Re-Examining Resistance: Fan-Produced Queer Readings and Teen Wolf

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RE-EXAMINING RESISTANCE: FAN-PRODUCED QUEER READINGS

AND TEEN WOLF

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RE-EXAMINING RESISTANCE: FAN-PRODUCED QUEER READINGS
AND TEEN WOLF

by

JOSHUA J. ESPINOZA

THESIS

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Abstract

MTV’s popular television series, *Teen Wolf* (2011), has amassed a large online following of fans that create their own queer narratives through fan-fiction, subverting the show’s hegemonic heteronormativity. Through a textual thematic analysis of *Teen Wolf*, this case study illustrates how online fandoms can subvert hegemony through queer readings of literary characters, resisting the dominant heteronormativity on network television. This article argues that rearticulating the show’s narratives into queer readings functions as a form of LGBT resistance, effectively counteracting the heteronormativity and hegemony portrayed on screen. This study examines how *Teen Wolf* approaches queer content, including homoeroticism and LGBT themes as comical relief, examined through queer theory, Hall’s model of Encoding/Decoding and Bakhtin’s literary mode of subversion known as the carnivalesque.

Keywords
Popular culture, network television, queer theory, Carnivalesque, Encoding/Decoding, resistance, queer resistance, fandom, user-generated content, fan-fiction, Teen Wolf
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Chapter 1: Introduction

In a high school in the fictitious town of Beacon Hills, California, a female werewolf brings a young man in a red jacket into the pool area against his will. It is nighttime and the rest of the city's residents are attending the school's lacrosse game. The young man, Stiles, comes face to face with an older man, Derek, also a werewolf, the alpha leader of his pack. The very human Stiles apprehensively responds with sarcasm to Derek's question about a creature that Stiles crossed paths with earlier in the episode. Derek threateningly punctures a basketball he is holding with his claws, asking Stiles again. He begins to describe a lizard-werewolf hybrid that has been terrorizing the town as the creature menacingly appears on the staircase behind them. Stiles and the two werewolves are no match for the monster, and Derek is soon injected with the lizard's paralyzing toxins, while the female wolf runs away.

Unable to move, Derek allows Stiles to drag him along, but in the chaos, Derek is knocked into the swimming pool. Stiles looks on as his cell phone falls out of his pocket, choosing to dive in after the werewolf. Struggling to stay afloat in the middle of the pool, the men realize that the creature is avoiding the water, as if it cannot swim. The lizard hovers around the perimeter as the two argue over the best course of action to take, but Stiles lets Derek sink to the bottom while he retrieves his cell phone. He calls for help, then once again dives into the water, tightly embracing the other man as they fight to stay above the surface. The two rivals are now forced to rely on each other to avoid the monster until help arrives. For the casual viewer, this scene would be just another storyline in the supernatural thriller that is MTV's Teen Wolf (2011). To a legion of devoted fans that not only watch the series religiously, but also write their own stories based on the show’s characters, the homoerotic subtext of this scene is confirmation that these two heterosexual characters make the perfect couple.
The pairing is known online as *Sterek*, a combination of both of the characters' names, and remains one of the most popular couples on the show, despite not actually being one. Sterek fans, a notable portion of the *Teen Wolf* fan base, have taken to writing their own interpretations of Stiles and Derek in a homosexual relationship, otherwise known as a slash pairing. Sterek has won a number of online surveys, the most impressive of which being After Elton's September 2012 poll, where 57% of 5 million users voted the pairing as their favorite couple (Ayers, 2012). Meyer (2013) channels Stuart Hall in explaining that fans will often identify so closely with certain elements of a particular media that they will use said elements in other parts of their lives. In the case of Sterek, these fans go beyond merely watching the television show, opting to additionally create their own stories based on the existing characters, modifying their sexuality to better fit their needs. Willis (2003) refers to this as a digital appropriation, resulting in a participatory culture in which fans find new meanings in media texts, which the original creators may have never intended.

