this project, "X" is referred to as Twitter (X) due to the Uniform Resource Locators (URLs) linked to each tweet gathered being listed as directing to Twitter.com, rather than X.com. Additionally, this thesis only focuses on Western conceptions of, and arguments regarding, Anti- and Pro-shipping. As discussed later, what Anti- and Pro-shipping are is not agreed upon by fans, and it should be understood that these debates vary significantly between individual fans, fandoms, and cultures. Given that the tweets gathered were all in English, readers should recognize that this analysis draws conclusions in the context of Western cultures and ideologies that impact the conversations observed. While beyond the scope of this thesis, future researchers could expand the scholarship on fandom by analyzing similar texts in non-Western contexts.

Shipping debates have increasingly resulted in hostilities between fans and feature cyberbullying, doxxing, and stalking (Drouin 83; Rosenburg 8). Building off the work of fandom researchers concerned both with shipping and the social behaviors of fans, such as Mélanie Bourdua, Bertha Chin, Renee Drouin, Henry Jenkins, Derek Johnson, Larsen et al., Allegra Rosenberg, and other relevant internet research practices, this work aims to observe Anti- and Pro-shipping rhetorical behaviors through the observation of Twitter (X) posts from ten different fandoms. Through coding original posts and replies, this work will use inductive coding and triangulation to ask how two opposing groups discuss shipping, interact, and engage in rhetorically complex acts that impact shared spaces. Previous discussions around Anti-shipping have frequently focused on Anti-shipping posts alone or a single or few fandoms at a time. This thesis codes posts made across a broad range of fandoms alongside those previously researched by the referenced works and Anti- and Pro-shipping tweets. Through these inclusions, this thesis aims to observe both Anti- and Pro-shipping interactions directly and how, despite taking place in a range of fandoms, shipping debates are shaping broader conceptions of fandom paradigms regarding behavior and fiction.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Fandoms

The term “fandom” encapsulates many ideas. Bourdaa states, “Fans are a culture of participation, expressed through interactions, activities, activism, and sharing” (387). This culture can develop around both fictional and nonfictional works. This thesis will focus on fandoms that form around fictional properties. This type of fandom may be called literary fandom, wherein “texts are written or controlled by copyright and license holders” (Sandvoss 22), or media fandom (Larsen et al. 9). In his work, Jenkins names five critical aspects of fandoms, writing fandom “involves a particular mode of reception” (277), “a particular set of critical and interpretive practice” (278), “constitutes a base for consumer activism” (278), “possesses particular forms of cultural production, aesthetic traditions and practices” (279), and “functions as an alternative social community” (280). Fandoms, being understood as participatory cultures, have social structures. These structures come with hierarchies influenced by the fans, texts, and producers (Sandvoss 21-22; Chin 244, 246-247). Derek Johnson argues that “ongoing struggles for discursive dominance constitutes fandom as a hegemonic struggle over interpretation and evaluation” (286). Chin calls fan hierarchies a “social game” (251) where fans seek to gain and maintain social capital that will elevate their status and interpretations of texts within a fandom’s social grouping (251).

Fandoms, being complex webs of social interactions, are, as Kristina Busse and Karen Hellekson state, “fragmented and fragmentary” (8). They are “self-perpetuating, itself a continual work in progress that cannot be shut down” (Busse and Hellekson 8). Fandoms are, in a sense, amalgamations constructed through the creation of “social bonds,” “collective intelligence,” “creative activities,” and “social engagements” (Bourdaa 385). They are locations of shared

experiences and those shared experiences themselves, both online and in-person. It is around these locations that fans gather and share their fan creations, those being fan fiction, fan videos, fan art, fan music (filk), and numerous other fan-produced texts or objects pertaining to the media they enjoy. Bourdaa writes, “Fan’s productivity and creativity are one of the pillars of fandom” (393). From this view, those who contribute to this productivity and creativity actively build and perpetuate fandoms, adding to the cultural wealth of the space.

2.2 Shipping

The act of shipping is, despite occasions of turbulence, a highly prevalent part of fandom spaces. As shown by Jenkins, the romantic pairing of characters is the focus of much fan production, expressed through numerous mediums. Due to the creative contributions of fans to fandom spaces, fandom studies take a particular interest in fan-created artifacts. Throughout *Textual Poachers*, Jenkins explores the manifestations of these involvements, describing fan productions of texts and meanings as an activity he names “not a solitary and private process but rather a social and public one” (75). Given the social nature of these productions, noncommunal behavior may be seen as falling outside the norm. Jenkins writes that within fandoms, “Noncommunal behavior is read negatively, as a violation of the social contract that binds fans together and often becomes the focus of collective outrage” (282). What counts as communal behavior can differ from fandom to fandom, but Jenkins focuses on some relative consistencies. One fundamental behavior is creation and openness to new fan creators. Jenkins notes that within media fandoms is the idea that any individual “may be able to make a contribution, however modest, to the cultural wealth of the larger community” (280). However, while this behavior reflects the conception of fandoms as “gift cultures,” as discussed above, this

does not imply that fandoms lack hierarchies or internal and external struggles (Chin 246; Johnson 287).

Several fandom scholars discuss shipping, the struggles related to the practice, and its place within fandoms (Bourdaa; Larsen et al.; Drouin; Hills; Jenkins; Johnson; Rosenberg). The practice has, arguably, been around since the inception of modern media fandom, which Jenkins looks at in *Textual Poachers* with the Star Trek fandom and, briefly, in *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* with Harry Potter fandom. Johnson uses the term "fan-tagonism" to describe the "ongoing, competitive struggles between internal factions and external institutions to discursively codify the fan-text-producer relationship according to their respective interests" (287). Despite being commonplace within many fandoms, fans and media producers do not always view shipping positively. Johnson points out while discussing the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997) fandom, "Shippers often inhabit specialized online communities and discussion venues, but this multiplicity of romantic permutations regularly puts shipper interests in competition within larger *Buffy* fan communities" (288). If a fan community does not place value on shipping or expresses disdain for the practice, arguments may arise.

2.3 Anti-shipping

Regardless of the value placed upon it, shipping has been a matter of personal taste for a notable portion of modern media fandom. However, this mentality has seen a distinct shift within the past decade, particularly around 2016, when a rise in an occurrence known as Anti-shipping challenged this arrangement (Larsen et al. 11). While ship wars, arguments over which ships are better have long existed, fandom sayings such as the aforementioned S.A.L.S, DL; DR, and YKINMKBYKIOK, indicate that many fans leaned towards a mentality of enjoying their ships while avoiding others. Anti-shipping practices stand out from previous fandom community

standards by arguing that an individual's ships reflect their morality rather than a difference in textual interpretation and/or fan enjoyment.

Before continuing, it must be noted that the terms used throughout this work, "Anti-shipper" and "Pro-shipper," are not agreed on. A significant part of the corpus observed for this thesis focused on how fans define what Anti-shipping and Pro-shipping are. These definitions can and do vary between fandoms and individuals. However, for this research, definitions had to be selected and observed for the sake of setting parameters. These definitions are an exercise of power and are not free from bias. By being upfront about this, I hope to not "aca-colonize fandom" (Busse and Hellekson 25) by detrimentally exercising academic power over the spaces I hold dear. Fandoms and the activities therein are profoundly complex and under constant construction. This work recognizes that the definitions found within will not be definitions everyone agrees with, but it also recognizes the reality that we must start somewhere when engaging with analysis.

Larsen et al. define Anti-shipping as "opposing a ship of two fictional characters on a moral basis" (5). Discussing one of her interviewees, Drouin writes, "Her belief that antis 'believe they have this moral and ethical highground' is among the most common recurring theme across participants" (59). Although research into Anti-shipping is just beginning, the ties between Anti-shippers and concepts of morality are clear. Anti-shippers can be seen as arguing that a fan's ships reflect their morals on a 1:1 basis or that the fiction one consumes reveals definitive information about themselves. For instance, if a person reads fanfiction in which a character abuses their partner, that fan must support romantic partner abuse. On the opposite side of this argument is "the "pro-shipper," or "anti-anti"" (Rosenberg). Pro-shippers oppose the idea

that what ships a fan enjoys correlates to their morals. This fundamental disagreement has caused deep tensions online and in real-world fandom spaces.

Of further interest is how these disagreements occur between fans "despite their shared identity markers of female and/or queer" (Drouin iii). Shipping has often been seen as a feminine activity (Busse 105; Drouin 13; Jenkins 140; Larsen et al. 25). While discussing the *Voltron: Legendary Defender* (*VLD*) fandom, Drouin notes that "perhaps ironically, the fandom is one of the most diverse of all time, dominated by female and queer fans, known primarily as victims of harassment in our scholarship, not the perpetrators" (2). According to Bridget Gelms, "online harassment disproportionately targets women," and that it "takes on additional dimensions for LGBTQIA+ women" (180). Due to this, one of the key questions within Anti-shipping research is, why are groups who are seen, typically, as targets of online abuse, engaging in harassment against other individuals with similar demographics?

Within the ever-changing world of the internet, fandoms have grown more visible over time. Fandom shipping practices are no longer hidden behind private email lists or blogs but are on popular social media sites like Twitter (X). This increased visibility has been referred to as a "context collapse," wherein the previous contexts of private (or semi-private) internet spaces have merged into a handful of large social platforms (Rosenberg). Due to this collapse, "NSFW [Not Safe For Work] and erotic content became much more visible to and accessible by the broader platformed public" (Rosenberg). As a result, individuals who were not meant to see it, including the creators of the media fandoms form around, can come face to face with erotic shipping practices. These erotic materials could reflect poorly on those who are posting them publicly or on the people who are in close online orbit to such individuals. There is the potential

for judgment from outsiders as members of the public see erotic content away from websites where it is generally expected.

Anti-shippers may have "an intrinsic desire to be seen as "good" fans in the eyes of that potentially infinite, collapsed public" (Rosenberg) and engage in activities meant to push "bad" fans away from public websites. To do this, Anti-shipping utilizes violent and inflammatory language to exclude certain shippers from fandom. This language involves calling fans who do not post approved content pedophiles, abusers, and incest enjoyers/apologists. After surveying 561 participants, Drouin names "Accusations of Pedophilia" and "Accusations of Incest" (52) among the most common codes her work observed. The use of "cultural signifiers like "pedophilic" "abusive" and "freak" to those who interact with and/or create certain fictional or visual types of taboo pornography—lend power to the arsenal of an anti-shipper's semantic arguments, framing their moral perspective to outsiders in visceral simplicity" (Rosenberg). Due to the cultural weight of these terms, arguing with Anti-shippers often puts Pro-shippers in the position of appearing to support sexual deviancy. These terms have rhetorical power that places Anti-shippers on a moral high ground at a glance. Individuals outside these arguments are likelier to listen to those who claim to be cleaning a fandom of its bad actors, especially in an online medium like Twitter (X), where the character count is limited and nuanced arguments would necessarily need to be dragged out over the course of numerous posts.

These accusations impact fandom spaces. Jenkins describes fandom as a community that recognizes "no clear-cut line between artists and consumers" where "all fans are potential writers whose talents need to be discovered, nurtured, and promoted and who may be able to make a contribution" (280). From this view, fan production is deeply embedded in fandom cultures. However, Anti-shipping makes an effort to harass creators who produce content that does not

adhere to shifting ideas of deviance, which lean on culturally charged terms. Anti-shippers often resort to "violent methods of disaffiliation" (Rosenberg) to gain control over fandoms. These methods include harassment and doxxing but may also involve real-life retaliation, including stalking and physical confrontation (Drouin 83). In the face of these risks, some fans may leave fan spaces altogether or create new spaces to avoid harassment.

2.4 N/ethnographies

To observe, code, and analyze the selected tweets, this thesis utilized ethnographic and netnographic research methods. Beverly J. Moss defines ethnography as "a qualitative research method that allows a researcher to gain a comprehensive view of the social interactions, behaviors, and beliefs of a community or social group" (155), or more poetically as "a story told jointly by the researcher and the members of the community" (154). Ethnographies look to give a "thick description" (Geertz 10-14) of communities, social groups, and cultures (Moss 157). B. Quarshie Smith adds, "Although by its very nature ethnographic research is qualitative, quantitative methods can be incorporated into its design and analysis" (137). This thesis seeks to provide a glimpse into the rhetoric used during shipping debates by two groups engaged in a disagreement that has grown notably intense. To do this, this work includes quantitative measures by observing and coding 400 tweets, 200 from each side of the Anti- and Pro-shipping debate. The coding of these tweets, which utilizes both inductive coding and triangulation, adds a quantitative dimension to this research by not only describing behaviors within fan discussions but by demonstrating who engages in these behaviors, how often, and in what contexts.

Given that these discussions happen largely online and only tweets have been observed, this project is what Felipe Addeo et al. name "A *Pure Netnography*," which is "research that is conducted only using data generated from online interactions" (17). This project includes no

interviews or observations of in-person interactions. Although shipping debates can take place offline in other fan spaces such as convention halls (Drouin 83), much of this phenomenon takes place online, in both public spaces like Twitter (X) and private arenas like Direct Messages (DMs). Addeo et al. write, "For the solely or primarily online phenomena, it is legitimate for ethnographers to study community life and practices just by examining the member online behavior" (17). As such, this work takes the Pure Netnographic approach, gathering tweets made by publicly accessible accounts.

This type of research may be called "*covert access or lurking*," where "the researcher invisibly observes the community without informing people about the research and the researcher's presence within the groups with related ethical implications" (Addeo et al. 21). Although this thesis selected only public[1] tweets, there are, as Addeo et al. note, ethical implications to that selection. It has been argued that while "it may be legally defensible to freely quote any fanwork found online" researchers have a "responsibility to ask permission from fan creators before sharing their work in academic or other contexts" (Fathallah 251). There are disagreements about the ethicality of referencing public works as documenting fan texts "within an academic milieu for a different audience is an exercise of power" (Fathallah 252). However, this project, considering the highly interactive and public nature of tweets, elected not to seek user permission. As Addeo et al. point out, "Others consider a covert netnography as a particularly suitable approach to investigate sensitive topics" (23) and given the harassment experienced during research by other researchers such as Drouin, who spends a sizable portion of her dissertation describing the harassment she received from Anti-shippers during her survey, this project settled on covert observation, a protection strategy similarly utilized by Larsen et al.

[1] Individuals can decide to make their Twitter (X) account private at any time. The Tweets selected for this work were public at the time of sampling but may not always remain so due to this.

As a member of fandom, I consider myself an acafan, a fan academic and a researcher. Drouin writes that acafans "often have insider knowledge and a clear passion for the media" (32). This insider knowledge and passion does have its advantages. For instance, Drouin details that "fandom communities can feel belittled, stigmatized, and wary of researchers. Yet, due to my position as a fan, I largely avoided this concern, as participants viewed me as trustworthy and a member of the community" (33). This aspect did not impact this research as much, given that covert observation was used. However, friends I have met through fandom have deeply supported my research, wanting, as I do, to understand more about shipping debates. Their encouragement has been extensively helpful throughout the years I have been curious about fandom practices. Busse and Hellekson write of fan scholars, "We rarely speak as fan or scholar; we rarely differentiate between academic and fannish audience, except perhaps in formality of tone" (24-25). I share my work with fellow fans and have, throughout this project, sought their feedback. They have repeatedly pointed me to conversations online that have inspired and motivated me to continue pursuing this project.

Another critical factor that impacted this research was my familiarity with shipping, having been involved with it for 14 years as a fanfiction writer. In the type of ethnography Moss details: "Ethnographers who study their own community may already have access to almost all facets of that community's life, most likely have roles in the community that existed before the study, and consciously or subconsciously know the rules of behavior within the community" (161). As a member of fandoms, I am in online fan spaces daily and have seen or used many of the terms observed in the tweets gathered. Busse and Hellekson write, "Within fan fiction itself, a number of subgeneres are well recognized–particularly because many fandom-specific categories exist" (10) and that fandom's "use of acronyms and cryptic terms deliberately

excludes those unaware of their meaning" (12). My familiarity with fandom genres and terms allowed me to view tweets containing this information without confusion when I encountered fandom terms such as S.A.L.S, DL; DR, and YKINMKBYKIOK. I have used and been around those who use these terms, a reality that enabled me to better code the language observed within these tweets. By understanding the language of fandom, I was able to assess the context and tone of these tweets more accurately than an individual outside of fandom may have been.

However, being an acafan is not without its disadvantages. As Moss warns, "There is a tendency for insiders to overlook patterns because they are not unique and strange" (167). Due to this, there is the possibility that I took some actions and patterns of behavior for granted throughout this project. Triangulation, wherein "Any patterns or impressions that the ethnographer recognizes and forms throughout the ethnography are tested by comparing one source of information with other sources in order to eliminate alternative explanations" (Moss 159), should help mitigate alternative explanations even if some continue to present. By observing tweets containing both Anti- and Pro-shipping sentiments and tweets from different fandoms, the codes for this project have been developed through multiple sources. Different fandoms approach shipping debates in varying ways, and, as noted, what constitutes Anti- and Pro-shipping is not fully agreed on. By including these differing aspects, throughlines began to make themselves apparent. These consistencies gave way to a broader view of what these debates entailed.

Additionally, bias must be considered. As Quarshie Smith writes, "Researchers who have some relationship to the community under study have to be self-conscious about how that relationship may affect judgment" (142). I identify as a Pro-shipper, a detail I expand upon later in my analysis. Due to this, and to my argument being that shipping debates and Anti-shippers

reauthor fandom spaces, there is bias in this research. In order to help balance this research, the Pro-shipper tweets were sampled with the same method as the Anti-shipper tweets and analyzed using the same codes utilized for the Anti-shipper posts. The development of these codes and how these tweets were sampled are discussed in detail in Chapter 3: Methods.

2.5 Sociological Rhetoric

Given the highly social nature of fandoms and the fan interactions observed, this thesis considers sociological rhetoric in analyzing the selected tweets. Describing sociological rhetoric, C. H. Knoblauch writes, "The distinguishing theme of the sociological story about the meaning of meaning is not its recognition of the importance of the social, which is common to all rhetorical perspectives, but rather its privileging of the social as the conceptual starting point for our understanding of discursive practice and the making of knowledge" (130). Fandoms, as social communities, create their own standards of behavior and forms of knowledge through complex collaboration. For example, through working together, fans create archives for fan productions like fanfiction or shared spaces such as forums, enabling open communication. Due to these actions, Jenkins posits that "fandom offers not so much as an escape from reality as an *alternative* reality whose values may be more humane and democratic than those held by mundane society" (280, emphasis added). As a kind of alternative reality, fandoms distinguish themselves from their surrounding society, partly by way of identification between fans. This distinguishing creates a subculture and, as a result, a social sphere that can hold particular norms and ways of behavior. By viewing fandoms as social spaces, we can understand how fandoms make knowledge and meaning through fan interactions. Kenneth Burke writes, "To identify A with B is to make A "consubstantial" with B" (21) and that "A way of life is an *acting-together*; and in acting together, men have common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes that

make them *consubstantial*" (21). Fandoms are joint acts constructed by fans coming together to share ideas, interpretations of texts, fan productions, and mutual enjoyment of the media they consume. One fan is joined to another through their similar status as fans. They are made consubstantial by way of their identifying together. This gathering, this joining of A to B, spiderwebs out, and fandoms develop through these social engagements. If fans were not social with one another, they would still be fans. To be a fan of it, one need not speak to anyone about their enjoyment of a text. However, fandoms are the social constructions of fans interacting together. Without this interaction, fandoms would not be present.

Considering sociological rhetoric, this work looks at writings by Burke, Thomas S. Kuhn, and Raymond Williams. Additionally, this thesis utilizes Knoblauch's writings on these theorists as a guiding text. Sociological rhetoric lends itself well to investigations into fandom spaces and behaviors since, as Knoblauch writes, "The sociological account of meaningfulness–valorizes interhuman, communal consciousness (collective knowledge or ideological awareness), which human beings produce through their engagement in shared practices of signification" (Knoblauch 131). Fandoms, with their fan productions, websites, convention meet-ups, message boards, archives, and more, have shared practices and knowledge. Any glance at fan production hosting websites like Archiveofourown.org will reveal instances of this as fans mark, or "tag," their works with information about ships that fans craft and pass on to others.

Another prominent form of fan information lies in fan identifications, which can mark fans as belonging to certain fandoms or subgroupings. Due to the importance of identifications in fandoms and how fans may transcend previous identities, moving on from old ones, or be forcefully placed into identities, Burke's work can be applied to shipping debates and how they attempt to define fans. Burke writes that "we are clearly in the region of rhetoric when

considering the identification whereby a specialized activity makes one a participant in some social or economic class" (28). When fans engage in the specialized activity of making and sharing fan productions, they participate in fandom, joining a social grouping. Additionally, fans can create further subgroups within fandoms, identifying themselves as a particular 'type' of fan. This thesis looks at two such subgroups, Anti- and Pro-shippers. Burke details that "Identification in itself is a kind of transcendence. For instance, since the individual is to some extent from his group, an identifying of him with the group is by the same token a transcending of his distinctness" (326). This concept of identification can be applied to fandoms. To identify oneself as a member of a fandom is to separate oneself from non-fans. Fans separate themselves from non-fans with terms such as "normies," a term often used in a derogatory fashion to indicate people who do not appreciate fandom or enjoy activities fandom members may devalue, such as professional sporting programs. When fans separate themselves from "normies," they transcend that broader group of "normal" people, marking themselves as unique and, in some cases, "better" for seeing the value of fictional media.

Following this concept of being better, fans who identify as Anti- or Pro-shippers can use those identities to demonstrate why they are "better" fans. This is especially true as Anti-shippers utilize rhetoric that positions Pro-shippers not only as "bad" fans but also as "bad" members of society. These identifications may be taken on willingly, but as with these shipping debates, a fan may forcibly identify another individual with a group they do not consider themselves a part of. For example, identifying someone as an Anti- or Pro-shipper can be used as an insult, an occurrence noted in the tweets observed. When forcefully identified with another groupa fan is moved into a subcategory, transcending their previous placement. Once placed into this subgrouping, it is difficult for an individual to return to a prior identification, especially if they

have been accused of sexual crimes. Such accusations can mark a fan for a long time if not forever, impacting their reputation.

Anti-shipping accusations can be seen as a push to change fandom standards by redefining what is and is not acceptable within fan production and identifying fans along those shifting lines of social acceptability. A fan is either "good" because they adhere to the new community standards or "bad" because they do not. Kuhn's work *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* discusses how science is socially constructed. Although Kuhn's work focuses on scientific communities, his observations regarding individuals being trained to act within their communities, learning specific ways of communicating and knowledge creation, and group expectations can be used as a metaphor applicable to other instances of groups with standardized ways of being. As social groups, fandoms demonstrate similar behaviors to scientific communities in that there are forms of knowledge production and language specific to the subcultures. As fans spend time in fandoms, they learn acronyms, phrases, common disputes, and expectations, often through conversations with other fans who were present in the fandom before them.

