In Fake Geek Girls: Fandom, Gender, and the Convergence Culture Industry, Suzanne Scott explores shifts in fandom through the trajectory of fan studies scholarship and the mainstreaming of geek culture. Scott examines the relations between gender and the industry, culture, and communities of media fandoms to advance a critique of the foundational feminist positioning of fan studies. Each of the six chapters focuses on different aspects of fan culture including the manufacturing of the fanboy identity; spreadable misogyny and the “fake geek girl”; fan labour and professionalization; and futures for fan engagement in a postfeminist landscape. Throughout this work it is clear that Scott is aware of, and speaking directly to, a distinctly feminist fan studies scholarly audience; one that is both cognizant of the history and tensions of the field, and most poised to change it.

Central to Scott’s analysis in Fake Geek Girls is her framing of what she terms the “convergence culture industry”; a concept that combines elements of Adorno and Horkheimer’s (1947) twentieth century “culture industry” and Jenkins’ (2006) early twenty-first century “convergence culture.” Where the “culture industry” would suggest fans are being controlled by the media’s mainstreaming of geek culture, and “convergence culture” suggests a utopian landscape in which fans influence and participate in geek media production, Scott instead shows how the androcentric packaging of the “fan” under convergence culture has catapulted white, cisgender, able-bodied, straight male fans to being one of the most influential demographics for media corporations to cater to. All the while, Scott reminds us that women are systematically left out of this demographic despite having been part of geek fandom all along, one of many paradoxes Scott highlights throughout the work.

Chapter one deals with the history of the field of fan studies. It works to trace a trajectory for new scholars, while also reminding established fan scholars that the theoretical frameworks from which their research stems are not infallible. In arguing for the current political need of fan studies sticking to its feminist roots, Scott acknowledges parallels between fan scholars nostalgic for a field that once
was distinctly resistant to male-centric subcultural studies, and that of nostalgic “fanboys” resistant to change or progression of the media with which they engage. Gender remains a focus at the root of these tensions, especially as Scott shows in Chapter two how the “fanboy” identity was reified through journalists, scholars, and the media industry’s attempts to contain and control fandoms at the expense of the “fangirl” identity. In Chapter three, Scott goes on to explore what she describes as “spreadable misogyny,” another play on Jenkins’ work with Joshua Green and Sam Ford (2013) on “spreadable media,” to show how the “fake geek girl” insult is leveraged in response to fanboys’ discomfort with being at once rejected by hegemonic society, and granted a great deal of power within it. In Chapters four through six, Scott draws attention to shifting relationship dynamics between fans and professional creators, and the way the barrier between the two is upheld or transgressed through this relational shift. Scott reinforces her analysis of the “convergence culture industry” by articulating the difference between female fan desire and their capacity to professionalize transformative fan works, concluding that women’s capacity is hampered by the structures of the convergence culture industry’s focus on fanboy methods of engagement.

The strengths of Fake Geek Girls lie in its ability to deftly navigate the shifting tensions within fandoms and geek culture, in both content and structure of the text. It is accessible to both new scholars to the field of fan studies and established scholars grappling with its shifting focus. One thing that adds to this accessibility is the way in which Scott transitions between chapters, seeming to mirror significant moments of transition for fandom within the convergence culture industry. This said, with binary gender being the main axis of power examined, as it has been throughout fan studies development, there are places where a more intersectional analysis would benefit Scott’s argument. In Chapter four’s discussion of Yvette Nicole Brown’s repeated guest appearances on the fan aftershow The Talking Dead, that Brown is both coded as an emotional fangirl and described by cast members as the show’s “therapist” leaves room for further examination of how the fandom of The Talking Dead, The Walking Dead, and these collaborative fan spaces frame women of colour as responsible for the emotional labour of an entire (male-centric) fandom. Likewise, though cosplay is discussed in Chapter six’s exploration of transformative female fanworks under the convergence culture industry, given cosplay’s presence in both analog and digital geek culture spaces and as a site of professionalization for fans, I wonder how it might factor into Scott’s analysis in Chapters four and five which explore containment of fan labour and professionalization of fanworks, and especially how cosplay might be examined from an intersectional perspective.

Overall, Fake Geek Girls is a comprehensive examination of fandom and its relationship to mainstream media. Scott’s conclusion acknowledges her limitations and bias as a white scholar as she draws on the anti-racist and intersectional
work of Robin DiAngelo (2011) and Kimberlé Crenshaw (1993) to interrogate her own fragility and the privileges of fan studies more broadly. Scott’s call to action is directed specifically toward her assumed audience: fan studies scholars who, like her, are concerned with women in fandom and who may have not yet fully grappled with their own fragility or biases with respect to the field. *Fake Geek Girls* does well to show how fandom has transformed under the “convergence culture industry” and who has been left behind as a result. In so doing, it effectively highlights how a nostalgic yearning for pre-convergence culture fandom, when fans were still relegated to the outer limits of hegemonic society before geek culture and mainstream culture were almost synonymous, has contributed to critical tensions in both fan communities and among the scholars that study them.

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