The particular set of fan-fiction writers who repurpose straight characters as homosexual in their writings, as in the case of Sterek fans, challenge widely held beliefs regarding homosexuality, both subverting and resisting the dominant cultural structure. These fans answer their own call for realistic and romantic stories featuring gay characters, all the while challenging the powerful entertainment industry and its limited LGBT representations. The fan-fiction that has come out of the *Teen Wolf* fandom has influenced its creators, culminating in retooled characterizations, ambiguously highlighting overarching themes from popular fan-created stories on screen. These fan-fiction writers actively resist the powerful Hollywood system’s dominant heteronormativity by subverting its literary characters into the very queer content they crave. Written from both a fan and academic perspective, this project seeks to analyze how user-
generated content influences *Teen Wolf*, to better understand fan-fiction as a subversion of dominant ideals regarding homosexuality and queer resistance to heteronormative hegemony as disseminated through network television.

1.1 **Queer Theory and Character Identification**

While the television landscape is slowly becoming more diverse, most network programming still shies away from depicting candid portrayals of sexual orientations that deviate from heterosexuality. Sexual orientation in most cases is defined or classified as homosexual or heterosexual, revolving around "the process of people coming out, or affirming a homosexual identity in a dominant heterosexual environment" (Phillips, 2007, p. 108). Though a form of self-identification, for the purpose of this study, sexual orientation is operationalized as sexual behavior, based on whom a person or character has sexual contact with (Matthews, Blosnich, Farmer, & Adams, 2014). Queer theory dualistically draws on the “disassociation with the supposed rigidity of the heterosexual/homosexual binary” in identifying categories like gay, and the “potential denaturalization of…heteronormativity as opposed to homosexuality” (Rothmann, 2013, p. 43). Queer theory scholars maintain that heteronormativity is “the discursive power granted to the compulsory heterosexual matrix in Western society…[relying] upon fixed notions of gender, sexuality and identity and veils its constructedness and anomalies by feigning universality and rendering the heteronormative discourse hegemonic” (Dhaenens, 2012, p. 443). By these standards, queer theory proposes that homosexuality is positioned as a “subservient sexual orientation,” as opposed to the normal and dominant heterosexuality (Rothmann, 2013, p. 42). Cultural hegemony, a subsidiary of Marxist beliefs, maintains that the dominant ruling class influences and shapes society’s value, beliefs and even their perception (Lears, 1985). Dhaenens
(2012) further argues that dominant society’s heteronormative discourse deprecates, despises and excludes individuals that do not engage in straight institutions and practices, such as marriage and reproduction, or values, such as monogamy. In his groundbreaking 1951 manifesto, *The Homosexual in America*, Donald Webster Cory compares the homosexual minority status to that of nationalities, religions and other ethnic groups that have been legally denied civil liberties, resulting in an “inferior social position,” and most notably, exclusion from mainstream media and culture (1951, p. 157). This notion of sexual superiority is evident in widespread homophobia and extends far beyond the world of marriage and politics.

Notable queer theorists readily identify that heteronormative ideals are widely perpetrated by popular culture and in particular network television. Network television inherently represents hegemony, portraying the values and norms of past generations, and is resistant to change by its very nature. Television plays a large part in the process of social definition, and as such, negative or stereotypical portrayals of gays and lesbians as weak, comical or immoral can hinder societal acceptance of LGBT individuals. However, being ignored by the media can be even more detrimental to sexual minorities than stereotypical portrayals alone. In 1991, Gross introduced the idea of *symbolic annihilation*, explaining that relative invisibility makes it difficult for LGBT audiences to identify and find significance in the media they are interacting with. The narratives of most, if not all, television programing is aimed towards an everyday audience, showcasing storylines that “promote [straight] coupling and commitment invariably in the form of marriage” (Aaron, 2009, pp. 69-70). Even on shows that include both heterosexual and homosexual situations, characters are still shown to adhere to the heteronormative norms of relationships, further reiterating those hegemonic values. Gross (1991) attributes these patterns in the depiction of majority and minority groups in the media as a direct
result of minorities having little to no control over its means of production. In the case of the Hollywood machine, the producers of television and other forms of entertainment are directly responsible for the images and ideas presented to mass publics, shaping beliefs and influencing behaviors, surreptitiously manipulating how audiences interpret messages. Gross’s figure illustrates these patterns: the solid line represents most programing, depicting majority images as produced for and by the majority; the dashed line signifies a smaller subset of programing which may include or revolve around minorities, but is still very much made for and by the majority. The dotted line then represents a very small percentage of media content, with depictions of minorities produced for and by minorities.