Such behaviors can be considered shared practices, where fans construct, interact with, and learn behaviors commonly exhibited within fandom spaces. Knoblauch uses Kuhn's text as an example of how fields can be considered locations of these shared practices. Discussing how Kuhn approaches "paradigms," he writes that it is these paradigms that outline science's "focuses of attention, forms of necessary expertise, instrumental requirements, procedural rules—and its very understanding of the nature of nature" (Knoblauch 133). Shared practices within fandoms can be viewed as paradigms or "a variety of familiar notions" (Kuhn 11). This work considers behaviors and ways of being that fandoms consider "normal" or "standard" as paradigms. A

paradigm of fandom one might look at is the openness to contribution, where fans are viewed as able to add their fan productions to the fandom (Jenkins 280). Although Kuhn discusses science, his discussions of how paradigms undergo change can be applied to fandoms. Kuhn writes, "The emergence of a paradigm affects the structure of the group that practices the field" (18). However, since paradigms can be created, they can also be altered. Anti-shipping, with its move to view shipping as a reflection of an individual's morals, is an example of a paradigm being altered despite previous community standards within fandoms. Discussing Kuhn, Knoblauch writes, "The very concept of scientific progress, then, is synonymous with paradigm replacement, understood as a struggle inside the scientific community, not to add the latest new discovery to universal knowledge but to reconstruct its internal, historical consensus about how to see the world" (136). When paradigms are replaced, changes occur within a field. What is standard is shifted, and the field reflects those changes. Anti- and Pro-shipping represent a struggle within fandom spaces to redefine standards. The strength of these debates reflects the importance of paradigms within fandom communities.

Since fandom communities operate largely online, these struggles occur primarily within written mediums where writing can be quickly posted and recirculated for other fans to see and interact with. This work observes such written discourse currently impacting fandom on websites that host fans. Raymond William's "focus is specifically on how written discourse, including literature, participates in the construction of culture" (Knoblauch 154). By posting online, either through conversations on social media or forums or by sharing fan productions on sites like Archiveofourown.com, fans contribute to the culture of fandoms. Knoblauch writes regarding William's work that "'culture,' is understood as the material, historically situated construction, and ever-changing record, of meanings, ideas, values, and institutions that a society produces

through practices of signification" (154). Fan productions and the shared meanings fans create and engage with in fandom spaces both reflect and add to fandom culture. The "meanings, ideas, values, and institutions" (Knoblauch 154) that fandoms create are fluid. Fan webpages can be constructed and deleted. Fan spaces can be carved out one day and destroyed the next. What a fandom looks like, acts like, contains, and values can all be changed by fans and struggled over. This means that the authoring of fandoms is up for grabs. Since fandoms are created so heavily through texts or online spaces mediated mainly by text, fandoms can be viewed both as texts and locations; thus, William's considerations of literature as a method of cultural construction are applicable. Fans add to the culture and change it through written discourse. Given the increasing presence of fandoms on social media websites, the circulation practices enabled by the internet are liable to continue as an essential aspect of how discourse is communicated in the space.

Chapter 3: Methods

For this thesis, 400 Twitter (X) posts were collected from individuals posting publicly about ten different fandoms, including *Hannibal* (2013), Harry Potter (1997), Star Wars (1977), *Homestuck* (2009), *My Hero Academia* (2014), *Steven Universe* (2013), *Killing Stalking* (2016), *Voltron: Legendary Defenders* (2016), *Supernatural* (2005), and *Genshin Impact* (2020). These fandoms were selected to demonstrate shipping debates across various media types. Fandoms such as *Hannibal* and *VLD* have had their Anti-shipping presence researched by Rosenberg and Drouin, respectively. Their inclusion acts as a throughline connecting previous studies to this thesis. Star Wars and Harry Potter represent older fandoms that still see the publication of new content, allowing new fans to intermingle with fans who have been involved with their fandoms for years. *Killing Stalking*, *Steven Universe*, and *Supernatural* have seen their primary content end even as fans continue to be active within fan spaces. while maintaining fan engagement. *Homestuck* was originally selected to be one of these fandoms as well, but *Homestuck: Beyond Canon* received a news update on October 30th, 2023, with the promise of monthly updates from November 1st, 2023, onwards (James). *My Hero Academia* and *Genshin Impact* are new, notably active fandoms wherein the original content is ongoing.

Looking at these fandoms in more detail, their content accounts for a range of target audiences. For example, *Steven Universe* (PG) aired on Cartoon Network. Meanwhile, *Hannibal* (NC-17) and *Supernatural* (MA) regularly featured adult content and violence. Including fandoms based around media aimed at various age demographics is highly relevant to discussing age and morality within shipping debates. Additionally, this thesis looks at fandoms formed around books (Harry Potter), movies (Star Wars), live-action television shows (*Hannibal* and *Supernatural)*, anime (*My Hero Academia*), cartoons (*Steven Universe* and *VLD*),

webcomics (*Killing Stalking* and *Homestuck*), and video games (*Genshin Impact*). However, many of these properties include other forms of media. For example, the Harry Potter books have been made into movies and video games. This thesis does not differentiate between posts made regarding differing intellectual property types. For example, one Star Wars tweet may speak of the movies, while another discusses a cartoon spinoff series. Due to the interconnected and sometimes unclear nature of which installment of a property users spoke of this thesis looks at fandom interactions, not necessarily specific movies, books, games, or television series. By investigating fandoms formed around various kinds of media, this thesis will demonstrate that shipping debates are far from relegated to one 'type' of fandom.

The Twitter (X) posts selected fall into one of four key categories: Anti-ship Original Post (ASOG), Pro-ship Original Post (PSOG), Anti-ship Reply (ASR), and Pro-ship Reply (PSR). An original post is one that Twitter (X)'s algorithm has marked as such; whereas, a reply is a tweet that Twitter (X) deemed a reply after the *replies* filter was applied. It might be simpler to say that an original post is a tweet not made in direct response to another post, but this was not always the case. Although generally true, original posts marked by Twitter (X) were not always tweets made without responding to another post. For example, Threads and Quotes posed a challenge to this research. Threads are strings of posts created by a user responding to their own tweet. These tweets are original in that they represent a single user's idea unless another user jumps into the conversation. However, they are also replies in that the tweet actively responds to another and can be considered a reply by Twitter (X). Quotes are posts made by "quoting" another post, that is reacting to and linking a tweet. Quotes are replies in that they respond to another tweet, but Twitter (X) presents them as original content and places them spatially above the tweet they react to. Users can also manually link another tweet in their post or include

screenshot images of another post, a common occurrence in a genre of post known as a “Call Out” post.

Due to these complexities, this work strictly adhered to the Twitter (X) algorithm. If Twitter (X) presented a tweet as an original post at the time of observation, it was sampled as such. Similarly, if Twitter (X) presented a post as a reply after applying the replies filter at the time of observation, it was considered a reply. This sampling sought to observe what an individual might see upon searching for shipping conversations on Twitter (X). As such, Twitter (X)’s algorithm was allowed to lead the way. These posts represent what a Twitter (X) user searching relevant terms would find as the “Top,” most relevant posts according to the platform’s algorithm, “original” tweets and “replies.” However, it can be generally understood that replies are posts more involved in cross-user interaction while original posts tend to operate as conversation starters.

At the time of writing, Twitter (X) is experiencing notable changes to its platform, workforce, and algorithms. It is unknown the extent to which this may have impacted this project. Due to the fluid, often ephemeral nature of these discussions and Twitter (X) as a social media website, it cannot be guaranteed that the tweets or accounts observed here still exist. These posts were gathered primarily between May 2023 and August 2023, with the replacement posts for users with multiple accounts gathered between September 2023 and November 2023.

Ten posts were taken for each of the four categories, resulting in 40 posts per fandom for a total of 400 posts. Algorithmically, these posts were curated by Twitter (X)’s search function as those being the “Top” most engaged with (i.e., the most viewed, liked, commented on, retweeted, bookmarked, and quoted). Each post was taken in order as it appeared according to what Twitter (X) deemed most relevant to the search terms. The search terms utilized were

recorded and, barring specialized searches regarding highly contested ships such as Reylo[2], generally include a configuration of 'X fandom Anti/Pro-ship.'[3]. The final criteria for tweets gathered were that they were originally written in English. Given that this research aims to study the rhetoric used within shipping debates, it was determined that a translator would risk losing linguistic aspects of the written posts if used.

To ensure the Twitter (X) algorithm selected only relevant posts, these tweets were gathered using a puppet account linked to a Gmail account created exclusively for this thesis. This account followed no other users, expressed no interests beyond those selections required to set up an account, made no posts, performed no searches beyond project demands, and viewed no posts other than those selected for study. These precautions were taken to eliminate, as far as possible within the complex realities of digital footprints, any bias held by the researcher that may have been reflected through the algorithm had a personal account been used. To allow for triangulation, each selected post represents, as far as can be confirmed, a new individual to reduce the chances of a single voice dominating the sample. However, while some tweets were replaced due to the discovery that their authors had other tweets of theirs gathered from other accounts, it cannot be fully guaranteed that each tweet comes from a unique individual. It is not uncommon for Twitter (X) users to have more than one account, and it is beyond the ability of this research to vet whether these accounts are connected to each other in any way.

The codes used to analyze the selected tweets were developed from a 36-tweet sample. Three posts of each of the four categories were pulled from three fandoms chosen using random number generation. The randomly generated fandoms were Harry Potter, *Hannibal*, and Star Wars. The tweets pulled from each fandom were the top three most interacted with posts within

[2] Reylo is a Star Wars ship between characters Kylo Ren and Rey
[3] The search terms utilized for each fandom can be found in Appendix A: Search Terms Utilized by Fandom.

the four post-type categories. These 36 posts were coded using inductive coding wherein patterns in the tweets were observed and developed into codes that could, in turn, be applied to the total sample. These tweets did not necessarily contain the most notable instances of violent language observed across the samples. Instead, this coding scheme reflects common examples of behavior and broad ideas. This process gave rise to eight main codes: Disapproval [DIS], Conversations About Ships [CAS], Morality Rhetoric [M], Discussions of Space [DS], Defining Attempts [DA], Fear [F], Discussions of Age [DOA], and Perceived Disconnects in Identity and Behavior [PDIB]. During the coding of the total 400 tweet sample, a ninth main code was developed in response to the data: Connections [C]. These main codes were broken down into 20 subcodes. The main codes and their subcodes are addressed in further detail in the following results section[4].

[4] A visualization of the results detailed in Chapter 4 can be found in Appendix B: Graphs of Coding Results.

Chapter 4: Results

The following chapter outlines the results of inductive coding used on the 400-tweet sample: first, it describes the main code and its overall appearance throughout the data; then, it details its subcodes and discusses the code as it manifested within the contexts of the conversations observed.

4.1 Main Code One: [DIS]

Main code [DIS], Disapproval, recorded instances wherein the observed Twitter (X) users expressed disapproval. [DIS] was broken down into four subcodes: [DISa], Disapproval of a Person or Group, [DISb], Disapproval of a Behavior [DISb], [DISc] Disapproval of a Ship or Ship Type, and [DISd], Disapproval of Textual Interpretation. Due to double coding, [DIS] appeared in 110.5% of the sampled tweets when all four subcodes were considered, being coded 542 times. Some form of disapproval was present in the majority of posts gathered, with 296 individual posts being coded as containing at least one subcode. Pro-ship tweets contained more language coded as [DIS] than Anti-ship posts. Amongst Pro-ship tweets, [DIS] subcodes were observed 278 times. Within Anti-ship posts, [DIS] subcodes were observed 264 times.

4.1.1 Subcode [DISa]

[DISa], Disapproval of a Person or Group, consisted primarily of accusations and derogatory language, including using the terms “Antis,” “Anti-shippers,” “Antiship,” “Pros,” “Pro-shippers,” and “Proship” as direct insults. [DISa] was coded 69 times, found in 17.25% of the total sample. Looking at Anti- and Pro-ship posts separately, [DISa] was observed in 49 Anti-ship posts, 24.5% of their sampled tweets. This subcode arose most frequently from original posts, being coded 28 times while the replies contained 21 instances of [DISa]. Meanwhile, 20

Pro-ship posts were recorded as displaying [DISa], 10% of their posts. Among the Pro-ship tweets, nine original posts contained [DISa], while 11 replies demonstrated the subcode.

4.1.2 Subcode [DISb]

[DISb], Disapproval of a Behavior, covered instances where one user expressed disapproval towards the actions or behaviors of another individual or a group. [DISb] occurred within 53.25% of the total sample, across 213 posts. This subcode appeared at a fairly consistent rate between Anti- and Pro-shipper posts. Within Pro-shipper posts, [DISb] was coded in 113 tweets, 56.50% of posts. Of the Pro-ship tweets, 55 original posts were observed as containing [DISb] while 58 replies demonstrated the subcode. One hundred Anti-shipper posts were coded as displaying [DISb], 50% of their posts. Looking at original posts and replies, Anti-ship original posts were marked as expressing [DISb] 51 times while replies contained the subcode 49 times.

4.1.3 Subcode [DISc]

[DISc], Disapproval of a Ship or Ship Type, recorded expressions of disapproval towards a specific ship or what I name a "ship type," that is a type of ship configuration such as siblings, minor and an adult, or human and a nonhuman entity. Due to the blurring of lines between ships and shipping as a behavior, [DISc] invariably double-coded frequently with [DISb]. Overall, [DISc] was coded for within 25% of the full 400 tweet sample, occurring 100 times. Anti-ship posts contributed 95 tweets to this total, 47.5% of their posts. 44 of the coded [DISc] appearances amongst Anti-ship tweets came from original posts and 51 came from replies. Across the Pro-ship tweets, five instances of [DISc] were observed, 2.5% of their posts. Two of these instances were found in original posts, while the remaining three came from replies.

4.1.4 Subcode [DISd]

[DISd], Disapproval of Textual Interpretation, coded times when a user questioned another fan's interpretation of a given fandom's source material or their understanding of that material's creators. [DISd] was coded in 60 posts, 15% of the gathered tweets, most of which occurred in Pro-ship tweets. [DISd] was marked present in 40 Pro-ship tweets, 20% of the time. 25 of these appearances were observed in original posts, and 15 were observed in replies. Within the Anti-ship posts, [DISd] was coded 20 times, in 10% of their sample. Six appeared from original posts, and the remaining 14 appeared in replies.

4.1.5 Main Code [DIS] Discussion

Disapproval, [DIS], was the most common code found throughout the gathered tweets, an expected occurrence giving these discussions center around a disagreement. [DISb] was the most common of all the subcodes. Both Anti- and Pro-ship tweets pointed to a described other behaving "badly." [DISb] was one of the few things Anti- and Pro-ship posts could agree upon: that those they argued against were bad actors. Every single fandom observed demonstrated [DISb] at a relatively similar rate, with *Homestuck* tweets containing the subcode the least, 15 times, and *Supernatural* tweets containing it the most, 26 times. Additionally, there were instances of [DISb] double-codeding with [DA], when while defining Anti- or Pro-shippers, a user also described disapproval towards them through their very definition. [DISc] was the second most common subcode: Anti-ship tweets included disliking a ship 95 out of the 100 [DISc] occurrences, a trend discussed later regarding main code [CAS], subcode [CASa]. [DISa] included insults, where it was noted that sometimes merely to call someone an Anti- or Pro-shipper was to insult them. This points to the heavy dislike between these groups, where simply being a member of one side or the other is seen negatively. This pattern is also visible in main

code [C], discussed later. The least common [DIS] subcode, [DISc], demonstrated the importance of the source material or the creators. Within these conversations, despite discussing fiction that they have the power to play with through fan productions, canon was highly important. Users would ask each other if they had consumed the source material or if they were more concerned about arguing over ships. They would also ask how a person could behave in the ways they did while being a fan of certain materials, an occurrence which overlapped with the final main code [PDIB] addressed below.

4.2 Main Code Two: [CAS]

Main code [CAS], Conversations About Ships, recorded tweets that contained discussions of ships not covered by [DISc], those being non-negative mentions of ships or ship types. [CAS] was split into two subcodes: [CASa], Personal Enjoyment of Ships, and [CASb] Neutral Discussions of Ships. Given that Anti- and Pro-shipping debates center around shipping, it follows that [CAS] would be amongst the top occurring codes, being coded 186 times within the 400-tweet sample, present 46.5% of the time, and appearing in 161 separate tweets. [CAS] was most frequent in Pro-ship posts, where at least one of its subcodes was noted 168 times. This code appeared far less often in Anti-ship posts, being recorded 18 times.

4.2.1 Subcode [CASa]

[CASa], Personal Enjoyment of Ships, tracked when an individual indicated they liked a ship. These positive discussions occurred in 43 out of the 400 tweets, 10.75% of the time. The majority of the tweets coded as containing [CASa] were Pro-ship posts, with 38, 19%, of their posts being marked with the subcode. 20 of these tweets were original posts, while 18 were replies. Only five tweets belonging to the Anti-ship posts were recorded as displaying [CASa], 2.5%, with two coded tweets being original posts and the other three being replies.

4.2.2 Subcode [CASb]

[CASb], Neutral Discussions of Ships, observed instances where shipping was marked as a key aspect of the discussions. [CASb] mainly acted to clarify and set the boundaries regarding what the tweets were about. Across the sample, [CASb] was coded 143 times, being found in 35.75% of all gathered tweets. [CASb] was recorded far more often within Pro-ship posts, being observed 130 times, 65% of the time. Among these occurrences, 57 were original posts, while 73 were replies. Across the Anti-ship posts, [CASb] was coded 13 times, or in 3.25% of the tweets. Four of these occurrences were original posts, and nine were replies.

4.2.3 Main Code [CAS] Discussion

Perhaps the most striking thing about [CAS] was the occurrence patterns within [CASa]. Despite these conversations involving ships and debating over which ships are okay to enjoy, the occurrence of [CASa] was fairly low throughout the sample. Pro-ship posts mentioned ships the user liked 38 times, while Anti-ship posts contained this activity only five times. In comparison, Anti-ship posts argued that someone else's ship was bad, [DISc], 95 times, more than 19 times as often as they indicated enjoying a ship. Pro-ship posts indicated dislike of another ship five times, just over seven times less than their indication of ship enjoyment. The differences in these subcode appearances are very telling for what each group gets out of ship discussions. While Pro-shippers come to these conversations wanting to discuss their ships, Anti-shippers want to express dislike of another fan's ships. Contributing to this idea is that within this sample, Pro-ship posts were also far more involved in neutral shipping discussions, an activity these users participated in ten times as often as Anti-ship posters. Not only were the Anti-ship posts sampled here largely uninterested in discussing ships they enjoyed, but they also did not often discuss ships from the point of neutrality.

4.3 Main Code Three: [M]

Main code [M], Morality Rhetoric, observed language across the tweets which pointed to morality as an essential aspect of shipping discussions. As noted, fandoms aimed at younger audiences still see explicit fan creations. This occurrence can cause debates amongst fans about the place of erotica regarding media not intended for an adult audience, and rhetorically heavy terms such as “pedophilia” appear frequently in shipping discussions. Fans may argue that the creation of adult content about shows aimed at a younger demographic or about characters who are canonically minors constitutes a form of grooming. However, these terms may also be present due to their ability to quickly turn outside audiences against an individual. [M] was split into two subcodes: Direct Discussions of Morality [Ma] and Indirect Discussions of Morality [Mb]. As a main code, [M] was coded for 39.75% of the time, appearing 159 times and in 158 tweets, with only a single instance of a tweet being coded as containing both subcodes. [M] was more present in Anti-ship posts, being coded 83 times. Within Pro-ship posts, [M] appeared 76 times.

4.3.1 Subcode [Ma]

[Ma], Direct Discussions of Morality, tracked the use of direct language regarding morality, e.g., the terms “morals,” “morality,” and “immoral.” [Ma] appeared in 9 out of the 400 tweets, 2.25% of the time. Eight of these instances were in Pro-ship posts, in 4% of their posts. Four occurrences were noted in original posts, while the other four were located among replies. Anti-ship posts contained a single instance [Ma], 0.5% of their tweets, where it appeared in a reply.

4.3.2 Subcode [Mb]

[Mb], Indirect Discussions of Morality, occurred much more frequently. This subcode tracked mentions of disgust and accusations of morally reprehensible behaviors such as pedophilia, abuse, rape, cyberbullying, and harassment. In total, [Mb] was present in 150 tweets, appearing 37.5% of the time. [Mb] was coded most frequently in Anti-ship posts, where it was present in 82 tweets, 41% of their posts. Thirty-five of the noted appearances were in original posts, whereas 47 were observed in replies. Within the Pro-ship posts collected, [Mb] was coded 68 times, being present in 34% of their sample. These appearances were split somewhat equally, with 31 original posts being coded as containing [Mb] and 37 replies being marked.

4.3.3 Main Code [M] Discussion

[M] was a rather complex code. Due to conversations around erotic material, particularly in concern with media aimed at a younger demographic or containing characters that were minors, moral arguments were frequent. While the term "moral" was not used often, language that pointed to larger social conceptions of morality was. Whether or not some of the moral arguments recorded were made in good faith is a difficult question. However, regardless of this belief, morality rhetoric, especially when it comes to protecting children, is effective. Some of the terms used often that were coded as [Mb] include "pedophilia," "incest," and "abuse." For example, @azacialeaf tweets, "why proshipping makes you a terrible person. 1: it might be fiction, but you still find pleasure in seeing minors and siblings having sex. 2: most proshippers draw r34[5] of games or cartoons that children would see"[6] (joel [@azacialeaf]). Direct references to morals, [Ma], occurred primarily in Pro-ship tweets, while indirect references, [Mb], occurred more often in Anti-ship posts. Additionally, while Anti-ship posts frequently accused others of

[5] r34 is used here as a shorthand for pornography.
[6] No tweet throughout this work has been altered by the author.

moral failings, mentions of morals within Pro-ship posts often included pushing back against those accusations.

4.4 Main Code Four: [DS]

Main code [DS], Discussions of Space, marked when fans treated fandoms as spaces. While not physical locations one can visit, fandoms can be "visited" by interacting with other fans on social media and by going to fan websites, blogs, Reddit pages, Discord servers, or other platforms fans coalesce on. [DS] was separated into two subcodes, [DSa], Negative Opinions of a Space and [DSb] Indications of Changes Within a Space. It should be noted that positive opinions of a space were not coded as it was observed only once within the sample where it was located beside language coded as [DSa] (Restless [@Restless_]). Within the total sample, [DS] was coded 96 times, being present across 24% of the tweets gathered and noted in 87 separate tweets. Overall, Pro-ship tweets discussed space more often, with [DS] subcodes being observed 64 times. Across the Anti-ship posts, [DS] subcodes appeared 32 times.

4.4.1 Subcode [DSa]

[DSa], Negative Opinions of a Space, was coded 76 times across the 400 gathered tweets, appearing 19% of the time. Most tweets coded as containing [DSa] were Pro-ship posts, with 48 tracked occurrences, 24% of their total posts. Among these tweets, 18 original posts were marked as demonstrating [DSa], while 30 were replies. Within Anti-ship tweets, 28 total were noted as containing the subcode, 14% of the sample. Anti-ship [DSa] appearances were split almost evenly between post types, with 15 being original posts and 13 being replies.

4.4.2 Subcode [DSb]

[DSb], Indication of Changes Within a Space, was recorded in 20 tweets, 5% of the total sample. [DSb] was found more frequently in Pro-ship posts, appearing 16 times across their

tweets. Five marked tweets were original posts; whereas, the remaining 11 Pro-ship posts marked as [DSb] were replies. Looking at the Anti-ship posts, this subcode appeared four times, occurring in 2% of their posts. Three of these tweets were original posts, while the remaining one was a reply.