![Figure 1](image)

*Figure 1* Gross’ model of media patterns of depictions of majority and minority images (Gross, 1998, p. 89)

According to Gross’ model, *Teen Wolf* falls under a fourth unique, and maybe rare, category of media which depicts minorities as produced by minorities for the majority. The show’s creator and show runner, Jeff Davis, himself an openly gay man, brings a distinctive perspective to a show that has attracted many LGBT viewers. Nonetheless, queer representation on television is often downplayed, instead “reiterating and consolidating patriarchal and traditional notions of gender and sexuality” (Dhaenens, 2012, p. 443). Continual viewing of television shows instills hegemonic values in viewers through mediated communication between
the audience and the media's characters in a process known as Parasocial Interaction. Limited representations of queer characters on television not only deprives LGBT audiences of positive visibility, but further requires that these viewers project their own narratives onto otherwise straight characters, which many do through the creation of user-generated content.

Parasocial Interaction (PSI), coined in 1956 by Horton and Wohl, observes audience interaction with media characters (Schramm & Hartmann, 2008). Television, movies and other mediums can "give the illusion of face-to-face [relationships]" with the media's performers, "as if they were in the circle of one's peers" (Horton & Wohl, 1956, p. 215). The actors, or the personae, in any given media, interact with their audiences by exchanging information, supplementing two-way communication. PSI is based entirely on audience perception, with the communication "taking place parasocially rather than interpersonally" (Schiappa, Allen, & Greg, 2007, p. 302). Using visual techniques, directors and producers pay close attention to appearance and gestures, with close-ups of an actor feigning intimacy and literal closeness. Burke (1984) refers to this as the coaching of attitudes, enticing audiences to suspend belief and feel a part of the fictional world they are watching. Parasocial exchanges are unidirectional and lead by the personae, but if a viewer is invested enough in a media, PSI allows "the fictional to [take] precedence over the actual" (Horton & Wohl, 1956, p. 215). Like face-to-face communication, habitual PSI with a personae can lead to an increased feeling of intimacy or loyalty. This intimate communication can be dangerous, as when the heteronormative ideals portrayed on television become internalized as homophobia or other prejudices.

Continual PSI with specific characters allows for the development of a Parasocial Relationship (PSR). Repetitive and dependable interactions with personas can become routine, with audiences feeling as though the personae is sharing their life with the viewer (Horton &
Wohl, 1956). Psychological explanations for PSRs can be as simple as enjoying a television show or a specific actor, to the PSI fulfilling the need for human interaction (Schiappa, Allen, & Greg, 2007). With abundant choices in media genres, audiences develop PSRs with characters that they closely identify with. Viewers who may not fully recognize themselves in the characters presented on television can negotiate their level of identification through the creation of user-generated content, personally altering specific differences between themselves and the personae so as to maximize PSI. The degree of identification with a personae is as important as the level of consumption, as some scholars argue that PSI is a consequence of media use. A viewer may feel their social interaction with a personae is reciprocated through a phenomenon known as paracommunication, depending on how much the viewer feels his or her interpersonal involvement in the PSI is acknowledged by the speaker. Through parasocial interactions, fans can identify which character traits they would like to negotiate or subvert so as to better fit their own narrative. A large segment of television viewers mindlessly consume what is presented, passively internalizing the messages delivered through dialogue and storylines, while a much smaller population appropriates the content, giving them renewed meanings and personal significance (Grossberg, 1992). Given the limited portrayal of queer characters in popular media, queer sensitive audiences must look elsewhere for queer content, often times creating their own based on popular established characters. It is through subversive digital appropriation of Hollywood's existing literary characters that fan-fiction writers resist dominant portrayals of hegemony, recasting heterosexuals on network television and in other media as homosexual (Willis, 2003). User-generated content, and fan-fiction in particular, allows these viewers to transcend parasocial behaviors, creating their own tangible alternative to what is broadcasted on television.
1.2 User-Generated Content: The “You” in YouTube