4.4.3 Main Code [DS] Discussion

One of the most notable aspects of coding [DS] was the overlaps between [DSa] and [DSb], where changes within fandom spaces were linked to viewing that space negatively. For example, @somaybelikeno writes, “I know we often gush about how big reylo is compared to other star wars ships, but in all honestly the destruction of those fandom spaces those ships could have had because of anti behavior is nothing short of tragic” (SMLN, Loki spoilers [@somaybelikeno]). This tweet, coded as both [DSa] and [DSb], relates a negative view of a fandom not because it holds a poor reputation or because the poster does not like it but because the fandom space lacks specific ship spaces. According to this post, those ship spaces have been destroyed, a negative and “tragic” form of change. As noted, only one post included a positive view of a fandom space, a surprising occurrence given the specific social connections made possible through fandom and the importance of fandoms in many fans’ lives.

4.5 Main Code Five: [C]

Main code [C], Connections, records petitions for connection or disconnection within the gathered tweets. Such occurrences were frequent in introductory style tweets, where a user, while describing who they were, asked for certain kinds of interactions or for disliked individuals to leave them alone. [C] has been divided into two subcodes: [Ca], Petitions for Connection, and [Cb], Petitions for Disconnection. As a main code, [C] appeared 67 times, 16.75% of the time,

and was noted in 58 separate posts. Anti-ship posts contained [C] most often, with the relevant subcodes being observed 38 times. Amongst Pro-ship tweets, [C] was recorded 29 times.

4.5.1 Subcode [Ca]

[Ca], Petitions for Connection, included such tweets as introductions and Before You Follow (BYF) posts. These tweets ask for mutual followers (moots) or general engagement from fellow fans. [Ca] was coded 20 times, in 5% of the gathered tweets. Interestingly, [Ca] was observed the same number of times between Anti- and Pro-ship posts, the 20 total occurrences being split evenly across the groups. [Ca] was noted in 10 Anti-ship posts, appearing 5% of the time. Nine coded tweets were original posts, with the last remaining one being a reply. [Ca] was also coded in 10 Pro-ship posts, appearing 5% of the time. Nine tweets coded as [Ca] were original posts, with the remaining tweet being a reply.

4.5.2 Subcode [Cb]

[Cb], Petitions for Disconnections, included behaviors such as users threatening to block each other, thereby cutting off access to their account, and Do Not Interact (DNI) posts which tell readers who a user is not interested in engaging with. [Cb] was coded 47 times, appearing in 11.75% of the same. The majority of the tweets coded as [Cb] were Anti-ship posts where the subcode was marked as present in 28 tweets, 14% of the time. Most of the coded Anti-ship tweets were original posts, being marked as containing [Cb] 22 times. The remaining six coded posts were replies. Amongst the Pro-ship posts, [Cb] was tracked 19 times, 9.5% of the time. Most of these tweets were original posts where [Cb] was noted 11 times. The remaining eight coded posts were replies.

4.5.3 Main Code [C] Discussion

Main code [C] provided some interesting insights, namely that although both Anti- and Pro-ship posts made it clear they wanted to connect with other fans, disconnection was also on their mind. Both the Anti- and Pro-ship posts displayed [Ca] 10 times, with their posts split identically between original posts and replies. While 20 posts certainly cannot prove that Anti- and Pro-shippers across the board desire to connect with like-minded fans at the same rate, the [Ca] code here is still fascinating. Despite the arguments, fans still want to connect to some extent, but, in the case of these posts, only with people they agree with. There was no recorded occurrence of an Anti-ship post that included wanting to make a connection with Pro-shippers, or of a Pro-ship post mentioning wanting to interact with Anti-shippers. [Cb] occurred more often than [Ca], with users writing about who they did not want to interact with and pushing other fans away. Fandoms may be social spaces, but not all social interaction is welcome. Both Anti- and Pro-ship posts contained [Cb], although Anti-ship posts displayed the behavior nine times more than Pro-ship tweets. The tweets taken regarding the *Homestuck* fandom included [Cb] most often, where it was coded nine times. *Homestuck* was also one of the four fandoms to lack any posts containing [Ca]. The other three fandoms that fell into this category were *My Hero Academia*, *Hannibal*, and *Killing Stalking*.

4.6 Main Code Six: [DA]

Main code [DA], Defining Attempts, was observed when users attempted to define themselves or their perceived other. For example, when an Anti-shipper described what Anti-shipping is or what Pro-shipping is. This thesis observes definitions given by Larsen et al. and Rosenberg. However, this work also recognizes that what Anti- and Pro-shipping are is not universally agreed upon within fandoms. [DA] represents an effort to record how fans, actively

involved in the discourse, define themselves and other individuals. [DA] was split into two subcodes, [DAa], Definitions of Others, and [DAb], Definitions of Self. [DA] was recorded 45 times across the total sample, being present 11.25% of the time and located in 34 unique tweets. Pro-ship posts participated in [DA] most often, with defining subcodes being observed 32 times. Throughout the Anti-ship tweets, [DA] was noted 13 times.

4.6.1 Subcode [DAa]

[DAa], Definitions of Others, where an individual provided a definition for, or description of, a group they were not a part of, was noted in 33 posts, appearing in 8.25% of the total sample. The majority of these defining attempts were located in Pro-ship tweets where [DAa] was coded 21 times, within 10.5% of their tweets. Six of these tweets were original posts, while the bulk, 15 posts, were replies. From the Anti-ship posts, 12 were coded as demonstrating [DAa], 6% of their sample. Four of these coded tweets were original posts, with the remaining eight being replies.

4.6.2 Subcode [DAb]

[DAb], Definitions of Self, where a user defined or described themselves or a group they were a part of, was coded for in 12 tweets, appearing 3% of the time. Pro-ship posts engaged in this activity the most, with 11 posts coded as demonstrating [DAb], 5.5% of their sample. Only one Pro-ship original post was marked as containing [DAb], the majority 10 instances coming from replies. A single Anti-ship [DAb] tweet was recorded where a self-definition was given in an original post.

4.6.3 Main Code [DA] Discussion

Across this data, [DAa] appeared more than twice as much as [DAb]. Interestingly, [DAb] was not present in the original 36-post sample, and, while noted in the full 400 tweets, it

was still relatively sparse. [DA] was primarily a ground for defining others, where users chose more often to outline who someone else was or what another group did. [DAa] and [DAb] often occurred in a single tweet. For example, one PSR read, “The "pro" means opposite of "anti". On Tumblr they started calling themselves anti-[ship name] (back then it was, like, Zutara[7] and Voltron stuff), so in response to that people who were trying to enjoy their ships started calling themselves pro-[ship name]” (יצחק 🏳️‍🌈 🐙 [@deusericusl]). Additionally, posts related to *VLD*, a fandom noted frequently by users observed for this project and researchers as central to the growth of Anti- and Pro-shipping arguments, displayed instances of [DAa] and [DAb] more than any other fandom. This may indicate that the fandom is particularly concerned with shipping arguments and is still participating in shaping them. Several Defining Attempts pointed back to *VLD*, naming the fandom as an essential figure in these discussions.

4.7 Main Code Seven: [F]

Main code [F], Fear, tracked instances of fear, experienced or caused, within the tweets gathered. [F] was split into two subcodes: [Fa], Witnessing or Experiencing Fear Causing Behavior, and [Fb], Performing Fear Causing Behavior. [F] was coded 44 times, appearing in 11% of the total sample, and was noted in 44 unique posts with no overlap between subcodes. Pro-ship tweets contained [F] most often, with the relevant subcodes being recorded 32 times. Anti-ship tweets contained [F] subcodes 12 times.

4.7.1 Subcode [Fa]

[Fa], Witnessing or Experiencing Fear Causing Behavior, observed times when a user indicated that they had witnessed someone else experience an action that could cause fear, such as harassment, or had been on the receiving end of those actions themselves. It should be noted

[7] Zutara is a ship between *Avatar: The Last Airbender*’s Zuko and Katara

that [Fa] was coded for even if the user did not appear afraid. For example, one user wrote that they had been threatened, joking about it in their tweet by writing, “Someone "threatened" to put me on a proship list for star wars tiktok and I'm like ok? Where is this list? I better be number 1. The list has yet to be revealed smh I was put on this list for saying Arthur MorganxObi-Wan Kenobi btw lol” (ObiNob [@obi_nob_kenobi]). Despite the lighthearted nature of the tweet, it was coded as [Fa] as the user indicated experiencing a threat. [Fa] was present in 40 posts, 10% of the total 400 tweets gathered. Pro-ship posts were coded as containing [Fa] most often, the subcode being observed 31 times, in 15.5% of their tweets. Thirteen [Fa] coded tweets came from Pro-ship original posts, while 18 came from replies. Nine Anti-ship posts were coded as demonstrating [Fa], present in 4.5% of their tweets. [Fa] was split almost evenly across the Anti-ship tweets, with five coded instances appearing in original posts and four appearing in replies.

4.7.2 Subcode [Fb]

[Fb], Performing Fear Causing Behavior, noted when a user threatened another or encouraged others to do the same. [Fb] was observed in four tweets, 1% of the total sample. Three of these instances came from Anti-ship tweets, being present in 1.5% of their tweets. Two Anti-ship tweets coded as [Fb] were original posts, while the remaining tweet was a reply. Only one instance of [Fb] was coded for within Pro-ship tweets, accounting for 0.5% of their sample. This single instance was in an original post.

4.7.3 Main Code [F] Discussion

The difference in frequency between [Fa] and [Fb] is significant and may seem jarring at first glance. [Fa] indicated that users had experienced or witnessed behavior that could cause fear. However, that behavior did not appear often in the data. In fact, [Fb] occurred the least out of every subcode. However, this does not mean that [Fb] should be discounted. Harassment can

occur through more than public posts, and some users who spoke of experiencing threats may have received them through direct messages (DMs), more private internet platforms such as Discord, or in real life. Ultimately, it would be impossible to account for every private attack. Therefore, [Fb] should still be taken seriously despite this sample's infrequency of public threats. It should also be noted that one PSR did indicate fear causing behavior with the poster writing, "I do this just to scare antis from tik tok But I really love them all (I have million other ships but this are my fav)" (wert [@wertisdumb]). This action was not specified in this post; however, it would be remiss to claim that only Anti-shippers can display these behaviors.

4.8 Main Code Eight: [DOA]

Main code [DOA], Discussions of Age, recorded instances wherein a user described their own age, that Anti-shippers were of a "younger" age demographic, or that Pro-shippers were of an "older" age demographic. This main code was created due to age being brought up by previous shipping researchers and research participants, as described by Drouin and Larsen et al. What constitutes "younger" and "older" is blurry, given the subjectivity of the terms. For the purpose of this research, "younger" is considered one through 19 years of age with a primary focus on teenagers given the occurrence of nicknames for Anti-shippers such as "puriteens" (🧚‍♀️ursula [@ecphrasis]; ibuprofano 69mg [@apathy_syndrome]) being used. Due to this, "older" is considered here to be anyone 20 or older. [DOA] has been split into three subcodes: [DOAa], Anti-shippers Are "Younger," [DOAb], Pro-shippers Are "Older," and [DOAc], Personal Indications of Age. Although not coded for, it should be mentioned that Pro-shippers were described as 14 twice (dvd normal 🎄 63 [@komaedeads]; shezhead arc [@flamingarc]). Additionally, Anti-shippers were never described as being "older." [DOA] was recorded 36 times, being present in 9% of the overall sample and found within 29 unique posts. Anti-ship

tweets were recorded as containing [DOA] subcodes 24 times. Across the Pro-ship posts, these subcodes were observed 12 times.

4.8.1 Subcode [DOAa]

[DOAa], Anti-shippers Are "Younger," was coded seven times across the sample, appearing in 1.75% of posts, most of which came from Pro-ship tweets. Five Pro-ship tweets were coded as containing [DOAa], being present 2.5% of the time. Three tweets were original posts, while the remaining two were replies. Anti-ship posts named Anti-shippers as "younger" twice, 1% of the time. Both instances were coded for within replies.

4.8.2 Subcode [DOAb]

[DOAb], Pro-shippers Are "Older," was recorded 14 times, being present in 3.5% of posts. The majority of tweets coded as containing [DOAb] were Anti-ship posts where the subcode appeared 13 times. Of these tweets, eight were original posts, and five were replies. Across the Pro-ship tweets, [DOAb] was coded once, that single instance being an original post.

4.8.3 Subcode [DOAc]

[DOAc], Personal Indications of Age, observed when a user indicated their age, directly or indirectly. Some users would write that they were a specific age, such as 16, while others would hint at their age, such as by saying, "Spending most of my teen years to 20ishin fandoms" (alexology.bsky.social ✨ @alexology@socel.net [@AlexologyArt]). Across all samples, [DOAc] was recorded 15 times, being present in 3.75% of the gathered tweets. Anti-ship posts displayed this language most often, with [DOAc] being noted nine times, in 4.5% of their posts. Six occurrences came from original posts, while the remaining three were coded in replies. The Pro-ship posts show users engaged in [DOAc] six times, in 3% of their posts. These instances

were split evenly, with three original Pro-ship posts being marked as having [DOAc] and three replies being recorded.

4.8.4 Main Code [DOA] Discussion

[DOAc] was performed most frequently out of the [DOA] subcodes, although not by much. Within this subcode, Anti-ship posters indicated that they were minors four times. Within two posts, they directly stated that they were about the age of 18, while in three posts, they alluded to their age by recalling events from when they were younger, implying at least that they were no longer that younger age or as if the case for one post by simply saying "I'm fucking old" (The Rizzler❤ ✨ 🔞 (Leo) [@Kaeru_legs]). Pro-ship posts never contained an instance where the user wrote that they were a minor. Pro-ship posts also never included a direct statement of age. Rather, these posts contained statements that conveyed the user was above 18. Within this data, Pro-shippers were generally seen as "older" and noted themselves as such. However, while Anti-shippers were always seen as "younger," this was not always the case when Anti-ship posts included age. While this was a relatively small data pool, it should be considered that not all Anti-shippers are "younger" and that their arguments are not relegated to one age demographic. Further, Anti-shippers, like everyone else, age; therefore, the idea that Anti-shippers are younger may change as time goes on if current younger Anti-shippers continue to be such.

4.9 Main Code Nine: [PDIB]

Main code [PDIB], Perceived Difference in Identity and Behavior, tracked language wherein a user expresses a disconnect between the actions of an individual and perceived or claimed identity. These tweets often contained a user asking how another fan could be Anti- or Pro-ship if they enjoyed certain ships or were in certain fandoms. [PDIB] was the only main code not broken down into subcodes. [PDIB] was observed in 34 tweets, occurring 8.5% of the

time. Most tweets coded as containing [PDIB] were Pro-ship posts where the code was noted 27 times, being present in 13.5% of the sample. Seventeen of these appearances were original posts, and 10 were in replies. Anti-ship posts were coded for [PDIB] 7 times, occurring in 3.5% of the sample. Most of these appearances came from original posts where [PDIB] was recorded six times, with the remaining appearance being a reply.

4.9.1 Main Code [PDIB] Discussion

Within the original 36-post sample used to create both main and sub codes, [PDIB] was the third most frequent code. However, it was the least common subcode across the total sample. [PDIB] primarily appeared within tweets where a user viewed another's actions as hypocritical, where what they did was viewed as unaligned with who they claimed to be. A clear example of this came from a *Hannibal* PSOG, which reads, "I don't understand how people can ship hannigram and call themselves antis You guys know they … murder people … right?" (Sydmish [@Sydmish1]). Here, the user alludes to Anti-shippers positioning themselves against amoral material. Yet, they have seen Anti-shippers shipping Hannigram, which pairs Hannibal Lecter (a serial killer/cannibal) with Will Graham (the criminal profiler hunting him), a pairing considered "problematic" due to the characters being enemies. As noted, [PDIB] occurred most often within Pro-shipper posts, regarding *Hannibal* most notably. Interestingly, no significant differences were observed between [PDIB] in fandoms with source material aimed at younger demographics than older audiences. These disconnects may lead researchers to question the authenticity of specific arguments used in shipping discourse, namely those concerned with morality, given that fans have observed Anti-shippers participating in activities they simultaneously condemn.

Chapter 5: Analysis

When settling down with this research, I was tempted to start by grouping the codes into themes. I wanted to move through the data as if I were sifting through dirt, trying to find gemstones, patterns I could point to. However, this effort invariably left out essential aspects. Pages in, I realized I was not looking at the whole picture. I had broken down the language of these discussions so far that I could not see the forest for trees. That is not to say that looking at the language of these discourses is not essential; I contend that it is. However, I ran the risk of muddying the point and fell face-first into that mud puddle.

When I think about fandoms, as someone who has enjoyed them since adolescence, I think of friends. I would not be where I am today without fandoms, and some of the dearest friends in my life have come from fan spaces and activities. When I think of fandoms, I think of social interactions with the power to shape a life and color the day-to-day. That is why I have become so intensely fascinated by Anti-shipping. In my personal experience, Anti-shipping has negatively impacted fandom spaces more than anything else. This, of course, has contributed to my bias in this project. As discussed earlier, pretending I do not identify as a Pro-shipper would be insincere.

In my personal life, I define Pro-shipping as a state of mind wherein it is believed that the ships of another individual do not indicate anything specific about their person or morality and that, ultimately, shipping is a personal matter. For me, being a Pro-shipper means that what another person enjoys in fiction is none of my business. Such a definition reflects other fandom instances, such as S.A.L.S and YKINMKBYKIOK. Over the years, I have asked myself why Anti-shippers behave the way they do. Why do they use such vitriolic language? Why do they seem to seek out content they do not like and proceed to DM other fans unkind or threatening

texts? Do they believe Pro-shippers are pedophiles, abusers, and rapists or is that the most effective language for them to use? This last question haunts me, and while this project is not fully equipped to answer it, I must ask that we consider the idea that some Anti-shippers do believe their accusations. However, that is a topic to untangle later. First, we will have to pull back and away from the minutiae of numbers and percentages and return to what I believe is the crux of fandom–social connections.

5.1 Social Connections

Fandoms, as defined by Jenkins, function "as an alternative social community" (280). This social community is given form through group contribution. When a fan produces a fan text and posts it online, they add not only to the discussion but also to the fandom, to the space. Shipping discourses, while perhaps without the prestige of fanfiction and fanart, are fan texts. The tweets observed throughout this project are ways that fans engage with the content they consume, with one another, and with the space. Jenkins writes, "Fandom possesses particular forms of cultural production, aesthetic traditions and practices" (279). These practices were glimpsed in tweets such as @DangerHissy's, which reads, "Idiot with just a toe in fandom. Completely nuts. This is why I don't use Tumblr anymore. The Supernatural and Torchwood Ship wars, Ron and Snape-Antis etc. I don't have to be a victim to have the right to write kink without hate. Wtf happened to YKINMK(BYKIOK) and DL:DR?!" (That Spaghetti Person 🅃🄷🄴🅈 [@DangerHissy]). The post displays a distinct frustration and anger towards an individual they see as going against fandom norms. However, the actions @DangerHissy expresses anger towards contribute nonetheless to the fandom landscape. This individual spoken of may only have "a toe in fandom," but they add to the conversation.

The participation of fans and their contributions to fan productions, as an exercise in the traditions and practices of fandoms, can be viewed as a form of citizenship (Dieterle et al. 201). Fans mark their place within fandoms when posting fanfiction, fanart, or any fan work online. These actions demonstrate their connection to fandom and their enjoyment of a particular media. Jenkins describes fandom as a community that recognizes "no clear-cut line between artists and consumers" where "all fans are potential writers whose talents need to be discovered, nurtured, and promoted and who may be able to make a contribution" (280). To this end, Bourdaa writes, "Fan's creativity is the cornerstone of every fandom" (387). When fans argue over shipping practices, they are contributing to fan spaces. They create discussions and interactions. In this way, they shape fandoms. @_wintersgraham tweets in an ASOG, "pro ship hannibal twt is disgusting" (jamie 🎄 [@_wintersgraham]), presenting the idea that a certain kind of shipping and their views towards it has impacted how they see a section of the fandom. To this user, an area within the fan space has become tainted. One PSR notes, "The anti are still here I hadn't see them in a min last I saw they were in the she ra and my hero academia fandom giving the fandom a bad name" (🎄 🎃 Pumpkinpines 🎃 🎄 #GREENLIGHTVOLUME10 OF RWBY [@AutumnSorbet]). Here, the reputation of an entire fandom is colored by Anti-shipper presence. Fandoms are socially constructed spaces, and how those spaces are formed and seen relies, necessarily, on the social interactions therein and the opinions of those engaging in them.

One of the key aspects of the discussions observed throughout this project was the embeddedness of context. While replies contained the context of responding to tweets, original posts occasionally linked to other tweets or websites where fan discussions were occurring. Original posts would include screenshot images of other conversations or references to events or debates that had taken place prior to posting, sometimes by years. Brandy Dieterle et al. position

"circulation practices as writing practices, as a kind of authorship" where "choosing–or not choosing–to boost writing teems with material and rhetorical consequentialities" (199). Dieterle et al. focus on how "sharing preexisting writing–retweeting, forwarding, sharing, reblogging, and so on" (198) operates as habits of citizenship (201) and stress that "practices of circulation–as writing activities–are never neutral or inconsequential" (202). By referring to previous events, conversations, and debates within fandoms, these users circulate information, curating a history. At the same time, as fans push others out of shared spaces by circulating accusations or threatening messages, they alter fandom's current form. Further, they challenge what it means to be a citizen of the space by redefining what an act of citizenship includes, and what content is permissible.

User @BB_Fax writes, "alright thread isn't working so here's just a whole ass list of homestuck proship accs" (@BB_Fax). This *Homestuck* fandom Anti-ship reply was coded as containing [Fb], Performing Fear Causing Behavior, due to a phenomenon known as "Call Out" posts. These social media posts expose the actions of others. Within the broader context of these conversations, by listing the names of fans they disagree with @BB_Fax expresses that they wish their followers to, at the very least, stop interacting with the fans being singled out. However, these posts have the potential to lead to more than ostracization. In her work, Drouin's interviewees frequently mentioned receiving threats, including death threats, from Anti-shippers (52). Across Drouin's data, she marks death threats, stalking, doxxing, and blackmail as some of the most common codes she observed (52). Posts such as the one by @BB_Fax operate as a kind of agenda setting that informs other users of potential actions they could take in response to disliked individuals in the social group. These posts publicize lists of individuals, othering them by setting them apart from the group and opening them up to potential targeting. Dieterle et al.

write “We might think of such agenda setting through strategic amplification as constructing an affective atmosphere that limits the kind of responses likely to emerge” (205)–“where oppositional voices can be easily drowned out” (206). The vitriolic language and accusations found within Anti-shipper posts can potentially limit Pro-shipper contributions to fandom spaces by instilling the fear of retaliation.

In 2020, I received a message from a friend linking to a *Danny Phantom* (2004) fanfiction. The story re-sparked my love for the show. Wanting to interact with other fans, I joined the Discord server linked in the author notes of the fanfiction. Surprisingly, the server was busy despite the series ending in 2007. The fandom was undergoing a renaissance during the COVID-19 pandemic, with fan creators returning to the fandom and producing new fan works. The Discord server was alive with conversation and, along with it, the fandom. I wondered why creators were coming “back.” Where had they gone? Why had there been a lull in fan production? Was it just that the show had ended over a decade prior? Curious, I began speaking to a few members and was informed that the fandom had experienced significant breakage years prior in an event known as the “truephan/antiphan war.” This “war” notably included shipping debates, particularly regarding the “problematic” romantic pairing of the main character, Daniel Fenton, with his nemesis Vlad Masters. This pairing is considered “problematic,” or disapproved of, due to Daniel being 14 in the show’s canon and Vlad being a villain the same age as Daniel’s parents. Even amidst the revitalization of the *Danny Phantom* fandom, there was an underlying fear that the shipping fights would return. As a result, some members who shipped “problematic” pairings decided to leave or to keep their ships private to the extent of living double lives where they only shared particular fan works in private.

What happened to the *Danny Phantom* fandom can be seen mirrored in a few of the tweets sampled for this project. @___SAMMX writes, “I’ve decided that I’m gonna keep destiel/wincest/sastiel/wincestiel[8] ships in my life. But I no longer belong in the supernatural fandom. There’s just too much hate in it, too many antis, and too much lgtbphobia.” (Sam [@___SAMMX]). This Pro-ship original post details that Anti-ship actions caused the author to leave the *Supernatural* fandom, even if they still enjoy some ships. In a PSOG @etherealpadme tweets, “i’m so fucking tired of all of it. i’m tired of the reylos vs antis. i’m tired of the harassment. i’m tired of the canceling. can we PLEASE to know people on a personal level before we block them for their view on a star wars ship” (mads [@etherealpadme]). This Pro-ship original post holds a palpable desperation for the Star Wars fandom to move past the arguments gripping it and the behaviors they have witnessed, including “canceling”—a genre of post akin to a “Call Out” post.

A “Call Out” post aims to get other individuals to see actions the called-out individual has performed and decry them. “Call Outs” are negative interactions, a sanctioning that can be quickly passed between individuals through social media via reposting or retweeting on Twitter (X). Across the corpus, the tweets reflected what Dieterle et al. noted: “writing assumes a relationship with others” (202). To be a member of a fandom is to have a relationship with other fans as a participant in the social group. Users pointed to each other in these tweets, events within their fandom spaces, shared practices, and histories. In “Call Out” posts, users assume a relationship by noting an individual in a shared space they disapprove of and want fellow fans to know about for the sake of protecting the community. Busse writes, “Fandom is always more

[8] Destiel is a ship between characters Dean Winchester and Castiel. Winscest, or SamDean, is a ship between characters Sam and Dean Winchester. Sastiel is a ship between Same Winchester and Castiel. Wincestiel is a ship between characters Sam Winchester, Dean Winchester, and Castiel. All four of these ships come from *Supernatural*.

complicated than the stories we tell about it" (106), and the context of these tweets demonstrates that reality. Describing the history of a single fandom would be a massive undertaking. However, the users observed in this project called forth histories not only of the fandoms they were recorded discussing but of others, cross-referencing and comparing. By passing along information regarding previous fandom events and individuals, fans create social dimensions of fandoms in ways that are not without bias or consequence (Dieterle et al. 202). I argue that Anti-ship practices of circulating accusations within fandom spaces attempt to create new knowledge that positions Pro-shippers as pedophiles, abusers, and rapists. This circulation and its rhetorical dimensions make it difficult for other fans to promote competing narratives, altering fandom spaces wherein certain voices are quieted.

5.2 Anti-ship Motivations

Why might this be happening? We must recognize that Anti-shipping did not suddenly appear. Instead, it shares connections between other "anti" instances throughout the history of fandoms. @GreenDayAngel tweets in a PSR that the "Supernatural fandom is at a weird sort of crossroads, where you have an intense ship war between two popular ships meeting up with anti-slash, anti-fanfic attitudes" (GreenDayAngel [@GreenDayAngel]). Drouin writes that, "Historically (1980s/1990s), queer fan content has been a 'dirty little secret' of fandom, specifically slash fanfiction, the act of male/male character romance, named after how fans of Star Trek put a slash between character names" (14). *Slash* is a dimension of fan activity that has seen notable contention, both within research and fan communities. Drouin points out that, "the writers of such gay romance studies are predominantly women" (14), a reality that has brought forth questions regarding fetishization. A fan calling a female fan's slash ship a form of fetishization may refer to them as a "fujoshi" (Larsen et al. 44). Larsen et al. discuss anti-

fujoshis, individuals who disapprove of fujoshi fans, writing that, “Like slash shippers, fujoshi and the fan-made content they create is subject to criticism of homophobia within their circles” (44). Anti-fujoshis put forward the idea the slash content women were creating “had little to do with actually gay men and that they were co-opting them for their sexual fantasies while having little concern or even awareness for homophobia” (Larsen et al. 44). As described by Twitter(X) user @GreenDayAngel these sentiments interact with Anti-shipping debates.

These contacts are more than brief passings. Anti-shipping, as it has developed, owes fair portions of its dimensions to Anti-slash, Anti-fujoshi, and other anti phenomena in fandom spaces. Jonathan Gray posits that, “To fully understand what it means to interact with the media and their texts, though, we must look at anti-fans and non-fans” (68), an action undertaken by other Anti-ship researchers. Drouin writes that “the concept of the anti-fan has been debated and analyzed for decades within the field of fan studies” (57) and that during interviews, her participants drew parallels between Anti-shippers and Anti-fans who are not, “against fandom per se, but of those who strongly dislike a given text or genre, considering it inane, stupid, morally bankrupt and/or aesthetic drivel” (Gray 70). One of Drouin’s interviewees argued that the term “anti” developed from Anti-fans before individuals began to attach other words to indicate being against a ship (57-58). @lizcourserants notes in a PSOG that there were also occurrences of individuals being anti specific characters, tweeting, “My first time seeing the term “anti” in fandom spaces was years ago on tumblr in the the Harry Potter tag on posts th… – I also remember when people on tumblr would use the tag “anti (character)” of “anti (ship)”” (discourse catharsis, taking a little break, brb~ [@lizcourserants]). Other discussions of Anti-character behaviors were witnessed in tweets such as those by @DangerHissy as well.

Due to the complexities of anti occurrences in fandoms, there were debates across the sampled tweets about which came first, Anti- or Pro-shipping. Such questions and answers frequently came from the tweets coded as containing [DA], Defining Attempts. @toska1121 tweets in a PSR, "No, *pro*shippers Named Themselves in Response to Self-Named *anti*shippers. The Latter Harassed Shippers for Their Ships Bc They Saw Those Ships as Immoral. Antis started in the Voltron and Star Wars fandoms and then spread from there" (toska [@toska1121]). This tweet marks Pro-shipping as a direct response to Anti-shipping. However, another PSR reads, "Maybe it's a generational gap thing??? I mean when I was 14 on the internet, noone ever brought up their age/gender/location/sexuality/anything but we all wrote Harry Potter and Digimon porn. Then again there was also no such thing as an "anti" or moral grandstanding over ships" (arrested 🤭 [@DuendePika]). Such a sentiment relates that not caring about the morality of ships was the norm pre-introduction of Anti-shipping. In this way, it can be argued that, while not named or marked as a "group," Pro-shipping was present in fandom spaces first. However, Anti-shipping has developed alongside, if not out of, a long history of anti sentiments, whether towards ships or not. We would be mistaken to believe that a concept of fandom without some level of disagreement has ever existed. However, we also should not ignore that Anti-shipping has differentiated itself from other anti instances and is now acting on fandoms in notable ways.

There is no fully idyllic past of fandom to return to, although some tweets, particularly those sampled from older fandoms, reference a less fraught past. @datkai_yuno tweets, "What do you guys think about klc/lck[9] antis of this generation? What's make them thinking like that? I mean 15 years ago in Supernatural fandom, people ship SamDean were very chill tho. And yes i

[9] Klc/Lck, or KaeLuc, is a ship from *Genshin Impact* between characters Kaeya Alberich and Diluc Ragnvindr.

was still a minor at that time but it did not look so chaos like these days. (That Guy ❄ Kai [@datkai_yuno]). However, @BruceMBWayne writes "I would argue it was always an issue, before it was framed as ship vs ship. Eg in Harry Potter canon/het[10] couples were the 'good' ones with the others going all as freaky. In hetalia anti USUK[11] would say incest to explain why their ship was better...." (Bruceman [@BruceMBWayne]). The use of the word "always" here places antis as a constant within the history of fandom. This tweet also brings up a fascinating point, noting that "in Harry Potter canon/her couples were the 'good' ones" (Bruceman [@BruceMBWayne]). Such language points back to Anti-slash, and, moving forward into the unraveling of Anti-ship language and behavior, we must address the issue of erotic material.

When it comes to Anti-shipping, "The problem at hand is, in no small part, due to the deeply affective nature of individual reactions to the sexual or taboo content" (Rosenberg). While some tweets gathered point to heterosexual pairings receiving Anti-ship hate, such as the pairing of Reylo, queer relationships, particularly involving male/male couples, appeared to face the brunt of Anti-shipping instances. The designation by some of Anti-shippers as "puriteens" or "conservaqueers" in both the tweets sampled and articles researched for this project may be "useful for discussions around a general rise in puritanism among young queer people" (Larsen et al. 49). They may also help dissect why so much Anti-ship rhetoric leans on inflammatory language such as pedophilia and the fear that Pro-shippers are grooming other fans through their erotic fan productions.

What does it mean to be a good fan? As @BruceMBWayne notes, there is the view that supporting canon, that is having occurred within the source material, ships, which are frequently

[10] Heterosexual.
[11] USUK is a ship from the anime *Hetalia: Axis Powers* between characters United States and United Kingdom.

heterosexual, is "good," painting homosexuality once more as "a 'dirty little secret'" (Drouin 14). "Context collapse," wherein "the world of digitally platformed fandom have illuminated not only the increasingly visible struggle among fans to define what constitutes 'acceptable' works to produce and consume, but the ways in which the collapse of formally standard fandom contexts have affected that struggle" (Rosenberg), has been hypothesized as a significant factor in the rise of Anti-shipping behaviors. Among Anti-shipping research, the idea is put forward that "in the public landscape of Twitter, where fandom activities are visible to the world at large, and there is an intrinsic desire to be seen as 'good' fans in the eyes of that potentially infinite, collapsed public" (Rosenberg) actions, including sanctioning, occur when fans identify "bad" fans within a public space. Fans may turn on one another to appear "good" and present their fandoms as palatable to a broader social media audience. This may be especially true in the case of homosexual erotic content because "Conversations about the moral appropriateness of taboo/kinky content have been endemic to fan spaces" (Rosenberg). These conversations are now happening in increasingly open environments with the added stakes of outsiders as witnesses. Due to these realities, there may be a desire to exclude NSFW material, especially those depicting queer eroticism.

Echoing this potential motivation, @Necroxis9 tweets, "Ive never seen a group of people in a fandom more devoted to wasting time hating a ship they don't support than anti-bkdk[12] people in the #MHA #MyHeroAcademia fandom holy shit. They're more obsessed than the people who LIKE bkdk. Curious its a gay m/m ship they hate this much" (🏳️‍🌈 Matt 🏳️‍🌈 [@Necroxis9]), questioning why a m/m (male/male) ship is receiving Anti-ship sentiments specifically. When observing these tweets, the defining attempts many users undertook reflected

[12] Bkdk, or BakuDeku, is a ship from *My Hero Academia* between characters Katsuki Bakugo and Izuku Midoriya.

Anti-shipping connections to preexisting labels such as “Anti-slash,” “Anti-fujoshi,” and “Anti-fan.” Further, by identifying as Anti-shippers, these fans separate themselves out from Pro-shippers in a way that involves no crossover. To be an Anti-shipper is not to be a Pro-shipper and vice versa. This defining through othering was a constant even if there was disagreement regarding what Anti- or Pro-shipping means. As Burke puts it, “one need not scrutinize the concept of ‘identification’ very sharply to see, implied in it at every turn, its iron counterpart: division” (23). Anti- and Pro-shipping need each other to exist the way they currently do within fandoms. As discussed above, while behaviors associated with Pro-shipping existed before the appearance of Anti-shipping, Pro-shipping as an *identity* has been conveyed by Twitter (X) users as coming into existence *after* Anti-shipping took form by separating users from previous community standards. These identities both create and are defined by division. However, this division must be maintained. Othering is a process and an active rather than passive practice. To be seen as a “good” fan actions must be performed and upheld for that label to stick.

5.3 Shifting Paradigms

These actions include harassing and creating “Call Out” posts. Anti- and Pro-shipping are not the activity of conversing about ships. Instead, they are struggles to determine what is and is not acceptable behavior in fandom. These struggles include forms of antagonism, as seen with code [Fa] and works such as Drouin’s and Larsen et al.’s. Fans relate that they have experienced threatening behavior from other fans due to Anti- and Pro-shipping debates. According to Johnson, fan struggles over the interpretation of texts occur “amongst fan, text, and producer” and “are continually articulated, disarticulated, and rearticulated” (286). These constantly developing struggles relate to specific paradigms or “world views” that fans bring to or uphold within fandoms. As groups, fandoms have expectations and ways of behaving that fans learn and

can become so acquainted with that they take those standards for granted. The same is true in other groups and fields, such as within scientific communities where the ways of 'being' a scientist are learned. Certain discourses and ways of communicating are considered normal within the field. For example, students pursuing scientific degrees are trained in the scientific method and expected to uphold that method as they enter the field. Kuhn explains that "accepted examples of actual scientific practice…provide models from which spring particular coherent traditions of scientific research" (10), meaning established scientific methods have community support as ways to pursue knowledge making.

These models of thinking and knowledge production, when considered on a community level, are paradigms. Kuhn describes "The study of these paradigms" as "preparing the student for membership in the particular scientific community with which he will practice" (10-11). Fandoms operate similarly in that there are community standards and traditions that authors such as Jenkins point to, which a fan becomes familiar with as they venture into fandom, learn the lingo, and (often but not always) begin to engage in fan production. Furthermore, Knoblauch, writing about Kuhn's work, explains that science is "historically situated, not only to a specific time and place but also continually subject to stress as the result of conceptual antagonism" (133). Likewise, socially constructed fandoms are just as open to conceptual antagonism as science and have their own discussions over what can and should occur within the group. Fandoms include internal struggles over what fandoms should be, look, and act like just as scientific communities have standards on who can participate in their discipline's knowledge creation. Anti-shipping is a form of this antagonism that is leading to a "paradigm shift" within fandom spaces and behaviors by pushing creators of taboo subjects out of the highly public spaces fandoms have begun to occupy.

Tweets coded as [DSb] indicate this paradigm shift and the struggles therein. One PSOG marked as containing [DSb] reads, “I really enjoy voltron but all these anti-ship fans are making being in this fandom really distasteful” (Khaira [@SecretBlackVow]). Meanwhile, an ASR labeled [DSb] includes, “i was a huge hannibal stan for years but all that pro ship rainbow meaty shit ruined it for me. over the years it just got worse and worse” (holden caulfield ☭ PS [@catchernthrye]). Kuhn writes that “the emergence of a paradigm affects the structure of the group that practices the field” (18), and by shifting the paradigm, through struggling towards new understandings of what it means to be a member of fandom and exercise citizenship within it, Anti-shippers are impacting fandom structure and practices. These communities of fans adjudicate standards, following Knoblauch’s point that “What identifies the community meanwhile is its collective agreement about the substance and form of its paradigm” (134), and yet, amid a paradigm shift, disagreements abound within fandom spaces around what fan texts may be created and who has the right to exist within shared spaces.

Disagreements over what fandom shipping paradigms should include and what practices are appropriate have led to Anti- and Pro-shipping being markers of identity. Anti- and Pro-shippers operate as separate groups, naming each other their opposite. In tweets, gathered individuals named themselves Anti- or Pro-shippers. These groups frequently decried the actions of their oppositions and made it clear that they belonged to one group or the other. Burke writes, “In pure identification there would be no strife. Likewise, there would be no strife in absolute separateness, since opponents can join battle only through a mediatory ground that makes their communication possible” (25). Twitter (X) is one such mediatory ground where fans and different fandoms can congregate and interact. On sites like Twitter (X), thoughts on shipping become identifications and not just opinions. By interacting publicly with those they disagree

with Anti- and Pro-shippers build their identities. As discussed by Rosenberg, these interactions occurring in such a public space adds a third dimension to shipping discussions. Due to "Context collapse," these debates do not simply happen between Anti-and Pro-shippers, but in front of a live audience (Rosenberg).

The mediatory ground of Twitter (X), which allows instant interaction between fans, is a stage. These conversations come with an audience, the size of which is unknowable to Twitter (X) users. These audiences can include a user's friends and family, but also their employers or the creators of the media they are fans of. Fans hold identifications beyond fandoms, like students, family members, or employees. These identifications can be compared to what Knoblauch writes about Burke: individuals are "socially positioned by means of myriad identifications, differentiated interests, and hierarchical orders" (137). The identifications a fan holds can influence how they behave regarding fandom. For example, a fan may have multiple Twitter (X) accounts, one associated with their professional life and one related to fannish behavior, including sharing shipping material. Alternatively, a fan may use names online other than their legal name to help hide their identity. However, given the complexities of digital footprints, connecting fan accounts to the people behind the screen is not very difficult. Such an action occurs when someone is doxed, and information about their legal name and address is publicized. As a result, some fans may wish to align fandoms with broader social concepts to avoid embarrassing materials, like erotica, being traced back to or associated with them. Given this, fans must contend with each other and outsider values that may not align with fandom practices.

The interpersonal relationships spoken of by Burke and their influence on rhetoric are present within fandoms as fans must increasingly consider not only the opinions of fellow fans

but also of individuals who are not acquainted with the standards of fandom. For example, writing erotic content and sharing it is common in fan spaces, even praised, but the creation of such material is not often viewed positively by the public. Fandom discussions, especially those in public spaces, cannot be separated from fans' identities beyond fandoms. Fans have families, places of work, and many other social engagements that impact their identities and, therefore, their motives. Fans cannot and should not be separated from the different facets of their identities, and as such, Burke's writings on those identities influencing a rhetor's actions stand out. In the eye of an infinite public, fans' identities can come into conflict with those beyond fandom and wishing to resolve this conflict, fans may turn to ways of behaving that go against previous community norms. For example, a fan cannot alter broader societal notions on erotic material, but they may be able to push an individual posting erotic material away from a shared space via harassment, thereby conforming fandom to outside opinions on appropriate public material. To help ensure their tactics successfully push out unwanted fans, Anti-shippers struggle for power within fandoms. Fandoms have hierarchical structures. There are fans within fandoms that are recognizable and hold reputations. Such fans can influence fandoms to a certain degree. How much necessarily depends on the fandom itself and factors such as size, but reputation does grant power in many fandom spaces.

While conducting this research, I was visited by a long-time fandom friend. Initially, I had known her "personetally," a term I use to mean we were close to a personal degree, but only interacted through an online medium. We finally met in real life in 2021 after having known each other for many years. Looking over my work, she pointed to a post and indicated that she knew the user being "Called Out" from their art. In my experience, this is not a rare phenomenon. Every fandom I have been in over the years has members other fans know about. My friend

herself is one of these members, producing content popular to such a degree that she could start her own Discord server, which currently possesses a few hundred members, and organize a few fan magazines (Zines). By obtaining high social standings with fandoms, Anti-shippers can gain the ability to shift group paradigms further. One of the ways they go about this is by negatively impacting the reputations of fellow fans through accusations of crimes, degrading their social standing both in the eyes of other fans and outsiders to fandoms.

Reputation is important, and according to Chin, we must not overlook "the importance fans still place on notions of 'reputation' in their interactions with each other in their respective fandoms, especially when social media platforms now enable these fans to interact with celebrities and content producers, or The Powers That Be (TPTB) directly" (243-244). Such reputations were referenced regarding fandoms as a whole during this research, with users arguing that certain fandoms had been tainted by Anti- and Pro-shipping debates. In one case, a poster argued that certain shipping practices reflected poorly upon the media the fandom formed around, tweeting, "Society if My hero academia fans stopped shipping every god damn underage character they see sharing a scene for nano seconds in the show and stopped being so toxic about it to a point of attacking the creator (they don't know they are giving a bad reputation to a good show)" (Kamina tinoudi [@KaminaTinoudi]). Such a post indicates that a bad reputation can bleed over, impacting the fandom and even the media. Considering the importance of reputation, especially where concerned with whole fandoms, it is no wonder that certain individuals would attempt to gain a high standing if they wanted outsiders to view fandoms positively.

These attempts to gain power exist alongside other standard practices of fandom, such as fan gifting fan works to each other. Fandom researchers such as Chin have observed these fan practices, who, while exploring the concept of fandom as a gift culture, notes that such a

positioning “does not exonerate it from conflict or any form of hierarchy” (246). This sentiment is shared with other authors who critique Jenkin’s presentation of fandoms, which focuses heavily on the more altruistic aspects of fandom, such as its democratic nature (282). For instance, Hills writes, “Jenkins’s work therefore needs to be viewed not simply as an example of academic-fan hybridity, but also as a rhetorical tailoring of fandom in order to act upon particular academic institutional spaces and agendas” (Introduction). From Hills perspective Jenkins’ presentation of fandoms, which avoided certain negative aspects of fan behaviors, held “a primary allegiance to the role of ‘fan’ and a secondary allegiance to ‘academia’” (Introduction). Within *Textual Poachers*, Jenkins relates anxieties over presenting fans in a negative light, in the ways they have been previously described as “brainless consumers” who “devote their lives to the cultivation of worthless knowledge” and “place inappropriate importance on devalued cultural material” (10). According to Jenkins, fans are often conceptualized as “social misfits” who are “feminized and/or desexualized” and shown to be “infantile, emotionally and intellectually immature” individuals who “are unable to separate fantasy from reality” (10). However, while his work stands in defense of fandoms, some researchers worry that there is a danger in presenting an “idealized version of fandom” (Chin 247) as it can ignore the harsher realities of operating within a field. For example, although scientific communities are built on certain agreements on what being a scientist entails, bullying and ostracization exist alongside standards of behavior. Fandoms are no different. Despite certain democratic practices being standard, hierarchies and bullying exist within. The presence of agreement in a group or the existence of pro-social behavior does not negate the possibility of harassment.

Such instances of harassment come up frequently in Anti-shipping research. Having conducted a survey, Drouin writes that her questions “gave people a space to share their feelings,

which likely accounts for the popularity and data overload [she] faced upon its publication" (41). With 544 respondents, works such as Drouin's clarify that fans want to discuss fandoms' negative aspects and look beyond the idealized conceptions of fandom (42). I experienced this myself after informing others of my interest in Anti- and Pro-shipping. The project that inspired this one included research during which I interviewed individuals from a Discord server I was a member of. As a trusted member of the fandom, I was permitted by server administrators to post about my research. I contribute the number of responses mainly to the fact that others viewed me as a trusted individual in the community. I was not a stranger to them. I was as invested in fandom as they were. Since then, I receive DMs regularly as people who have learned about me share their experiences or provide links to instances of internet discourses they believe will help me. Recently, I received a link to a publicly posted 156-page document outlining the harassment a fan received due to shipping disagreements that led them to the decision to end their life. This was not the first time I have been informed about suicide due to Anti-shipper harassment.

Suicide is not the only result of Anti-shipper harassment. Harassed fans may also leave fandoms to move away from environments in which they are no longer welcome. A key outcome of Anti-shipper harassment is that it enables Anti-shippers to gain social status by pushing other fans away from fandoms. This harassment is a struggle to obtain the power to redefine fandom standards of behavior. Chin writes, "Within the context of fandom, then, the invention, development, and maintenance of the fan identity are inseparable from the invention of the social game in the various fields of fandom" (251). This social game includes being seen as a "good" fan in the face of the public (Rosenberg), a public that may contain the very creators of the content a fan enjoys (Chin 244). Fans do not desire to be seen through a lens of fan stereotypes which, "while not without a limited factual basis, amounts to a projection of anxieties about the

violation of dominant cultural hierarchies" (Jenkins 17), and so complex discourses and identities develop as fans interact in front of an audience, engaging in arguments that aim to further their reputations within fandoms through appealing to broader social norms. Conventions of acceptability do not develop exclusively from within a fandom. Instead, fans bring influences from broader cultural values into these spaces and may attempt to separate fandoms from the negative views outsiders hold towards fans by acting to align fandom with those values.