The Internet has revolutionized the way that audiences consume their favorite media and, subsequently, how they interact with it. Likewise, traditional forms of media such as television, radio, newspaper and other periodicals have evolved to include internet outlets through which their consumers can engage with their product when and where is most convenient. This no strings attached approach lends itself to audiences engaging further with a medium at their own pace, in their own time. No longer are audiences simply passively watching their favorite films and series or listening to music, they are actively engaging and reacting to their media. Music lovers can record themselves singing and dancing to their favorite songs, then upload their video to YouTube, or articulate their reactions in real time to a new episode of a television show on Twitter. But who is the "you" in YouTube? Created by non-professionals, user-generated content (UGC) consists of "blogs, wikis, discussion forums, posts, chats, tweets, podcasts, pins, digital images, video, audio files, [or] other forms of media...created by users of an online system...made available via social media Web sites" (Moens, Li, & Chua, 2014, p. 8). Ultimate fans of a given medium can take social media rituals a step further by designing their own interpretations of characters or situations from a television show or film in the form of text, images, videos or multimedia data (Karpovich, 2007). UGC allows viewers to further engage with their favorite characters, exploring untold stories or repurposing existing ones.

Easy creation and editing software, as well as a generation of digital natives, have lowered the cost and time commitment that would normally go into producing UGC, adding to its rise in popularity. Jenkins (2006) argues that new technologies have created an intersection of new and old media in which audiences demand to participate in the culture. Through the process of creating and sharing UGC, audience members can take a more active role in the media that
they consume, becoming producers, writers and editors themselves. The ease at which UGC can be produced and self-published allows its creators the unrestricted freedom to narrate and communicate their own cultural experiences (Burgess & Green, 2009). Whether consciously or not, UGC can act as resistance to dominant portrayals of race, masculinity, sexuality and hegemony in music, television and other media, repurposing them to include the voices of those usually silenced. Limited diversity on network television in terms of race, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation has prompted creators of UGC to resist dominant portrayals in mainstream media in favor of exploring storylines and themes more familiar to their own experiences. While UGC comes in many forms, fan-fiction continues to push the boundaries of resistance, subverting television characters and plot lines into the LGBT content so regularly ignored by Hollywood producers.

1.3 **Fan-fiction**

Fan-fiction is the amateur writing of stories featuring characters from other stories, films or television shows in new situations by fans of the original media. Jenkins (2008) explains that these fan-written stories take place in the same fictional universe as the creator’s favorite television series, films or other media properties, as interpreted by the individual author's own voice. Amateur writers produce their stories by amassing a number of combinations of elements from established characters or settings with a variety of original content. These stories can serve the purpose of filling in gaps that the original media failed to address, or completely reimagining the events of a television series or film. The practice originated in the science fiction genre and is more often than not used "as a means of re-writing media narratives in order to pair same-sex
characters together in romantic relationships” (Meyer M., 2013, p. 478). Stories are collected and sorted by television fandom (a portmanteau of fan and kingdom), to be read by fans or reviewed by other writers. Each fandom is then broken up into subcategories depending on the character pairing, also known as a ship, from the word relationship, or as a slash (from the "/" placed between the names of the characters being shipped [i.e. Clark Kent/Lex Luthor, or in the case of Teen Wolf, Stiles/Derek, which is then shortened to Sterek]).

In examining slash fan-fiction, that is, fan-fiction that subverts media heroes to form homoerotic pairings, which makes up a large majority of all amateur material, Woledge (2005) concludes that the phenomena originated with the television show Star Trek. When the show ended in the early 1970s, female fans began independently writing homoerotic slash fan-fiction based on scenes from the show they interpreted to suggest that Captain Kirk and Officer Spock were in a homosexual relationship. As the relationship was never acknowledged on screen, nor was it ever confirmed otherwise, this subculture of fans sought to compile their own erotic stories based on the existing characters. The subversive nature of the characterizations in the slash fiction challenged attitudes towards homosexuality at the time, some of which are still blatant, resisting these ideals as well as the very industry that failed to include LGBT themes in the first place. Slash fiction stories were published in fanzines, spawning intricate fan-produced bodies of work, which eventually grew far beyond the Star Trek universe.

Slash fiction primarily revolves around the male-on-male pairings of seemingly heterosexual characters. Interestingly enough, a large portion of fan-fiction writers are straight, college-educated females inverting the male gaze, all the while resisting dominant portrayals of homosexuality, or the lack thereof (Meyer, 2013). Jenkins (2008) explains that these fans want something more out of the original source material, taking it upon themselves to explore the what
if's and what else that could entail. This negotiation of character traits by slash writers has resulted in a number of unique labels, including alternative universe and out of character distinctions in a story's notes, broadcasting its relation to the original source material (Jenkins, 2008). A 2013 survey of fan-fiction writers on ArchiveOfOwnOwn.com found that 45.5% of all stories posted to the site were categorized as M/M, revolving around the relationships between two male characters (Miller, 2015). These digital appropriations by slash writers expose a need for more prominent and substantial LGBT content, with these writers taking it upon themselves to subvert television’s straight characters as a means of resisting the entertainment industry's hegemonic ideals.