5.4 Fiction and Morality Rhetoric

And the value we invariably return to is sex. The conversations observed across this research were concerned primarily with three codes: [DIS], [CAS], and [M]. These codes, Disapproval, Conversations About Ships, and Morality Rhetoric, respectively, were not particularly surprising to see given that, at the crux of these discussions, lies what is and is not permissible to ship. What sex is okay to write about, converse about, read about, or draw? What sex might be viewed by a wider public as too perverse? [DISc], Disapproval of a Ship or Ship Type, occurred 100 times throughout the tweets sampled. Ninety-five of those times came from Anti-ship posts. Common reasons for disapproving of a ship included age gaps and depictions of abuse. Additionally, [DISa] and [DISb] coded numerous instances wherein individuals were implied to be comfortable with pedophilia, abuse, rape, and incest.

By positioning other fans as sexual criminals, Anti-shippers create the justifications for "Call Out" posts. For example, @strawb3rryfemme tweets in a "Call Out" post, "cw // cp, pedophelia, pro ship hey uhh a lot of my moots[13] r following the artist elentori. they were super popular on tumblr for their gravity falls and voltron art and was very much into 'aging up' minor

[13] Term meaning "mutuals", individuals the poster follows and who follow the poster back on a social media platform.

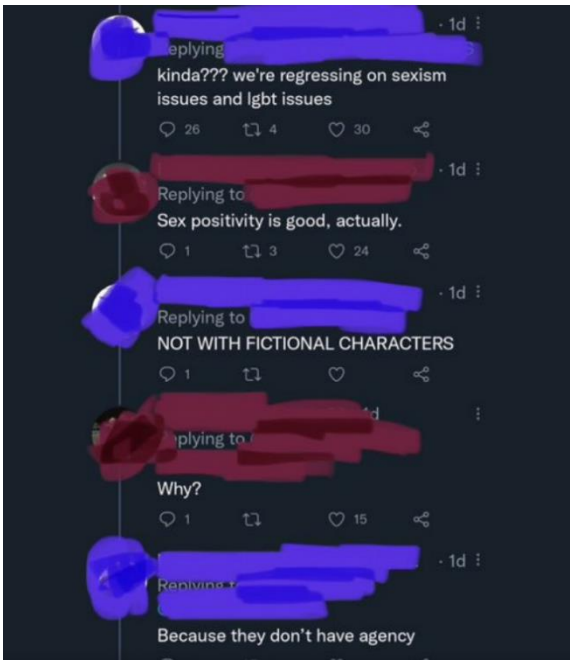
characters to ship them with adults" (eve-il 🍓 🎪 [@strawb3rryfemme]). In this *VLD* ASOG, the author warns their followers that they are about to discuss child pornography and pedophilia before describing the actions of another fan. This fan is noted as "aging up" minor characters, presenting them as older than they are in the canon of the story, to pair them with adult characters romantically. Despite being fictional, and therefore without actual age, the act of aging characters up to write or draw erotic material is a contested activity in fan spaces. One PSOG discussing this debate, reads, ">clearly aged up MHA characters >Setting wasn't even sexual at all (just implied) Anti: "Bro why are you sexualizing minors? And why do you not want to interact with minors?"" (🎄 WTFAntis 🎄 [@AntisWTF]). In these cases, presenting a fictional character as an adult while they are canonically a minor is implied to be as morally reprehensible as producing actual child pornography.

These arguments rely heavily on the personification of fictional individuals wherein the fictional character is treated as an actual human. From this perspective, a character cannot be aged up, just as a real child cannot be suddenly transformed into an adult. Such arguments place fictional characters as people, real children, who are impacted by being written about in an erotic context. @beetheloser tweets in an ASR, "My hero Academia. they are CHILDREN the NSFW art and fanfic the shipping wars tododeku bakudeku;-; minors THE SHIPPING!!!!!" (Ash [@beetheloser]). One ASOG reads, "I just don't really understand how people are like anti-proship but still rt mha student porn That...IS proship... that's...a teenager...literally 16 years old. That's a little kid. That's weird. Fucking weirdo behavior" (☁ kira [@strwbry_kira]), pointing back to the disagreements over how Anti- and Pro-shippers are defined, but also placing fictional characters as "literally 16 years old". Such descriptions were abundant, with numerous posters utilizing language that implied the characters discussed were no different from actual people.

Earlier, I asked that we consider the possibility that some Anti-shippers do think Pro-shippers are pedophiles, rapists, or abusers. As noted, I do not believe this project is entirely suited to answering that question. I contend it would require interviews with past and present Anti-shippers and a more comprehensive data set. However, this does not mean that fellow fans may not be impacted by Anti-shippers at least framing their arguments around implied belief. @R0YALSYRUP writes “i see a lot of proship/antiship discourse on my tl these days and it’s like ripping open a wound that had closed up long ago. i find it genuinely upsetting, people act like drawing porn of mha characters is as bad as sexualizing a real minor” (PANCAKE 🥞, gargling senpai’s balls [@R0YALSYRUP]). This user compares shipping discourse to “ripping open a wound,” conveying deep distress while the term “act” can be read as both belief and behavior. Another user tweets in a PSOG, “antis: all fiction affects reality and if you actually enjoy smth like killing stalking then you’re a violent rapist and murderer” (´[@ikebuk]). Yet another user posts, “THATS NOT WHAT PROSHIP MEANS ffs[14] I loved Killing Stalking but I don’t think murder and rape is ok what the fuck" (tiny nic [@tiny_matsu]). Such tweets demonstrate that whether or not Anti-shippers believe their accusations, the rhetoric within their arguments upholds that belief and actively impacts Pro-shippers as a result.

During this research, I received a DM of a Twitter (X) comment thread regarding the author’s role while writing sexual scenes between characters, shown below.

[14] Abbreviation meaning “for fuck’s sake”.



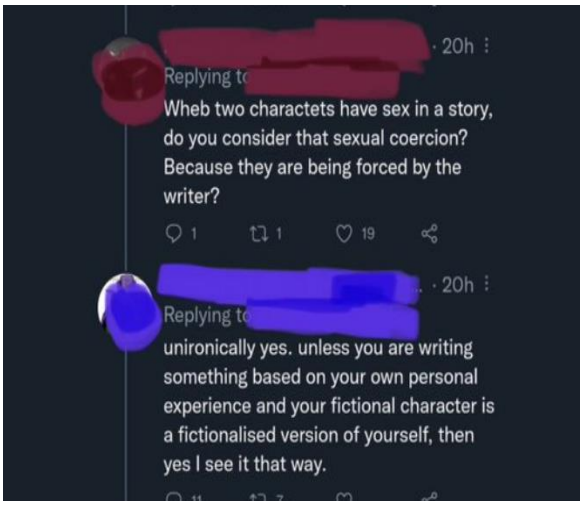


Figure 1: Screenshot image of Twitter (X) post shared by Tumblr user @breadandblankets.

These tweets were not sampled for this project, but their similarities to the posts gathered should not be ignored. These tweets, like others sampled, paint fictional characters as real to the extent that making them do something sexual is a form of coercion. Within this conversation, the first user argues that if the original author includes sex in their work, they have engaged in a violation of another being's agency because the author has control over the narrative, with an exception granted in the case of the author writing about their own experiences. Fandom scholars should not ignore such ways of thinking as research into shipping continues to develop. These conversations involve not only what is and is not moral to display in the media but also discussions around what fiction is and what roles the author and audience play in it.

If fiction is real, if shipping minors, incest, or pairings with abuse is synonymous with doing those sexual acts, then morality becomes an issue. Regardless of whether Anti-shippers believe it, Pro-shipping is framed in accordance with this proposed reality. From the outside, from the potentially infinite public present on social media platforms, these arguments can

appear at a glance to be about instances of actual harm. Moral arguments [M] frequently appeared not as direct discussions in the gathered tweets but as Indirect Discussions of Morality [Mb]. 41% of the Anti-ship posts mentioned an individual, or in the case of Lucasfilm, a company, engaging in actions generally held to be immoral. 34% of Pro-ship posts were also coded with [Mb]. However, it should be noted that these instances were commentaries on Anti-ship accusations or posts that described Anti-shippers as harassers, not as perpetrators of sexual crimes. It is through the heavy crossovers between [DISb] regarding behavior, [DISc] regarding ships, and [Mb] that it becomes evident that these arguments are constructed by and large around the argument that Pro-shippers, through their shipping practices, are engaging in immoral sexual behaviors.

Drouin argues that "Antis seem to believe that they stand for social justice, and are protecting others (i.e. minors) from the "harmfulness" of a particular ship by policing the fandom from "predators" or "pedophiles" or whatever else they choose to coin supporters of their anti-ship" (61). Such "social justice" gains an additional dimension due to the idea that Anti-shippers are "younger." This admittedly vague term has been discussed in the works of other researchers, where Anti-shippers are referred to by fans as teenagers (Drouin 71). Throughout her interviews, Drouin found, "The majority of survey participants put forth a demographic of anti that skews female and younger" (71). The very title of Larsen et al.'s work, "It Makes Me, a Minor, Uncomfortable," references a post they gathered for their research (64). However, coding the posts gathered for this project resulted in very few age mentions. Only seven posts depicted Anti-shippers as younger, with four posts coming from Anti-shippers themselves writing that they were minors.

Arguing that children are in danger is not a new rhetorical tactic but is effective. After all, in the fast-paced environment of the internet, an accusation of pedophilia is a quick way to turn a crowd against someone. Fighting against such accusations is arduous, and people risk being targeted if they attempt to assist someone being harassed. The placement of such high moral stakes onto shipping arguments puts many Pro-shippers at a disadvantage, as there is little recourse for coming back from accusations of sexual deviancy. While discussing how fans are conceptualized in reference to socially condemned depictions, Jenkins writes, "Materials viewed as undesirable within a particular aesthetic are often accused of harmful social effects or negative influences upon their consumers. Aesthetic preferences are imposed through legislation and public pressure; for example, in the cause of protecting children from the influence of undesired cultural materials" (17). Anti-ship arguments continue such public pressures as they sanction other fans for materials they disapprove of, which may not adhere to their desired aesthetic. In the face of social media, where many fan spaces have conglomerated within the public eye, particular ships and kinds of erotic material do not fit the vision of "fandom" all fans wish to achieve. Within notions of palatability, some fans may see presenting fandom as containing less taboo/kinky material as an extension of being a "good" fan. This framing only gains strength through the idea that Anti-shippers want to clear a fandom of sexual deviants.

5.4 Reauthoring Fandom

I argue that Anti-shipping changes fan spaces through their accusations and that the move to push specific fan creators out of fandoms is a form of authoring. Bourdaa writes that fandoms are "a social community, in the sense that fans share a social bond" (392). Shipping arguments, with their polarizing language, split fans into two key identifications: Anti- and Pro-ship. These identities are not presented as capable of coexisting. As such, fandoms become contested

territories. The code [DS] tracked discussions of space and was observed 96 times across the gathered tweets. Nineteen of these tweets relayed the idea that fandoms have changed, such as @Oni_Queen, who notes that, “Back in the day I could literally find a page or group for any Harry Potter ship, and could enjoy its content without some anti yelling in my face about it because those groups were monitored. I miss those groups sometimes…” (Oni CA 🎮 UA [@Oni_Queen]). According to this poster, previous fandom pages or groups were monitored and thus prevented anti individuals from lashing out. This tweet, through its inclusion of “page” and “group” is likely referring to fandom activities that took place outside of fully open social media hubs. These spaces have monitors and administrators. However, now fandom occurs very publicly as well. With fandoms open to the broader public, Anti-shippers have the motivation to be a “good” fan and the means to attack other fans for failing to meet that bar.

Anti-shippers can reauthor fandoms through these attacks, pushing out creative members they see as creating perverse materials. According to Catherine Driscoll, “The privacy associated with the novel and pornography is emphasized in fan fiction and inseparable from its distribution on the Internet and thus from moral panics about pornography on the Internet” (81). The intensely public nature of social media creates ample opportunity for these moral panics, which Anti-shippers can take advantage of to aid them in removing “bad” fans from fandom spaces. Whether Anti-shippers believe their claims or not, their language enables them to frame the exclusion of certain fans from public fandom around removing bad actors. Anti-shippers can orient their harassment around creating safe fandoms, a goal that is easy for outsiders to understand and get behind, especially given Twitter (X)’s short-form content. When Anti-shippers present their arguments around bettering fandoms, they simultaneously mark fandoms as “bad” by harboring deviant individuals.

Of the tweets coded, 49 were marked as the subcode [DSa], which observed mentions of a fandom as being “bad”. Both Pro and Anti-shippers spoke of fandoms negatively. Anti-shippers noted that fandoms were bad because they contained Pro-shippers. One user, @peppernsfw, also argues that good creators were removed while Pro-shippers remain, writing in an ASOG, “why would anyone even want to be in the harry potter fandom at this point. all the people making good content were shooed away. the tag[15] is probably just straight proship horrors now right” (weird whore wednesday [@peppernsfw]). Pro-ship posts about [DSa] often noted changes in behaviors over time. For example, @Persian_Slipper tweets in a PSR, “Also, that vid shows why antis couldn't have existed in 2000s era fandom. Between Clex[16], all the Buffy S1-S3 ships, Wincest, and the entire Harry Potter fandom, every fucking thing was "problematic." Oh, and Q/O[17] shippers. Heads would have exploded” (have camera, loves travel 🕯️ 🦉 📦 🌹 [@Persian_Slipper]). Discussions of how fandoms have changed lined up notably with conversations of a fandom being bad. At no point in this project was an individual observed as claiming fandom spaces had changed for the better.

When discussing ships online, Anti- and Pro-shippers both participate in forms of writing, creating posts and contributing to the fandom space. Fandoms are a form of text and can be read. Observing the fan productions of a fandom can inform a reader of that fandom as a space and community. We can ask what fan contributions a fandom values and what kinds of conversations are repeatedly held. For example, the posts regarding *Hannibal* were frequently concerned with [DISd], Disapproval of Textual Interpretation. Within this fandom, there appeared to be a deep value placed on the source material and its creators, particularly concerning textual

[15] Term meaning “hashtag”.
[16] Clex is a ship between DC Comic characters Clark Kent and Lex Luther
[17] At time of writing the characters who compose the Q/O ship referenced are unknown. Q may be a reference to Qui-Gon/Obi-Wan due to *The Phantom Menace* coming out in 1999.

interpretation. @adybpt posts, "Idk why you're getting ratioed[18] this is factually correct. Bryan[19] is pro ship. If antis existed in universe: Hannibal is a cannibal who doesn't care about morals anyway. Will is a forensics professor who could not give a fuck about what books you read in your free time" (Mouse, Nap Era, 💙🍆🪦🕊️•🫐🗑️👍 [@adybpt]). Similarly, posts from the *Killing Stalking* fandom demonstrated frequent conversations around the importance of genre. @chichi92_nickel tweets in a PSOG, "Lmao at antis getting angry that the Killing Stalking English publisher is calling it a BL" [20](Nickel 👄's KS 🤌🍆 [@chichi92_nickel]). These tweets demonstrate issues that these fandoms are concerned with. While discussion topics vary from fandom to fandom, all ten fandoms observed contained conversations about Anti- and Pro-shipping. These appearances indicate that shipping debates are not relegated to a single fandom but are present across fandoms, blending into other issues, such as interpretation and genre.

When fans debate how texts should be interpreted and played, they add to fandom spaces and challenge community norms. Further, given that fans are often members of multiple fandoms, their engagement in these conversations are not relegated to one fan grouping. Bourdaa writes, “Fandoms work as social communities, and as such they participate within and collaborate in social actions” (388). These social actions, consisting of inter-fan collaboration, form the norms of a fandom, placing expectations upon the space. When Anti-shippers move their ideas between fandoms, shipping debates spread. When Anti-shippers point to Pro-shippers and make the argument that the fan productions they create indicate that they are pedophiles, abusers, and rapists, they place the expectation, in a highly public space, that such creations are immoral and should be shunned. There is no expectation of negotiation. As noted, these

[18] Being ratioed indicates someone’s response to a user’s post is receiving more engagement than the original post.
[19] Bryan fuller is the producer of Hannibal (2013).
[20] BL, or boyslove, is a genre of fiction depicting male/male romance and erotica.

arguments are not framed in such a way that implies Anti- and Pro-shippers can come to an understanding. Johnson notes that "fans do not easily agree to disagree—differing opinions become co-present, competing interests struggling to define interpretive and evaluative consensus" (288). These conversations are not about mutually building fandom or coming to an agreement about the construction of fandom. Instead, Anti-shipping seeks to rebuild fandom through expulsion, gaining power via rhetorical moves meant to sanction the activities of those fans with whom they disagree. While moving between fandoms, Anti-shippers rely on ways of identifying and arguing that transcend one fandom space but are rather shared with individuals across different fandoms and the broader public.

Anti-shippers create flexible persuasive appeals around being concerned fandom members by tying their arguments not to a single fandom but to ideas on morality and deviance. These appeals can be brought into fan spaces regardless of the content a fandom forms around. According to Knoblauch, "The critical move in a persuasive appeal is the representation of shared social location (we're all Americans), shared history (I was once a farm boy myself), shared values (we're all after justice), and therefore mutual interests" (141). By positioning themselves as fandom members concerned with the presence of bad actors within the group, Anti-shippers can ask fellow fans if they are comfortable allowing sexual criminals to remain in a shared space. Anti-shippers rely on concepts of shared spaces as this enables them to build the idea that criminals are overrunning fandom groups. When they note that fandoms have changed, they point back to a shared history, an idealized past, when Pro-shipping was not an issue (weird whore wednesday [@peppernsfw]). Lastly, by utilizing broader concerns about the presence of queer and erotic materials online, as well as language that implies real individuals, particularly children, are being harmed, Anti-shippers appeal to the values of individuals both within and

without fandoms. For these reasons, Anti-shipping is present within fandoms regardless of whether a fandom focuses on media aimed at children or adults. The target demographic of the media matters little as Anti-shipping focuses on appealing to the members of fandom and outsiders as they push sanctioned fans away based on criminal accusations. What is far more critical to Anti-shipping than a work's audience are ideas of shared locations, histories, and values.

Shipping debates often occur within two key locations: a given fandom and a social media platform. These locations fluctuate during an individual's time as a fan. For example, a fan may be a member of multiple fandoms, or they may step away from fandoms, return to them, or communicate with individuals across fandoms. Fans may also discuss their fandoms on numerous social media platforms, some public and some private. When Anti-shippers engage with Pro-shippers, the mediums of those engagements are fluid as well. It may be private, as speculated regarding code [Fa], but it may also be intensely public, such as with "Call Out" posts or when Anti-shippers try to point to entire "sides" of fandom as being "bad." One ASR discussing the "bad" sides of fandoms reads, "But yeah ok on third thought don't look deep into Supernatural fandom stuff or you will find literal adult xxx stuff. The J2[21]/wincest side is absolutely traumatizing, worst proshipper stuff you can imagine. The Misha Collins half & other fandoms are much nicer and more normal tho!" (Restless [@Restless_]). @Restless_ points to the *Supernatural* fandom and draws a line around a particular "side" of it, the side that includes J2 and Wincest. This side is othered by the tweet, called "absolutely traumatizing" and excised from the general community of the fandom. The word "normal" also tells the poster's audience that those who engage with J2 and Wincest are abnormal. However, another *Supernatural* fan

[21] J2 is a ship consisting of real-life *Supernatural* actors Jared Padalecki and Jenson Ackles

tweets in a PSOG, “Do you think that Destiel shippers who are also antis are aware that the Supernatural ship that has undoubtedly had the greatest cultural impact is Wincest? I think about this often and it never fails to make me laugh” (.: Nae :. [@aureousCopycat]). @aureousCopycat places Wincest as an essential part of *Supernatural*’s fandom, yet user @Restless_ labels it as an abnormal part. While this is a brief example, it captures the larger impacts of these debates where portions of fandom, even large, arguably impactful portions, are being othered.

When Anti-shippers describe certain sections of fandoms as abnormal and advise others to stay away, they also minimize the history of those sections of fandom and remove opportunities for cross-fan interactions by drawing lines around part of fandoms that are “good” and “bad.” Fandoms share history. Fans trade information about past fandom events and arguments. For example, when members of the *Danny Phantom* Discord servers I had joined shared stories with me of the antiphan/truephan war they were engaging in the process of sharing history. This act deepened my connection to the fandom by allowing me to feel more knowledgeable about the community around me. I was lucky to come across a group of fans willing to discuss these events although it was clear that, due to some members leaving the fandom permanently, there were holes in the picture. When fans leave a fandom, they take history with them and by pushing fans away Anti-shippers limit the knowledge of the past available to new fandom members. This alters the conceptions of what fandoms value by controlling who gets to speak on what fandoms used to be like.

It is the shared values portion of the persuasive appeal that Anti-shippers focus perhaps most heavily on. As demonstrated through the occurrence of moral discussions, values are a defining factor of Anti-ship rhetoric. By framing their arguments around removing pedophiles and other forms of sexual acts that are morally reprehensible, Anti-shippers speak to shared

cultural values that extend through and beyond fandom spaces. We must not forget that fans are members of their societies as well. They carry into fandoms previously held understandings of norms and social mores. It is not only the broader public of social media that Anti-ship accusations turn against Pro-ship individuals, but fellow fans as well. Anti-shippers can point to those fans producing taboo or kinkier content and ask their fellow fans if they want such erotic material in fandom spaces, utilizing wider social anxieties about pornographic material and minors being exposed to it or groomed.

This question creates an easy identity for other fans to slip into. Fans can quickly identify themselves as someone who is against child abuse. The idea of protecting children is so common and unifying that an identity as a person who cares about children requires little to no effort by an audience to take on. Looking at Burke's work, Knoblauch writes, "identification is motivated and strategic, hence deserving of cautious inspection–it usefully opens up the double meaning of identification as a process of distinguishing, or naming, no less than a process of interrelating" (142). The disagreements between the definition of Anti- or Pro-shipping means that individuals who align themselves with Anti-ship rhetoric often do so by disaffiliating themselves from Pro-shippers. When Anti-shippers accuse Pro-shippers of harming minors, other fans can then easily see themselves as against Pro-shippers and continue to disaffiliate them from shared fan spaces via the circulation of "Call Out" posts or by blocking Pro-shippers, cutting them off from potential interactions. They may also report Pro-shippers for posting harmful material, such as child pornography, an action that can get them removed from Twitter (X). At the same time, individuals who see these accusations may begin to identify as Anti-shippers, distinguishing themselves actively from Pro-shippers on the basis of wanting to protect children.

This distinguishing can be conducted through writings such as DNI and BYF posts. These posts inform readers of who the poster rejects. One ASR reads, “DNI / BYF / TRIGGERS ; dni : - dream stan/supporter[22] - like killing stalking (makes me uncomfortable) - proship/conservative/maga ect dni i will block on site byf” (jack ps #ceasefirenow [@SIXFLESH_]). Pro-shippers also take part in this distinguishing. For example, one PSR reads, “-- byf · i think anti's are ridiculous, just navigate away from my page. · i ship sheith, if thats a bother. · i read killing stalking and may post about it, if that bothers you. no, i do not agree with the characters' actions. · no terfs / homo/transphobes / racists / etc” (🩸 andrew, gf lovebot 🩸 [@falciente]). Across the data gathered, 77 instances of such posts, marked [Ca], were recorded. Twenty-eight occurred in Anti-ship posts, while 19 were found in Pro-ship posts, indicating that both groups participated in disaffiliating from other fans. This mutual pushing away only acts to split fandoms further, a reality that, as shown through @etherealpadme, some fans may be fed up with but unequipped to change on their own.

These posts also inform those who agree with the tweet's author that they share similar views, engaging in interrelating even as they push some fans away. This is one advantage of “pinned” posts, a feature on Twitter (X) that allows a user to keep certain information at the top of their Twitter (X) page. By pinning the information about who they distance themselves from, users allow others to view their identity at a glance. The same is true for bios, a self-description users can include on their Twitter (X) account. In the Twitter (X) browser format, bios are visible directly to the right of a user’s tweets, meaning they are frequently on display. When fans take on such identities as Anti- or Pro-shipper and construct relevant posts or bios, they act rhetorically upon themselves by displaying how they align themselves regarding shipping debates. Burke

[22] Someone who enjoys content produced by YouTube user and personality Dream.

posits that “members of a group promote social cohesion by acting rhetorically upon themselves and one another” (Burke xiv). Fans place who they are within an argument and make that position highly visible. When a user writes that they are an Anti- or Pro-shipper, that claimed identity is loaded with meanings relevant to shipping debates and interpreted by other fans. Further, when publicly marking themselves as Anti-ship, Anti-shippers place pressure on Pro-shippers to remain quiet out of fear that they will be “Called Out.”

Both Anti- and Pro-shippers publish DNI and BYF posts, seeking to relate to those with similar opinions and distance themselves from those who disagree. So, what is the difference? Anti-shippers, like any other fan, should be able to say they do not like a ship. Not everyone has, or should have, the same tastes when it comes to media. However, as discussed, Anti-shipping is not merely the dislike of specific ships. Instead, it is the act of arguing that, through their enjoyment of specific ships, other fans are engaging in morally corrupt behaviors. @NotDyingInACage writes in a PSOG, “Just to be clear, you guys, a #notp is far different from an #anti And if you call yourself a safe anti, youre not an anti Your peace with ones offense towards a ship is Just a notp #vld #voltron To be an anti is to fight to eradicate/#dehumanize a ship and its shippers” (GreasyBoi(Commissions open) [@NotDyingInACage]). This user captures an essential aspect of fandom, the NOTP. Where OTP, One True Pairing (Driscoll 79), is a fandom term used to describe a ship someone enjoys, as @NOTDyingInACage writes, NOTP indicates a disliked ship. As described by this tweet, Anti-shippers do not simply dislike a ship. Instead, they accuse other fans of moral failings and shun them from fan spaces.

Anti-shippers frequently remind Pro-shippers that they may be sanctioned for expressing their enjoyment of fictional material seen as “problematic.” By pinning posts and adding to their bios that they are Anti-shippers, they broadcast to fellow fans that they may participate in

harassing them, creating social cohesion through fear. @Octipii writes in an ASR that "[* = unlike a lot of ants, i *don't* think the people i hate deserve to starve" (Mx. Sebastian-Moses Sabra D. T. [@Octipii]). This post demonstrates, from the perspective of an Anti-shipper, how Anti-shippers behave and how other fans may view them. This post assures readers that this user will not act like other Anti-shippers. Why would Pro-shippers feel safe in a fandom environment where such posts are deemed necessary? Why would Pro-shippers want to participate in a fandom where individuals announce publicly that they do not want them in shared spaces? Johnson details, "Alternative positions and tastes must somehow be silenced so that divergent interests within a community can be unified as hegemonic interpretive consensus" (287). Anti-ship posts and bios act as silencing tactics, reminders that a fan's community contains Anti-shippers and, therefore, their rhetoric. Such tactics amplify Anti-shippers' positions, even if there may be less of them than Pro-shippers. According to Drouin, Anti-shippers are seen as a minority in fandom, yet are very visible due to how vocal they are and how they "stalked and harassed other fans both digitally and inperson" (2). By challenging previous fandom behaviors, Anti-shipping represents "divergent interests" (Johnson 287) and, through the pressure they place upon other fans, they seek to create a new consensus about what fandoms should include, with little room for dissent.

Across the tweets gathered, the code [F] was observed 44 times. Among these [Fb], Performing Fear Causing Behavior, was coded four times. This low appearance may make it seem like fear is not being caused within Anti- and Pro-shipper interactions. However, the code [Fa], Witnessing or Experiencing Fear Causing Behavior, may paint a different picture. [Fa] was coded 40 times, appearing most frequently in Pro-ship posts. The prevalence of [Fa] could indicate harassing behaviors occurring in more private mediums such as DMs. Drouin points to

many instances across her research where Pro-ship or non-anti-ship fans relayed that they had received threatening or frightening private messages (81, 86-87, 94). Larsen et al. also describe private messages playing a role in harassment, writing, "a fan artist I follow who is open about being a stage four cancer survivor posted screenshots of some message she had gotten. They said things like "you survived cancer only to ship sheith?"[23], "your cancer should have killed you for shipping sheith", and "it's a shame you survived cancer only to be a paedophile" (9). While more blatant, publicly posted instances of threats were not often observed in this work, that does not mean attempts to cause fear are not present. Throughout this project, individuals noted behavior such as Anti-shippers sending death threats[24] (Gooberton [@Gabbyv23]) and "telling fans to commit suicide/die/etc" (∽ yuu ∽ [@_featherweather]). Additionally, as noted, instances such as Anti-ship bios act as quieter policing methods, warning other fans that they may experience harassment if they express specific textual interpretations.

Fearing being "Called Out" and harassed, Pro-shippers face decisions regarding how comfortable they are interacting in fan spaces. By circulating material that names Pro-shippers as criminals, Anti-shippers invite other fans to harass them. As these posts continue to be spread, the risk of harassment increases and compounds as more individuals become involved in acts of sanctioning. For Burke, "The basic function of rhetoric" is "the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or to induce actions in other human agents" (Burke 41). Along these lines, Drouin writes that "efforts in labeling others as pedophiles is used first as a coercive effort to either change minds or drive fans off the internet" (87). Anti-shipper rhetoric works to change the attitudes of fellow fans and outsiders by convincing them Pro-shippers are engaged in

[23] Sheith is a *Voltron: Legendary Defenders* ship of the characters Takashi "Shiro" Shirogane and Keith Kogane.
[24] One ASOG notes that Pro-shippers have sent death threats too. @Mokcie15 writes, "all that pro ship bs is out of the rails , stalking the actors is truly unexplainable and all the death threats like TF are yall children" (Victor 🦌***COMMISSIONS OPEN*** [@Mokcie15]).

pedophilia. This convincing acts as a call to action where the audience is moved to participate in cleaning a fandom of its bad actors. As a result, Pro-shippers are pushed away from fandoms. In these ways, Anti-shippers reauthor fandoms by shifting the paradigm about what is "normal" within fan spaces and behaviors. These actions discourage fans from creating or posting fan material about "problematic" ships, an occurrence Drouin noted in her interviews during which some interviewees related being scared to post fan art and fan fiction due to concerns over being targeted (81, 102).

Due to these fears, Pro-shippers may stop producing fan content or leave a fandom, as seen with @___SAMMX. Alternatively, individuals who ship Anti-shipper-targeted pairings may leave a fandom's public space instead of exiting the fandom altogether. Fandom gatherings in more private locations, such as Discord servers, give fans a more protected space to engage with others. The *Danny Phantom* Discord server I joined in 2020 was one such place, allowing "problematic" fan creators to share their works, receive feedback, and interact with other fans. This server is monitored by a team that helps ensure hate is not spread across the group, operating akin to the fan pages described by @Oni_Queen. Creators in this server may not feel comfortable posting their shipping content to more public websites, but they can still engage in the social connections formed by sharing fan productions, an integral part of the fandom experience. However, this does not mean the space is free of fear. Part of the reason I have not named the server in this work is out of concern for my fellow fans, and I have checked with the moderation team to ensure that even these anecdotal mentions are vague.

This fear remains because, despite being semi-private spaces, Discord servers can often be joined by anyone with an appropriate URL link. Due to this, Anti-shippers can join the servers, observe the group members, and publish that information to public websites with a "Call

Out" post. Drouin recounts a related instance she experienced: "A friend of mine, who knew me before the project launched, shared that I was fine with one of her friends, who then reported it in a proshipping Discord channel, a popular chat program for fans. This led multiple people to claim I had not left the internet and must be a fan of the 'pedophilia and incest ship'" (133), demonstrating that even information shared in good faith can be leaked, found by Anti-shippers, and used for harassment. Further, using easily downloadable programs known as Discord-raid-bots, Anti-shippers can take over a server and kick or ban members from the group, effectively destroying a community space. To help prevent this, some Pro-ship Discord servers have layers of security. One server I am a member of requires a month of positive interaction with the server before the administrators invite someone into a second Discord server through DMing a private URL link. Another server I am in requires three months, while another has the rule that members must be hand-selected by administrators after publicly publishing Pro-ship content. Such security helps deter Anti-ship raids as they demand time, effort, and even risk.

In 2019, my friend, who visited during this project, and I decided to create our own Discord Server due to a disagreement with another server's moderation team. We were both fans of the anime and manga *Ao No Exorcist* and had joined one of the fandom's Discord servers. Over our time there, the community's rules changed. The ships we enjoyed were banned from space. Although no harassment occurred, we were told we could not post fan art or fanfiction of our ships. If we did, we would be kicked out of the group. My friend decided to create an OC, an original character placed within a fictional property, and ship him with a few of the characters. These newly created ships were also deemed inappropriate, even in a non-erotic context. In response, we chose to leave the group. As the creator of her character, my friend could adhere to community guidelines not to discuss ships with banned topics. However, the moderation team

still did not like her ships. We decided to create a Discord server open to all ships with strict guidelines to not harass other fans over the pairings they enjoy. As a server, we have experienced Anti-shippers coming into the space, accusing members of pedophilia and abuse. Members of the moderation team have received "Call Out" posts for their involvement with the server, and vigilance is required to keep the space as safe as possible for members.

When I say that Anti-shippers reauthor fandom spaces, what I mean is that they act against previous fandom norms, mark fellow fans as deviant, encourage others to do the same, and chase those fans out of shared spaces. Anti-shippers, growing out of and intersecting with Anti-fan, Anti-slash, and Anti-fujoshi sentiments, are engaged in an active paradigm shift of fandom practices such as S.A.L.S, YKINMKBYKIOK, and DL; DR. Drouin notes that during her interviews, "Fans also documented that antis have radically changed fandom as they know it and are unparalleled in their actions" (100). Anti-shippers alter public fan spaces by driving out Pro-ship fans and creative members by limiting what art can be produced without backlash. Further, they continue to change fandoms by creating a need for new fan spaces. Williams names writing a "central" and "material social art" (211), an act where "We begin to see the relations–not only the interpersonal but also the truly social–within which (but not necessarily subject to which) the distinguishable identities and phases of identities develop" (197). Through writing via the creation and recirculation of accusatory anti-Pro-ship materials, Anti-shippers distinguish Pro-shippers and taboo/kinky ships from themselves, identifying who they are by who they are not. This process alters the social interactions of fandoms, adding additional dynamics while supplanting others.

From a hierarchical standpoint, these actions place Anti-shippers in a position of power as they represent themselves as moral "good" fans who wish to exclude immoral "bad" fans. As

discussed, reputation is vital in fandom. By gaining a reputation that revolves around removing "bad" fans, Anti-shippers can gain the power to impact the social formations of fandom. They do this by encouraging other fans to act as Anti-shippers and by damaging Pro-shippers' reputations through accusations. This results in Pro-shippers being removed from the social space, granting them less of a voice in how fandoms operate. When Pro-shippers are removed, their cultural contributions to fandoms are also prevented, changing how fandoms look in terms of what fan productions they contain. Williams states, "In the significant case of authorship it leads to the dynamic sense of social formation, of individual development, and of cultural creation" (197). As authors of space, Anti-shippers are creating new norms within fandoms, reshaping how they operate as social communities and what cultural artifacts they contain. They also create groupings, identities that fans can choose for themselves, but that may also be forced upon them. An individual need not identify as a Pro-shipper to be marked as one, a complex reality that impacts how an individual is permitted to act within the community.

Returning to Bourdaa's work, which considers fandoms as social communities due to the social bonds formed between fans (392), Anti-shipping operates interestingly. On one hand, Anti-shippers break social bonds by attempting to persuade fans that members of their community are causing harm and must be removed from shared spaces. These othered fans are disaffiliated, sometimes through violent means and can permanently impact how a fan contributes to fandom. Yet, on the other hand, they create social bonds when these othered fans join to form new communities. The bonds in these communities may be especially strong, having formed in the face of backlash, Pro-shippers reaching out to one another to assure their fellows that safe spaces still exist. In a PSOG @lightlyteal writes, "if anyone is stuck in supernatural anti circles and worried no one will be their friend if they openly write problematique fic, ME!!!! i'll

love you!!!! i'm a cas/misha fan/destiel shipper who isn't an anti and doesn't care if u also ship incest or whatever" (havu 🌈🍗 does this unit have a soul? [@lightlyteal]). Due to this, Anti-shippers may be seen as engaging in a dual form of authorship by altering existing spaces and creating the need for new ones.

There is no idyllic fandom to return to. Anti-shippers have not transformed a perfect space into an imperfect one, but it should not be ignored that a transformation is occurring. @jajankaisen tweets in a PSR that, "antis pre-dated voltron, i remember being told that i'm an abuse apologist for a homestuck ship i liked back in 2012 lol but voltron PERFECTED them" (liz 🔞 the king of discourses [@jajankaisen]). @jajankaisen's statement, like Drouin, addresses the growth of Anti-shipping, although not necessarily in terms of size, but in effectiveness. This tweet points towards ability. According to @jajankaisen, the *VLD* fandom perfected Anti-shipping, developing it into what is now occurring within fandom spaces. In this same vein, @ValkrisScreams posts in a PSOG, "I think about this daily because the" pro ship" / "anti" discourse was defined in a totally different was pre-voltron. The voltron fandom twisted the meaning of those terms and it WORKED in their favor so every other fandom afterwards used it as a blueprint" (@ValkrisScreams). Looking at previous concepts such as Anti-slash, Anti-fujoshi, and Anti-fan, it is evident that anti behavior did exist before Anti-shippers as they are now. However, as Drouin writes, their rhetoric operates in an unparalleled way (100).

Part of the purpose of gathering tweets regarding different fandoms was to demonstrate the existence of shipping debates across different fan bases. However, something else also became apparent: instances of "spreading." Fans related that they had witnessed Anti-ship sentiments moving from particular fandoms into others. While Anti-shippers may be seen as a minority inside fandom spaces, a few gathered tweets noted that their ideas moved outward from

fandoms such as *VLD* and Star Wars, as detailed by @toska1121. According to @Piklesuke, "antiship came first. It came from "antishaladin" when antis moved from the Voltron fandom into othet fandom spaces. "Proship" was coined in response" (Valkylander 💕 [@Piklesuke]). While shipping arguments, such as the ship wars in Harry Potter (ControlledDeorbiting [@loonunit]), have long existed, Anti-shipping does not relegate itself to one ship, one fandom, or one type of fictional property. Instead, Anti-shipping operates as a way of lashing out at other fans through particular forms of rhetoric concerned with the emotional appeals of getting rid of pedophiles, abusers, and rapists. This is part of what makes their impact on fandoms unparalleled and distinctive from other instances of anti behavior. Additionally, unlike Anti-slash and Anti-fujoshi, Anti-shipping rhetoric is used against heterosexual ships like Reylo and lesbian ships like Lapidot[25] as well. Unlike Anti-fans, Anti-shippers do not focus on one property or type of fiction. Instead, their rhetoric migrates between fandoms, bringing Anti-ship discourse into shared, semi-private, and private spaces regardless of media content, genre, or ships.

When it comes to shipping, I follow DL; DR rules. If I do not like aspects of certain fan content, I do not engage with it. There may be ships I find distasteful, but as discussed with NOTPs, there is a difference between disliking a ship and accusing others in ways that have real-world consequences. Drouin, discussing the language used by Anti-shippers, writes that "the use of pedophilia has had long-term ramifications, starting with fans of media now questioning the validity of the accusation and being significantly less likely to believe an alleged victim" (94). The impact of Anti-shipping stretches beyond the bounds of fandom into the real world. @Gabbyv23 posts in a PSOG, "ppl forget about the voltron fandom but... yall should probably remember. bcuz they hated some ships so much that they harassed ppl and sent death threats,

[25] *Steven Universe* ship between Peridot and Lapis Lazuli

even to the staff" (Gooberton [@Gabbyv23]). Beyond being pushed out of fandoms, individuals who are harassed may experience adverse mental impacts (Brody and Vangelisti 740). Further, as Drouin notes, such accusations about fictional characters can cause victims of sexual harassment to be doubted. Relegating Anti-shipping issues solely to the realm of fandom ignores the fact that fans also exist in the real world. Fans are people with lives, and being accused of sexual crimes due to fiction is not a light infraction. In the public sphere of Twitter (X), a fan's friends, family, or employers may be able to see such accusations, causing their reputation to suffer outside of fandom situations.

Given the widespread nature of Anti-shipping behaviors, which appear in numerous fandoms, others may begin to act as Anti-shippers to help them secure their place within fan social hierarchies. Returning to social contracts, Jenkins outlines that behavior viewed as noncommunal is seen as a violation of those contracts (282). Anti-ship rhetoric can be viewed as violating the social contract of fandoms by trying to reauthor what is and is not acceptable fan practice. This noncommunal behavior can push others out of fandoms or lead fandoms to develop new spaces specifically away from Anti-shippers. Many of the tweets gathered, particularly concerning the [DIS] code, show that Pro-ship posters see Anti-shippers as violators of the social contract. However, Anti-shipper rhetoric calls upon larger notions of social contracts through emotional appeals, making them hard to fight. These appeals, which paint Pro-shippers as harmful to children, threaten to place Pro-shippers not only outside of fandom spaces but to impact their public reputations through the claim that they break social contracts of morality. By shifting the paradigm of fandoms through rhetoric tied to larger social notions of what is and is not moral behavior, Anti-shipping creates a need to act in ways approved of by larger social conventions to continue staying in fandom spaces while minimizing potential harassment.

When fans act in ways Anti-shippers approve, such as by avoiding sharing fan works regarding “bad” ships, they reduce the chance of harassment. Fans are aware of this and can make moves to either fly under the radar of Anti-shippers or circulate Anti-shipping rhetoric to indicate that they are “good” members of fandom communities. Such actions, which demonstrate a fan's status as “good,” can be viewed as an attempt “to affirm membership in the community by acting to validate the paradigm” (Knoblauch 140). When fans validate the new paradigms of fandom being implemented through Anti-shipping behavior, they simultaneously express their desire to stay in fandoms, as such actions help prevent harassment that could push them away. By appealing to broader social standards of behavior and utilizing damaging accusations, Anti-shippers create the need for fans to engage in this affirmation, demonstrating their belonging to the “good” side of fandom. Fans must prove through the circulation of Anti-ship rhetoric or the avoidance of “bad” ships that they are “good” fans or risk being forced out of the community. Due to this, fans may act to validate the new paradigms of fandom, even if they go against previous community standards, to avoid cyberbullying and remain in shared spaces.

According to cyberbullying research conducted by Nicholas Brody and Anita L. Vangelisti, “the hurtful and often public comments and photographs which constitutes cyberbullying are likely to influence other bystanders’ perceptions of the cyberbullying victim” (744). Using vitriolic language, Anti-shippers utilize this influence. By naming fellow fans as pedophiles, abusers, and rapists, they quickly and effectively tear down their reputations in a way that is not only difficult to counter but presents onlookers with a clear villain. Those who ship “problematic” pairings are put in a position where attempting to alter how others perceive them is both challenging and an admission of guilt. Of course, a pedophile, abuser, or rapist would want to convince others that they are not causing harm. Such a person would want to continue

having access to the group they are harming. By presenting Pro-shippers in this way, Anti-shippers render fighting against these accusations a confirmation of them. Gelms notes that online harassment "carries long-term effects on individual victims as well as the social makeup of online spaces in that it dictates who is allowed to contribute to the conversations that happen online – it has a massive impact on who and what circulates on social media safely" (181). In the face of these accusations, some fans may see it as more productive to leave fandom rather than fight the uphill battle against harassment that places them in such a poor social position. As a result, Anti-shippers also limit the circulation of disapproved content, an act just as laced with meaning and impact.

In her interviews, Drouin noted that participants frequently brought up that "acting in fandom without harassment "was 'Near impossible'" (190). Considering this description, it is not beyond the realm of speculation to wonder if some individuals acting as Anti-shippers do so as a method of self-preservation. As discussed, fans may act in ways meant to demonstrate that they are "good" members of fandom, following the paradigm shift Anti-shippers are bringing to fandoms to avoid harassment. This kind of cooperation relates to Burke's idea that a person may attempt "to form himself in accordance with the communicative norms that match the cooperative ways of his society" (39). Anti-shippers are changing the paradigms of acting within fandom spaces. As such, those who wish to remain within those spaces may have better luck by espousing the rhetoric of that change. Due to this possibility, I argue that fandom researchers should consider not only the idea that some Anti-shippers truly believe their accusations of misconduct but also the possibility that some Anti-shippers may not be Anti-shippers at all. Instead, some fans might engage in virtue signaling out of a desire for safety.

Anti-shipper targeting is not a single event. When an individual is marked as a "bad" fan, they can receive multiple "Call Out" posts from different accounts or be sent numerous threatening messages. Further, due to the nature of platforms such as Twitter (X), "Call Out" posts do not simply disappear but persist in the public eye. Brody and Vangelisti observe that "Because messages and photos are often persistent online and can be saved or stored for viewing at a later time, a single message can have repeated effects" (740). When harassment occurs online, it can be viewed, commented on, and shared by numerous individuals. The fans receiving harassment based on shipping may see the same information about them from multiple sources. Additionally, as is the case with some Anti-ship bios, they may be reminded in more passive ways that they are liable to be sanctioned in a public space. Even if a post is not made about them specifically, many of the tweets observed categorize Pro-shippers broadly. A fan may see a ship they enjoy labeled as a Pro-ship and become wary of creating content for the pairing out of fear of being "Called out." A single fan cannot push back against Anti-shipping as a behavior, and engaging in content they enjoy may risk harassment. Given this, there are those fans who choose to leave fandom altogether. Others find new spaces to coalesce, forming new communities to avoid Anti-shippers. Still, others might recirculate posts with Anti-ship sentiments to help separate themselves from Pro-shippers they have seen being harassed. Then there are those fans who may see Anti-shipping and support it, whether out of a desire to present fandom differently to outsiders by removing taboo erotica or out of agreement with Anti-ship accusations. No matter how fans act in response to shipping debates, it is evident that Anti-shipping, in a way set apart from other anti instances, is reauthoring fandoms.