Fan-fiction is primarily collected online in databases like archival web sites such as Fanfiction.net, Wattpad.com, ArchiveOfOwnOwn.org and Livejournal.com, or posted openly on blogs on Tumblr.com, to be shared with other fans. Fan-fiction groups act as a participatory culture (Kell, 2009), with the members of any given fandom not only sharing interests in a particular television show, but ideas and plots for future slash storylines. Because of the amount of time that goes into watching, creating, writing, revising and interacting with other fans, fan-fiction writers identify as a community, using their preferred slash pairing to distinguish between interest groups. These communities emphasize interaction between fan-fiction writers and casual fans, allowing for peer-revisions as well as joint efforts and story ideas, affectionately referred to on Livejournal as plot bunnies. Tumblr in particular has revolutionized the scope and speed at which fandoms share their UGC. The site, a social networking and blogging platform hybrid, boasts 108.6 million active blogs with an estimated 50.9 billion unique posts (Baig, 2013). Like the more familiar Facebook, Tumblr allows its members to “like” UGC, as well as the more innovative option to “reblog,” easily sharing posts and adding commentary or additional content
with just one click. In December 2014, Tumblr published the results of a yearlong project, analyzing user data to compile its first ever statistical rundown of the site’s most popular posts and fandoms (About Tumblr’s Year in Review, 2014).

Interestingly enough, queer slash fiction constituted a large enough percentage of what technology blogs call “the biggest fandom-centered social media platform” to justify a Most Reblogged Ships category (Romano, 2014, p. 5). The top spot went to Destiel, a slash pairing of Dean Winchester and the angel Castiel, straight characters from the CW’s paranormal thriller Supernatural (2005), with Teen Wolf’s Sterek pairing taking the sixth position (Most Reblogged Ships, 2014).

### Most Reblogged Ships

**Ship:** (noun) Short for “relationship,” an imagined romantic pairing of two people, fictional or otherwise.

1. **Destiel**
   - Dean Winchester & Castiel
   - *Supernatural*
2. **Johnlock**
   - John Watson & Sherlock Holmes
   - *Sherlock*
3. **Larry Stylinson**
   - Harry Styles & Louis Tomlinson
   - *One Direction*
4. **Captain Swan**
   - Captain Hook & Emma Swan
   - *Once Upon a Time*
5. **Ereri**
   - Eren Jaeger & Levi Ackerman
   - *Attack on Titan*
6. **Sterek**
   - Stiles Stilinski & Derek Hale
   - *Teen Wolf*
7. **Troyler**
   - Troye Sivan & Tyler Oakley
   - *YouTubers*
8. **MakoHaru**
   - Makoto Tachibana & Haruka Nanase
   - *Free!*
9. **Narry**
   - Harry Styles & Niall Horan
   - *One Direction*
10. **JeanMarco**
    - Jean Kirstein & Marco Bott
    - *Attack on Titan*

![Figure 1.2 Tumblr’s Most Reblogged Ships of 2014](image-url)
Wattpad.com reportedly sees 63,000 unique stories uploaded to their site per day, with the site’s fandoms ranging from television and film to real life celebrities (Marchese, 2015). Amateur stories are not the only way in which fandoms interact with a series, as Tumblr users also create and “reblog” fan art, digital illustrations or manipulations featuring the likenesses of the actors portraying the characters featured in fan-fiction. Fan art articulates scenes from existing fan-fictions or other situations outside of the show’s canonical material. Re-imaginings of actual scenes from television shows are posted in the form of gif sets, animated images with no sound, with user-written dialogue captioning the scene in place of how they originally played out. Tumblr users can tag their content under the television show on which it is based, as well as the slash pairing, allowing for it to be viewed by anyone who searches for the corresponding tag. Tumblr’s Sterek tag remains one of the Teen Wolf fandom's most active outlets, with posts reaching over 5,000 unique reblogged shares in just a few days time. Ever active fan-fiction writers always return to the original media for inspiration, examining canonical homoerotic scenes for hints of queer content or possible proof of their slash pairing resulting from queer readings of the original media. Through digital appropriation of Hollywood’s existing and licensed characters as homosexuals, fan-fiction writers actively resist the industry’s dominant heteronormativity and its limited LGBT texts through user-generated content.
Chapter 2: Queer Resistance