Chapter 6: Moving Forward

In a typical week, I receive a handful of DMs concerning Anti-shipping. People know it is a topic I am interested in and point me to discussions. As Drouin observes, fans want to discuss shipping debates and Anti-shippers' impacts on fandoms (42). When people come to me to talk about these occurrences, they reflect this notion, sharing their experiences. It is one thing to say Anti-shipping deserves more attention and investigation from my perspective, but the involvement of other fans in shipping research suggests that they want these events to be studied as well. With them in mind, research into shipping discourses can move forward in a few ways.

Observing the online posts revolving around shipping discourses allows for a glimpse into what they entail and the rhetoric used by both sides of these debates. As investigations continue, researchers would do well to work in pairs, if not teams, to code these texts. While working on this project, I coded the sampled tweets multiple times, going back through my work to see if I still believed a tweet should be coded as it was. [Mb], Indirect Discussions of Morality, gave me the most trouble, resulting in me working through the tweets numerous times and seeking advice from my advisor before I settled on the final number of occurrences. Likewise [Fb], Performing Fear Causing Behavior, required me to read the tweets aloud to assess the tone they wished to convey. Some tweets were straightforward, such as @acidbathdemon's "somehow a proshipper found this by searching homestuck. i will now run you over with my stolen pink jaguar" (obsi [@acidbathdemon].), while others that included insulting language were more challenging to code. This was due to a lack of clarity involving intention. Many insults were not coded for as it was determined that they represented anger but not the direct desire to harm someone. Having a fellow researcher to reference with would improve the strength of these codes and give more depth to the research.

Considering interviews featured in other works, it would also be beneficial for researchers to speak with Anti-shippers to try and gain more information regarding their perspectives. However, this does pose some distinct challenges. During her research, Drouin encountered Anti-shippers contributing to her survey with "responses that simply read 'die bitch' or 'go kill yourself,'" (44), demonstrating that some Anti-shippers may lash out during study. Although, it should be noted that some did answer Drouin meaningfully. Common among these answers was another hurdle: the idea that Anti-shippers are minors (67-70). If this is true, interviewing Anti-shippers would include the complexities of studying minors. Given that this research includes sensitive topics such as erotic material, a study involving them would be a massive undertaking to ensure participant safety and ethicality.

Nevertheless, if possible, in a way that could protect both participants and researchers, direct Anti-shipper interviews would be a boon to this area of research. Drouin writes that, "Considering the brevity and scarcity of antis partaking in the survey, I cannot draw conclusive arguments on their beliefs and actions from their words alone" (70). Due to this, research, including Anti-shipper posts such as Larsen et al.'s and my own, provides perhaps as much of a glance into the mindsets of these individuals as we can get at this time. Direct input from Anti-shippers in the more personal medium of interviews or open-answer surveys would significantly advance our understanding of these discussions. If a safe, secure medium could be ensured, researchers would be better equipped to ask essential questions about whether or not Anti-shippers believe their accusations and if some Anti-shippers act out of self-preservation. Individuals who used to identify as Anti-shippers would also be an interesting demographic to study. They could provide insight into why some fans become Anti-shippers and how a person may come to stop agreeing with or espousing Anti-ship rhetoric.

Another way Anti-shipping perspectives might be added to this conversation is through research conducted at the academic level by Anti-shippers themselves. At the time of writing, I am unaware of any research from this perspective. However, just as fans may be more open to research conducted by fellow fans, Anti-shippers may be more willing to be interviewed by fellow Anti-shippers. Drouin notes that some individuals did not view her as trustworthy due to her bias and the perception that she enjoyed "problematic" ships (133). If Anti-shippers believe researchers with bias cannot represent them correctly or in good faith, directly contributing to the discussion could be a viable path.

Finally, one of the most significant difficulties facing these investigations is researcher safety. Drouin writes that on "February 18, 2018 antis used data from my IRB approval form, such as my phone number, school location, and full name, to harass me" (43). This harassment included threats to set fire to her classroom and led to her "Fearing again for my life and that of my loved ones" (Drouin 43). While the IRB does provide a layer of ethicality to research, it should not be ignored that it represents a risk on the researcher's part. Drouin suggests "preemptive protection" (156), such as using a Google number to fill out the IRB and "other options, such as removing all photographs from online, locking down all accounts, or changing names" (157). However, as Drouin herself notes, these preemptive measures "may not be plausible" for many researchers "as this can either prevent them from using social media to collect data or connect with participants" (157). There is also the issue that a researcher's name is attached to the IRB and their project. No matter how a researcher may go about trying to anonymize themselves online, the possibility exists that someone could take advantage of this and locate them. Drouin suggests that researchers be trained through courses on how to deal with harassment as a researcher (157) and notes that she had fewer resources due to her position as a

graduate student working on her dissertation (158). When discussing this project with my family, a few members related their fear for me, and safety was a factor I had to consider. There is no guarantee that I will not experience harassment related to this work once it is finished, especially since I intend to share it with fandom friends as they have supported me throughout this research and deserve to see the results.

Ultimately, this type of research asks much of the researcher. While ethicality is essential for the participants' sake, it must also be considered for the researcher. Although I was not harassed during this project, I have been in the past and may be in the future due to this research. Additionally, I know several individuals who have had their lives impacted by shipping debates. The DM I received of the 156-page post regarding harassment was, as I said, not the first time I have encountered the impacts of cyberbullying, a reality discussed in depth by Brody and Vangelisti. I am left asking at what point the research demands become unethical to the researcher. This is research that deserves to be done. Fandom changes need to be studied for the field to remain current with the subject of interest. However, I find the suggestions I have come across through articles and speaking to colleagues researching dangerous groups to be Band-Aids rather than in-depth solutions. I do not have an answer, but I do have a resigned frustration. For now, the most I can offer is this thesis. Future researchers should know that they put themselves and others in danger when they study hostile groups. How much danger is bound to vary, but the possibility of risk exists and should be weighed personally.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

When I started writing fanfiction at twelve, I had no idea the subject would become a focus of my academic interests. Back then, fanfiction was something I was viscerally ashamed of; heaven forbid my mom discovered I was reading stories with sex. I was a preteen, and middle school was awful, but my friend showed me Wattpad.com and fanfiction.net. There is this idea I have run into online that as we age, we stop enjoying things we love. I have wondered before if this is part of why Pro-shippers being framed as older often comes with an implication of shame. I try, now, to enjoy fanfiction guilt-free. I was embarrassed when I was younger–I do not want to be embarrassed now, too. Helping with this is the number of times I have talked with others about reading fanfiction, considering it literature, and viewing fan texts as genuine works of art, whatever a genuine work of art may be. I have found that such conversations are deeply validating, not just to myself but to other fans who have not often been given the opportunity to talk about fandom offline. These discussions have moved fandom from the online mediums of my life to the world beyond the screen. A dear friend once asked me why I did not study English if I liked writing so much. She convinced me I could use fanfiction as a jumping-off point and attend college while writing original works. I took her advice but still found myself wanting to linger at the jumping point, wanting to return to fanfiction and ask questions I saw occurring in fan spaces.

Having started college in 2017, I found myself studying English alongside the growth of Anti-shipping, and its existence nagged at me. In 2019, I asked my friend as we started our Discord server why no one was talking about Anti-shipping outside of online places. Turns out they were, and although questions about Anti-shippers are as new as they are, fan studies is more vast than I had initially imagined. Cultural theorist Roland Barthes is not a strange citation to see

in fan research; in his work, *Death of The Author*, he writes, “The image of literature to be found in ordinary culture is tyrannically centred on the author, his person, his life, his tastes, his passions” (143). To Barthes, people often enshrine the idea that “The *explanation* of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the *author* ‘confiding’ in us” (143) in their minds and interpretations of texts. I find this idea to be highly prevalent within Anti-shipper rhetoric. Their posts coalesce around the idea that what a fan author produces is an inherent reflection of them. To an Anti-shipper, when a fan creates content that includes textual elements such as sexual violence, the author ‘confides’ in them the desire to engage in that violence. This is not to say that a text can reveal nothing about an author or that a creator gives nothing of themselves to their writing. However, I argue that art, being as endlessly complex as it is, should not be described with such broad strokes. Just as the vast majority of horror movie enjoyers cannot be said to want to kill others, Pro-shippers, or anyone who enjoys dark fiction or depictions of violent, even deviant sex, do not inherently want those events to happen. Fantasy can be enjoyed in just that realm, the fantastic.

This leads, in my mind, to perhaps the most disconcerting aspect of Anti-shipping rhetoric: the framing of fiction as reality. If a fictional character is “literally 16 years old” (☁ kira [@strwbry_kira]), then the creators of the texts are not engaging in a fantasy; they are coercing people. This frame gives the language used throughout these arguments, such as accusations of pedophilia, incest, abuse, and rape, more depth. Anti-shippers are not simply accusing other fans of illegal acts; they are creating a victim. Their accusations, which reject middle ground or nuance, leave no room for the text and reader negotiations Barthes implies. Cornel Sandvoss writes, “By defining the act of reading as a form of dialogue between text and

reader, in fandom and elsewhere, we enter into a wider social and cultural commitment as to what texts are for and what we believe the uses of reading to be" (28). Anti-shipping framing, which places fictional characters as existing people, does not define reading in this way. This language gives no room to the text and the reader, filling the space of the creative process with an all-powerful god author and a living subject. The living subject is at the mercy of the god author's whims, the author's deepest desires and longings. If the author chooses, their living subjects can fall prey to all manner of heinous acts. An author can rape them, beat them, or kill them, and by doing this, they have committed those harms from the perspective of Anti-shippers. For Anti-shippers espousing this rhetoric, the author is not dead but alive and monstrous.

In this supposed reality, we must ask ourselves what texts are for (Sandvoss 28). If fiction is not fantasy, then readers are witnesses. If characters face danger, the witnesses must necessarily be participants. It is, after all, their turning of the page, or scrolling as is the case for many online mediums, that progresses the story, forcing the characters to live through the events of the narrative yet again. Why would anyone willingly watch another human being be hurt? Why would anyone claim to enjoy such acts? Surely, you would not want someone like that in a shared space—would you?

There is, I argue, a nonnegligible portion of Anti-shippers who believe this. While this thesis cannot definitively prove whether this is the case, the corpus of posts I've analyzed (which is a fraction of the posts I've read over the past 14 years in fandom) demonstrate Anti-shipping rhetoric is prevalent. This rhetoric is powerful, and, as I've identified, this harassment has pushed fans out of shared spaces with threats to their reputation. It is difficult to fight against and presents Pro-shippers as "bad" fans in such a way that insinuates they're predatory individuals. While some may use these arguments purely because they are effective tactics, we must

remember that the work rhetoric does is not exclusive to its target. Put simply, by using and being exposed to these arguments, some Anti-shippers may come to believe their claims wholeheartedly.

Where does fiction live in this belief? Barthes writes that "To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on the text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing" (147). When Anti-shippers give fan works an author and a meaning derived from the presupposed inclinations of that creator, they do far more than close the writing. A fan text has a final signified; it points to the author's desires in a direct manner of communication. At the same time, the fan work is not real. The fan work is not fiction. The fan work is not a text to be decoded. Instead, the text's meanings are glaringly obvious, and the text itself is a living act of violence. Anti-shippers limit fan texts by removing the text, as a fictional conception, altogether. The author is a criminal because they have conducted criminal activities; worse, they publicly display their misconduct. Barthes goes on to write that "we know that to give writing its future, it is necessary to overthrow the myth: the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (148), but here the author is far from dead, and the reader has long been born. The reader plays the part of witness, participant, and accomplice. The reader wants what the author does. A Pro-shipper need not produce content to be a Pro-shipper. The enjoyment of a "problematic" ship is enough. Here, fictional writing has no future. It is not fictional. The logical conclusion to the idea that fictional characters are real is that there is no fiction. In this sense, fiction lives nowhere. One could say fiction is dead, but if these arguments are to be believed, it never existed in the first place.

Anti-shipping rhetoric is impacting fandoms. I will not argue that Anti-shipping alone is altering broader social conceptions of fiction and the place of writing and art in the world.

However, I will posit that it is a symptom of deeper issues regarding changing conversations around textual interpretation. Anti-shipping, with its ties to Anti-fan, Anti-slash, and Anti-fujoshi sentiments, is a continuation of such debates and the social anxieties surrounding the presence of erotic material in public spaces. Some Anti-shippers may claim that Pro-shippers are sexual deviants out of genuine belief. Meanwhile, others, in a bid to be seen as "good" fans in front of the endless public provided by large social media platforms like Twitter (X), may police the behaviors of other fans who post material regarding less socially accepted sexual acts. Additionally, there is the possibility that some Anti-shippers behave as such in an act of self-preservation.

Regardless of why Anti-shippers post their accusations, Anti-shipping stands out from other instances of anti behavior and is reauthoring fandoms on multiple levels. As Gelms states, "a key impact that online harassment has on public discourse: it limits *who* participates and *what* is discussed" (185). By placing pressure on other fans to act in accordance with their views on what fiction may permissibly contain, Anti-shippers limit who can safely participate in public fandom. If fans are not in line with these views, they risk being accused of crimes that can impact their reputations online and offline. By publishing information about themselves in highly visible locations such as Twitter (X) bios, Anti-shippers also place quieter pressure on their fellow fans, telling them without the need for a post that they could be sanctioned for their actions. This results in a hostile environment that Pro-shippers, no longer able to act as citizens of the space, may choose to leave.

As a result, Anti-shippers reauthor fandoms by altering current fan spaces and creating the need for new ones. When Pro-shippers leave fan spaces where they have experienced harassment or felt rejected, they create new ones, crafting new communities. These communities are not

guaranteed protection, however. Anti-shippers have been observed using information from more private Discord servers to "Call Out" fans (Drouin 133). However, social bonds can still form in those spaces, and even though some fans may live double lives, there is some benefit to be gained from drawing together. Without those moderated, semi-private spaces, I would not have met some of my closest friends. However, there is a distinct feeling of loss in knowing that some fandom spaces have been destroyed due to shipping arguments, a reality noted by @somaybelikeno. During the antiphan/truepan war, some artists deleted their works and removed themselves from the *Danny Phantom* fandom entirely. Their works now exist primarily in the hands of those who had saved their fan productions to their personal devices. This is purely anecdotal for their privacy, yet some tweets, like @___SAMMX's, reflect people leaving fandoms. When Anti-shippers push other fans out, it is not only the people who leave. It is their contributions, too. Exiting fandom can include removing the work one has given to the space leaving a hole behind. I did not hear about the *Danny Phantom* fan artists leaving the fandom from those artists but from fans who missed them. I was shown their art secondhand. There is nothing I can compare this to but grief. The fandoms I have participated in, and the tweets included in this project, convey grief.

Anti-shippers are shifting the paradigms of fandom. They do this through numerous means but move mainly from the idea that an individual's ships reflect their moral character (Larsen et al. 5). This argument goes against previous fandom notions of ships as a matter of taste. To Anti-shippers, ships are no longer a fan's personal business. Instead, individuals can experience harm through these romantic pairings–namely, the characters themselves and minors who come across erotic material online. The tweets gathered for this project demonstrated that shipping debates focused heavily on concepts of disapproval regarding ships where that

disapproval lay primarily in perceived moral failings. Dieterle et al. write that "citizenship is a category that often describes the kinds of attributes needed for participation in public life" (202). Where previously citizenship within fandom spaces included such attributes as an openness to fellow fan contribution and participation (Bourdaa 387; Jenkins 280), Anti-shippers challenge this arrangement through widespread, public and private sanctioning of fans and their creations. Their rhetoric frequently frames fictional characters as real to push the narrative that Pro-shippers are engaged in actual criminal activity. Further, this frame calls into question more significant issues about what place fiction has in the world and who authors and readers are. By presenting fiction as reality, new relationships between consumers of fiction and fiction itself take form. What is the role of the author if their characters are not theirs or the audience's, but their own person? Where does the reader fit into that equation? How can the paradigms of media fandom remain intact if the very concept of fiction is challenged?

History is an essential aspect of fandom. Fans record events in canon, pass down stories of previous fandom events, share fan works, and come together in times of fear and grief. I find myself orbiting one final question. What happens to a fandom's history when its members are removed? The internet is a vast space, an ephemeral place. While people say what is on the internet remains there forever, some things go missing. Ghosts are left, snippets of a person's online contributions floating around after they are gone. In fandoms I participate in, there is a distinct haunting. There are pieces of art, stories, songs, videos, and people that we will never get to know. Vast portions of their contributions have been wiped away in the hopes of safety. To those of us still in fandoms, these fans and their works have died in a way. When these individuals leave, they take the knowledge of previous fandom norms and paradigms with them. They take history.

When fandom members are pushed out of fan spaces the odds of those fandoms changing further increases. This is why Anti-shipping is as unparalleled as it is. There are fewer voices around to say, “Things used to be different.” Fandoms have never been perfect. They never will be. However, the more people leave fandom, the more widespread Anti-shipping will become. To keep shipping a matter of taste, an activity set apart from morals, a pushback against Anti-shipping would have to occur. Efforts would need to be made by Pro-ship fans to display their thoughts on the debate. Such efforts do exist. Some of the tweets sampled displayed this behavior. However, there is risk in such actions, and as such, I cannot blame other fans for choosing to join private groups rather than publicly interacting with fandoms—after all, I often do the same. Due to this, researchers of shipping debates must take up an important task: recording. As fandoms continue to change, we owe it to ourselves as fans and scholars to describe these events and provide fellow fans not only the opportunity to see their concerns addressed but a tangible record of the change happening around them.

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Appendix A: Search Terms Utilized by Fandom

1. Genshin Impact: Genshin Impact Anti Ship, Genshin Impact Anti shipping, Genshin Impact Pro Ship, Genshin Impact Proshipper, Genshin Impact Pro Shipping
2. Killing Stalking: Killing Stalking Antis, Killing Stalking Anti Ship, Killing Stalking Anti shipper, Killing Stalking Pro Ship, Killing Stalking Proshipper, Killing Stalking Pro Shipping
3. Harry Potter: Harry Potter Anti Ship, Harry Potter Anti Shipping, Harry Potter Pro Ship, Harry Potter Pro Shipping, Harry Potter Proship
4. Hannibal: Hannibal Anti Ship, Hannibal Pro Ship
5. Homestuck: Homestuck Anti Ship, Homestuck Pro Ship, Homestuck Proship, Homestuck Proshipper
6. My Hero Academia: MHA Anti Ship, MHA Antishipping, My Hero Academia Antis, MHA Pro Ship, MHA Pro Shipping, My Hero Academia Pro Ship
7. Star Wars: Star Wars Anti Reylo, Star Wars Anti Ship, Star Wars Pro Ship, Star Wars Pro Reylo
8. Steven Universe: Steven Universe Antis, Steven Universe Anti Ship, Steven Universe Proship, Steven Universe Pro Ship, Steven Universe Proshipping
9. Supernatural: SPN Anti Ship, Supernatural Anti Ship, SPN Pro Ship, Supernatural Pro Ship, Supernatural Proshipper
10. Voltron: Legendary Defenders: VLD Anti Ship, Voltron: Legendary Defenders Anti Ship, VLD Pro Ship, Voltron: Legendary Defenders Pro Ship, VLD Proshipper, VLD Proshipping

Appendix B: Graphs of Coding Results

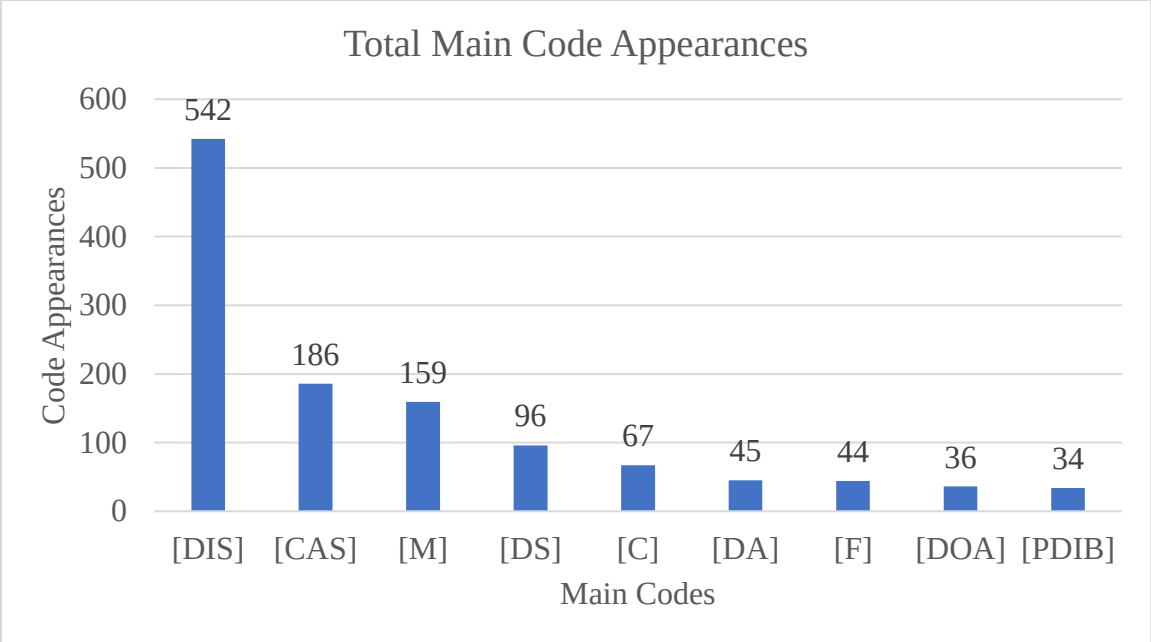

Figure 2: Total Main Code Appearances.

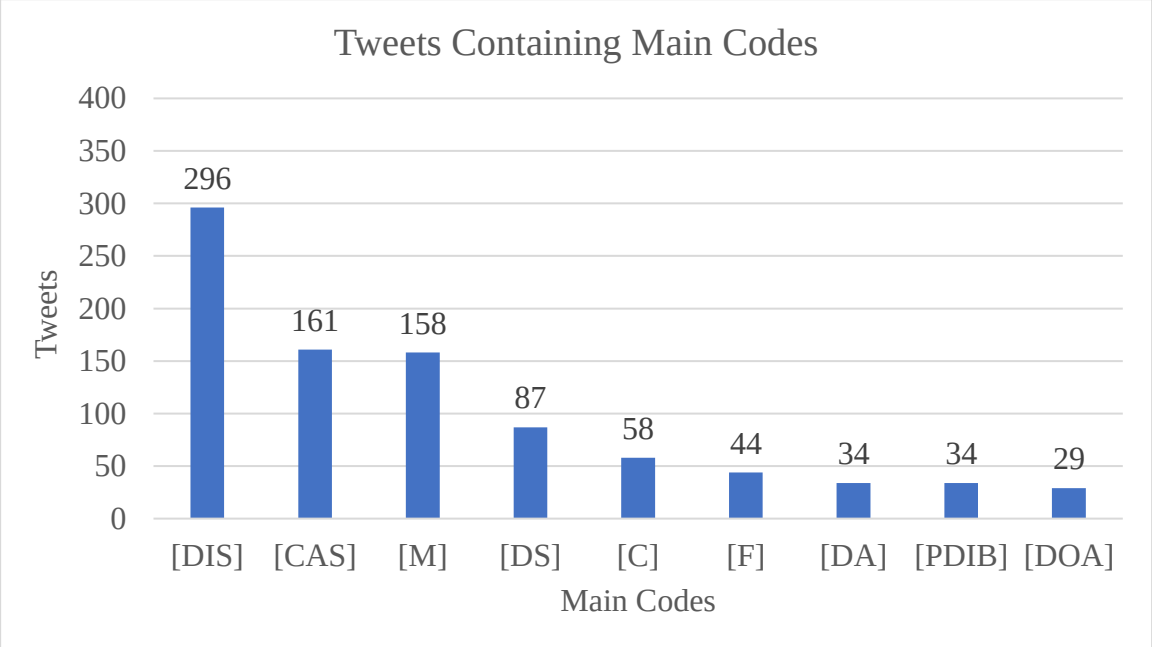

Figure 3: Tweets Containing Main Codes.