Like fan-fiction writers, small subsets of media producers subvert hegemony through the media they produce, using satire and comedy to stage material that is over-the-top and often times flamboyant or obscene. It is through this use of Camp that certain media excessively subverts heteronormative hegemony, successfully creating and engaging in queer resistance. Sontag (2001) defines Camp as a “certain mode of aestheticism…in terms of the degree of artifice, or stylization” and the “love of the exaggerated” (pp. 277, 279). Camp, by its very nature, subverts popular culture to an extreme degree, exposing the downfalls of hegemonic institutions like religion, politics, or marriage. Many in the LGBT community have long since developed a camp sensibility to engage with the mainstream media that so willingly excludes queer voices, affording these audiences a unique cultural lens through which they experience texts and practices (Grossberg, 1992). This subversion of heteronormative society not only challenges the status quo, but also actively resists it, providing queer audiences a coping mechanism with which to deal with homophobia and other grievances that come with a straight power structure. A camp sensibility acts as a negotiation of culturally constructed notions of gender and sexuality, while most importantly creating community (Vider, 2013). A camp sensibility binds LGBT viewers’ context, their place in the world, to how they derive meanings from the media they are engaging with.

Camp sensibility can culminate in a form of queer resistance, often manifesting itself through the practice of queer reading: seeing homosexual content where the original producers may not have intended such narratives. Meyer (2013) suggests that queer readings invert Lacan’s gaze theory to accommodate a camp sensibility, revealing queerness in popular media, all the while re-examining the hegemonic mainstream and “its preferred readings to [reinscribe]
queerness” (Dhaenens, Van Bauwel, & Biltereyst, 2008, p. 341). Through this process, sexual minorities can invert the hegemonic significances embedded within a media text (Gross, 1998). The process of queer readings by LGBT audiences is similar to how fan-fiction writers extract content from their favorite television shows, deconstructing “traditional narratives [to] reveal the queer from reading between the story lines” (Dhaenens, Van Bauwel, & Biltereyst, 2008, p. 343). Queer theorists are quick to point out that queer reading is not the practice of making a text queer, but rather an acknowledgement that different interpretations may exist, including subversive analysis of a text as queer (Doty, 1997). Like fan-fiction, queer readings of a media allow LGBT viewers to answer their own call for more diverse representations of gay and lesbian narratives in popular culture, resisting the dominant heteronormative values encoded in most network television shows and films. Queer readings and camp sensibility have long been a substitute for meaningful queer representation on television and film, as far back as the 1940s, when the Motion Picture Production Code prohibited depictions of sexual perversions, specifically singling out homosexuality (Barrios, 2003). LGBT audiences have decoded Hollywood productions through a gay lens, reading queer in the homoerotic subtexts of films such as *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953) (Doty, 2000), *Flash Gordon* (1980) (Vider, 2013), *Thelma & Louise* (1991) (Doty, 2000), *Batman and Robin* (1997) and even *The Lord of the Rings* series (2001 – 2003) (Dhaenens, Van Bauwel, & Biltereyst, 2008). Queer readings derive alternative narratives and themes from a media which the original producers may not have ever intended and most mainstream audiences will never acknowledge. A message is delivered in the form of a sign-vehicle, the package in which it was organized, adhering to the rules of language and communication in relation to context and discourse (Chandler, 2007). From a dominant societal perspective, power relations shape how a message is produced and is subsequently
interpreted. If the message is oppositional to societal views, its intent is negated, keeping the message from being properly decoded by an audience (Hall, 1993). Still, Dhaenens (2008) maintains that dominant and queer readings of a media are nonetheless both valid and valuable interpretations important to representation and identification.