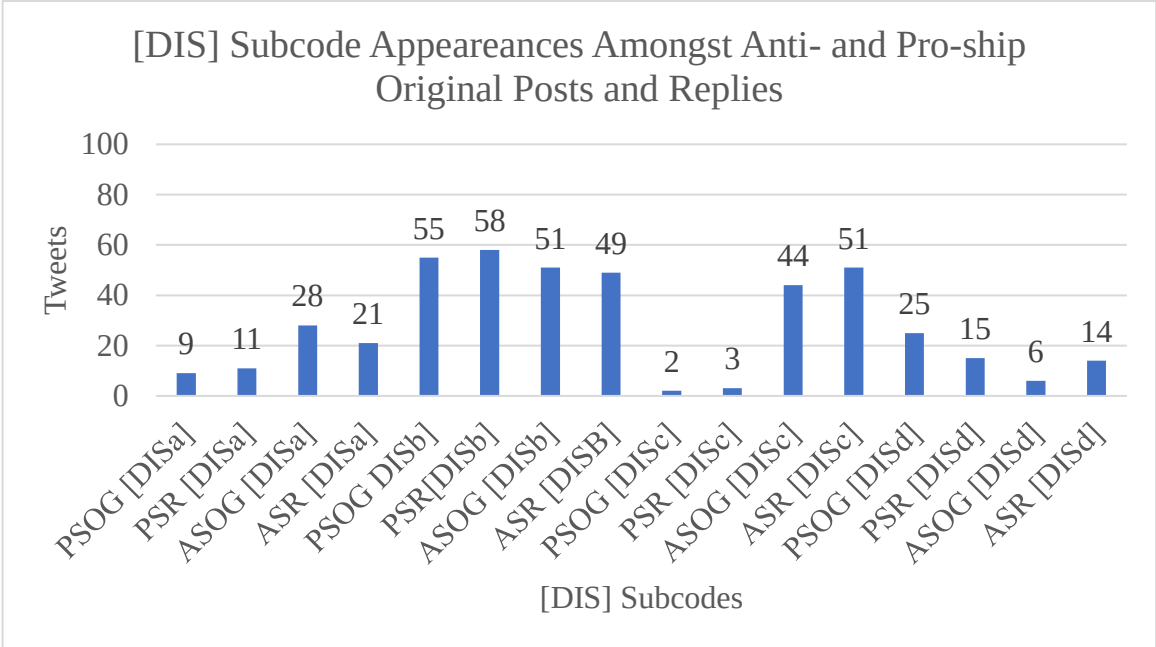

Figure 4: [DIS] Subcode Appearances Amongst Anti- and Pro-ship Original Post and Replies.

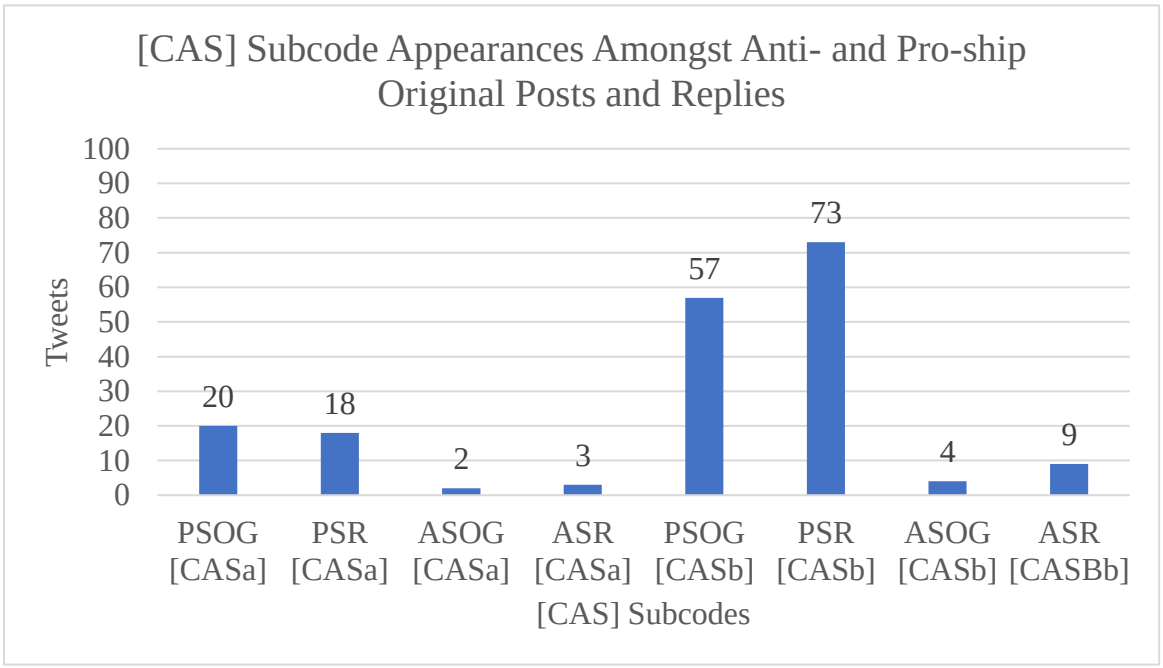

Figure 5: [CAS] Subcode Appearances Amongst Anti- and Pro-ship Original Posts and Replies.

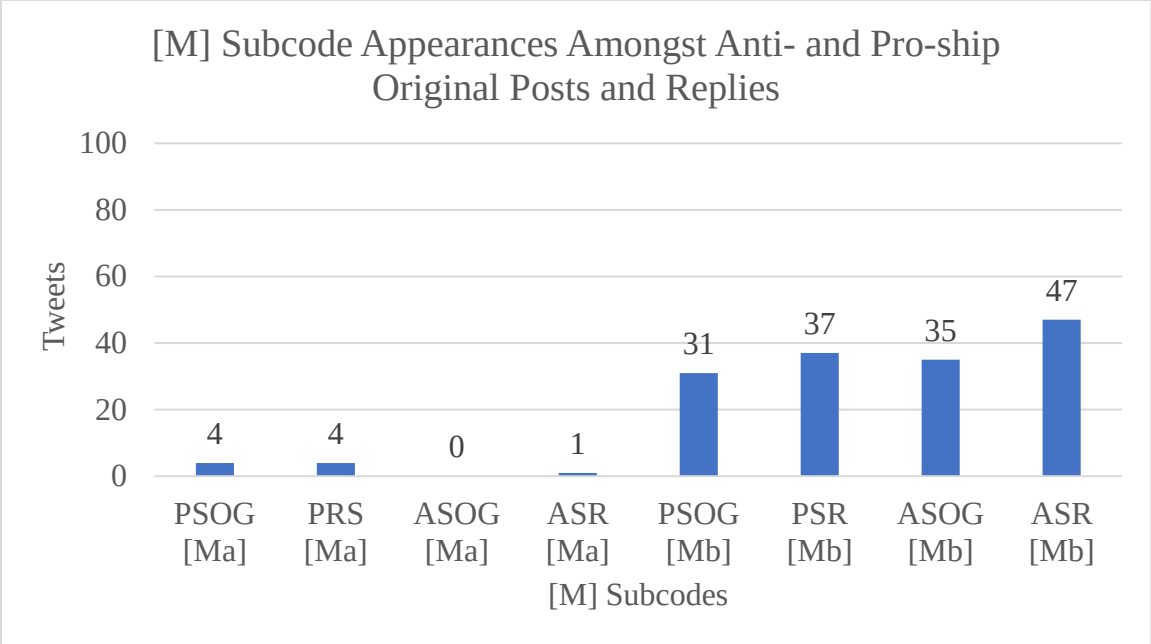

Figure 6: [M] Subcode Appearances Amongst Anti- and Pro-ship Original Posts and Replies.

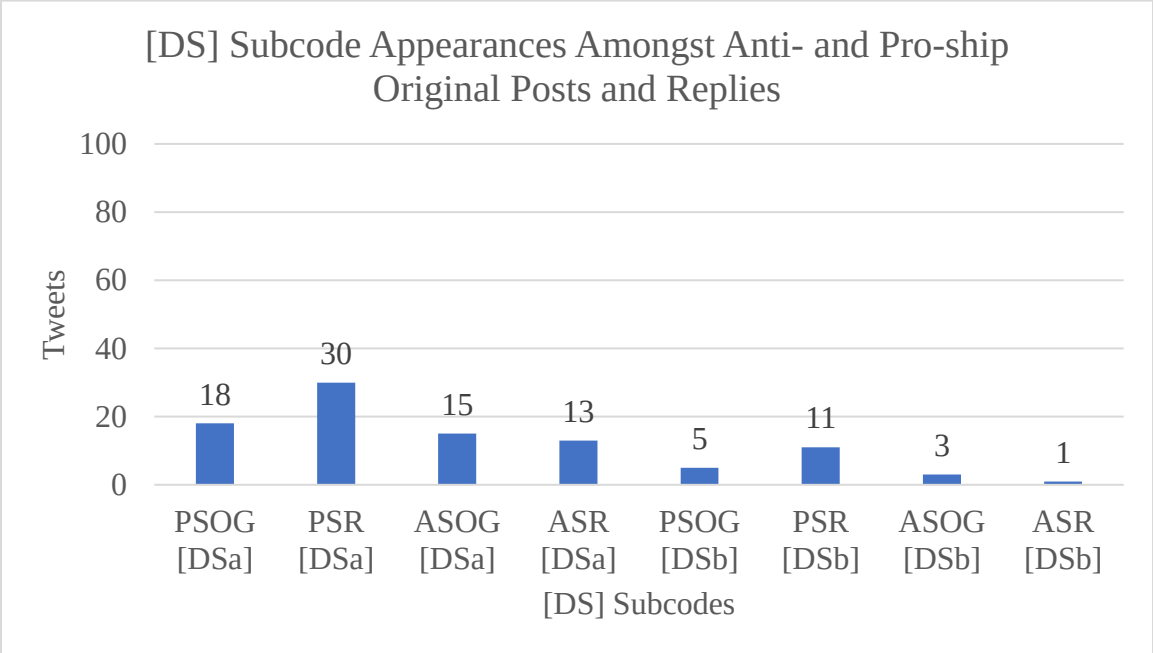

Figure 7: [DS] Subcode Appearances Amongst Anti- and Pro-ship Original Posts and Replies.

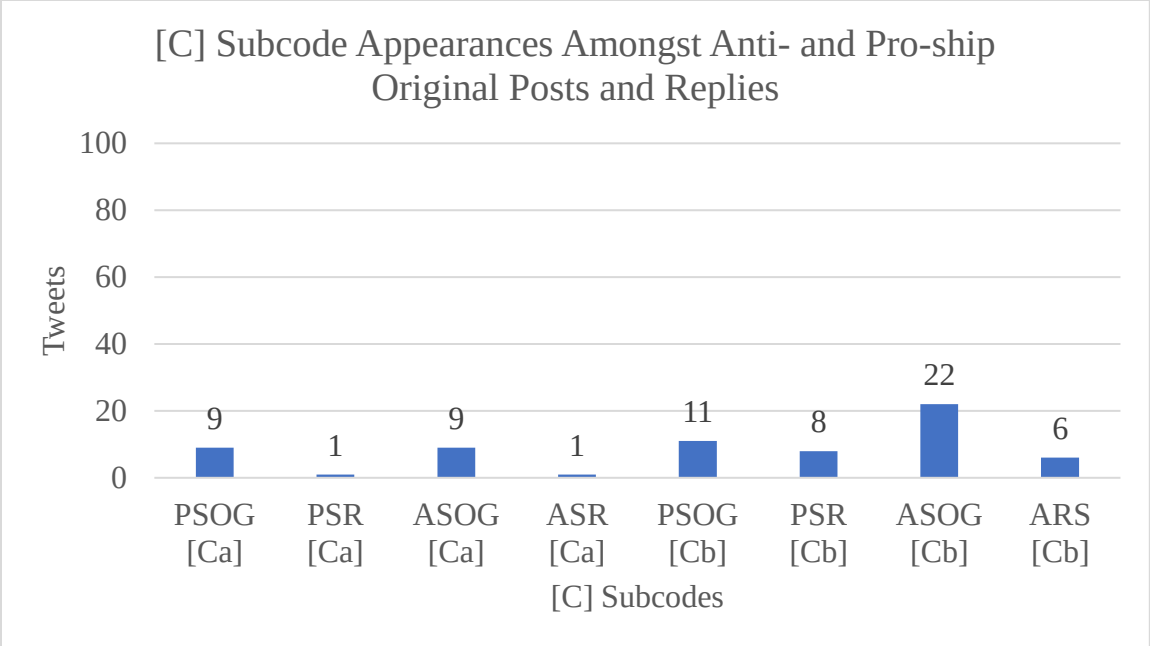

Figure 8: [C] Subcode Appearances Amongst Anti- and Pro-ship Original Post and Replies.

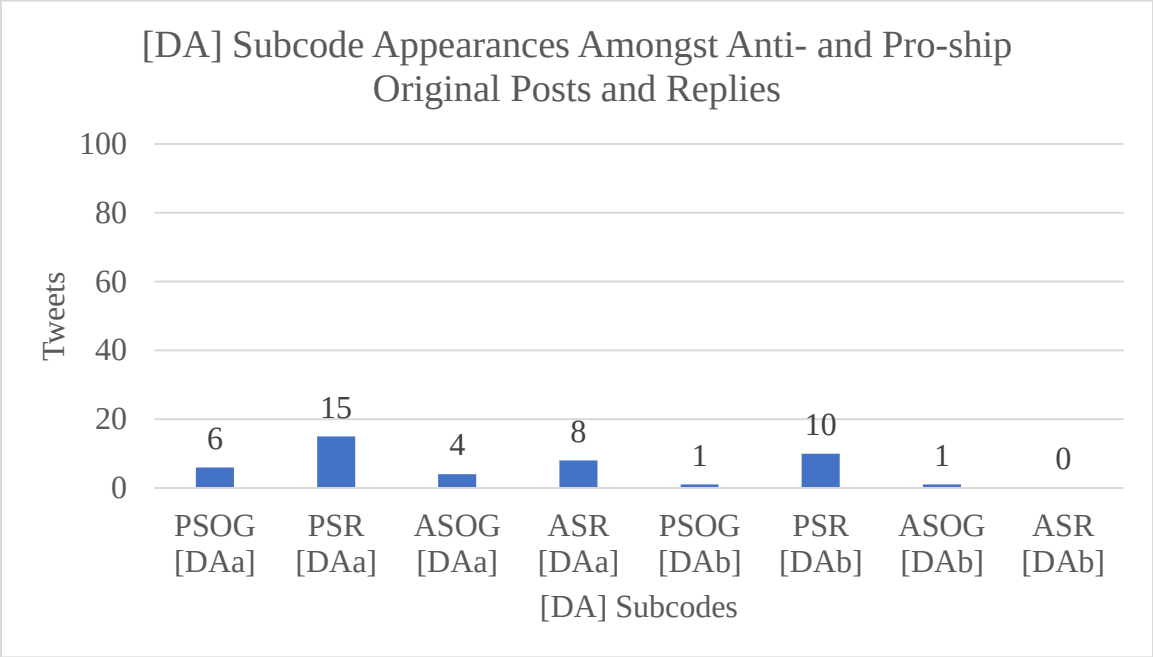

Figure 9: [DA] Subcode Appearances Amongst Anti- and Pro-ship Original Posts and Replies.

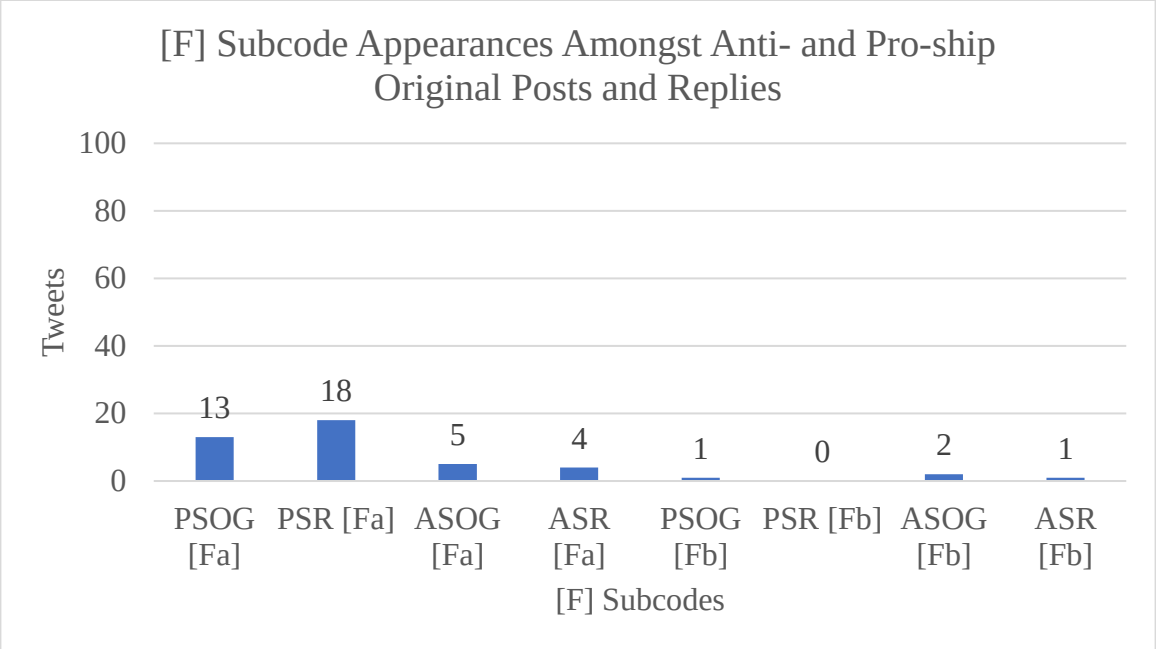

Figure 10: [F] Subcode Appearances Amongst Anti- and Pro-ship Original Posts and Replies.

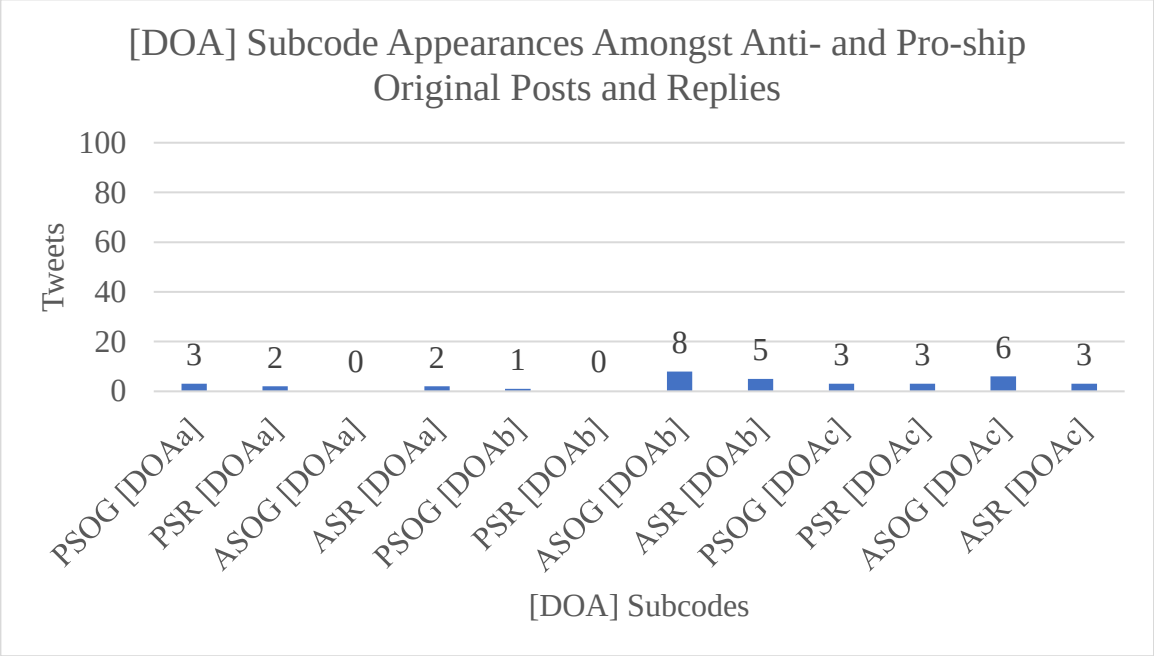

Figure 11: [DOA] Subcode Appearances Amongst Anti- and Pro-ship Original Posts and Replies.

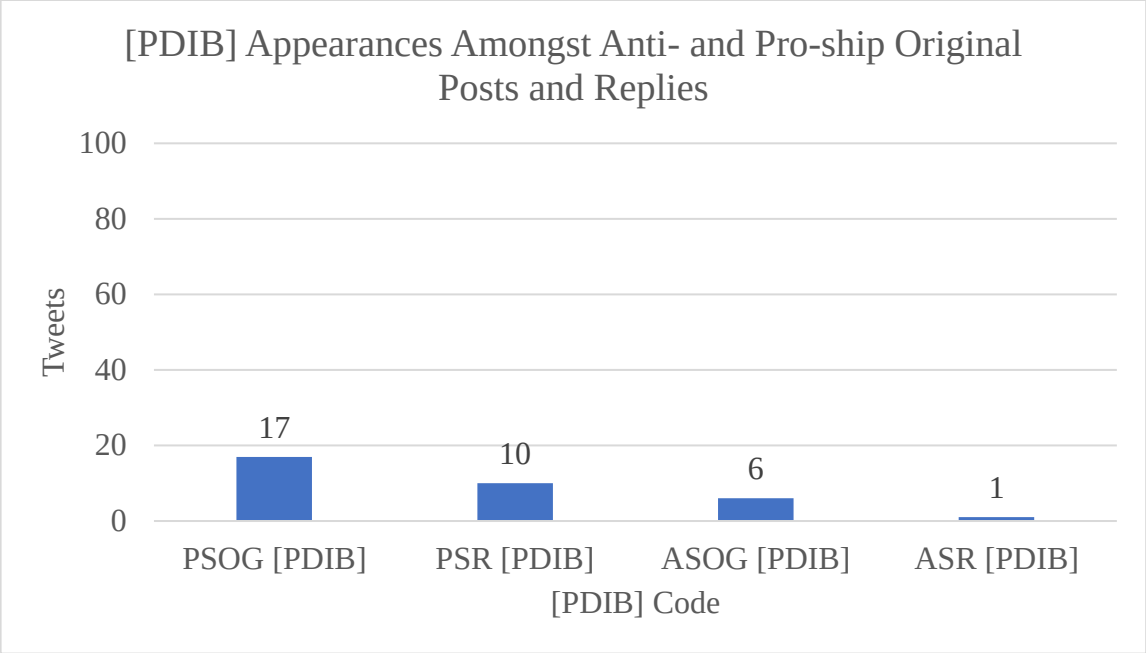

Figure 12: [PDIB] Appearances Amongst Anti- and Pro-ship Original Posts and Replies.