Grossberg originated these claims, applying them to fandom while arguing that, because texts are fluid and people are active, there are bound to be numerous interpretations of any given media. He reasons that “both audiences and texts are constantly being remade—their identity and effectiveness reconstructed—by relocating their place within different contexts” (Grossberg, 1992, p. 460). Limited LGBT representation in popular culture provides little for those looking for genuine queer content, leaving them to find it in the subtext of otherwise straight narratives, actively resisting dominant hegemonic heteronormativity. Resistance is in itself an aspect of queer theory, inspired by Foucault’s (1980) musings on power as a repressive social factor, highlighting resistance as an aspect of power relations within a dominant social construct (Dhaenens et al, 2008). Social identifiers like straight or gay are used by dominant groups to “access hegemony and protect their superior position in social hierarchies” (Cherney & Lindemann, 2013, p. 15). These categories become common place and ultimately protected by hegemony, only ever questioned by outsiders looking to resist dominant sexual identities. It is through queer resistance in the form of queer readings or camp sensibility that LGBT audiences pursue emancipation from compulsory heteronormativity. Queer theorists readily acknowledge that heteronormativity relies on discursive practices to validate heterosexuality as the dominant sexual identity, using television and popular culture as the main vessel through which straight supremacy is maintained. But, as Grossberg notes, “power lies in [the] ability to appropriate any text,” lending legitimacy to queer readings and camp sensibility as queer resistance (1988, p.
140). He further acknowledges that even the abstract possibility of resistance is a form of empowerment, in a sense justifying fan-fiction as a subversive tool that resists the heteronormative ideals portrayed on network television.

2.1 **Subversive Television and the Carnivalesque**

Employing aspects of camp sensibility outside of the LGBT community, a subset of mainstream writers and producers have sought to introduce some of the investigative elements of camp into their own work, as a means of critiquing contemporary culture. Though not camp *per se*, some producers working within the powerful entertainment industry responsible for network television shows and films use a similar strategy known as subversion to examine hegemonic ideals within popular culture. The use of subversion aims to “[destabilize] fixed notions of gender and sexuality, questioning their hegemonic positions from within dominant social and cultural systems” (Dhaenens, 2012, p. 218). Like fan-fiction, subversion allows writers to create content “outside [of] the hierarchical restrictions of mainstream, patriarchal society” (Booth, 2014, p. 400). Traditional narratives are actively reworked through subversion, commenting on and critiquing hegemonic heteronormativity. Like queer readings, subversion provides an active and viable alternative to hegemonic heteronormative ideals and norms.

In his model of Encoding/Decoding Communication, Hall examines the effectiveness of subversion of media as an extension of the cultural theorist's articulation theory. The model centers on semiotics, choosing to spotlight the perceived meaning in relation to the message's bearings in constructed reality, rather than the simpler interpretation of a text's structure (Chandler, 2007). Encoding and decoding are based on ideas from hegemonic theory, focusing on how meanings and institutionalized ideals can latch on to a message, disseminating with it,
shifting and influencing its original purpose. Through this model, Hall explains that every message contains a complex structure of dominance, and is *imprinted* with society's largely held ideals and beliefs which follows meaning through its relation with predominate power structures. A message can only be properly received and decoded if it is recognizable, not straying too far from popularly held beliefs or notions. Anything other than a hegemonic reading may result in the listener or viewer making assumptions that derail the message's intended purpose. Hall's model is influential among communication scholars, particularly those examining how audiences of different social statuses interpret network television.

A small population of writers and creators within the Hollywood machine have taken it upon themselves to portray characters and ideals subversive to many of society's widely held beliefs. These television shows and movies usually employ humor as the vehicle through which their messages are disseminated, satirizing the very subjects they wish to bring attention to. The early 80's saw the addition of Paul Reubens' ambiguous and unconventional character Pee-Wee Herman to early morning children's programming, leading many to question the character's and the actor's sexuality, as well as his intentions (Prono, 2007). *Roseanne* (1988) is widely regarded as a subversive sitcom that inspired feminist resistance in its unique portrayals of a working class family in Middle America through the eyes of its matriarch (Lee, 1992). The show not only challenged male and female gender roles, but attitudes towards the LGBT community and other minorities with its open discussions of homosexuality and other taboo subjects at the time.

British television's *Mr. Bean* (1990) challenged the boundaries of hegemonic masculinity, subverting many of the qualities of traditional representations of masculinity, ironically reaffirming rather than dispelling them (Neville, 2009). The character's flamboyance and subsequent distance from socially acceptable masculine behaviors proved Hall's musings correct,
resulting in oppositional readings of an already subversive message intended to dispel stereotypes. Perhaps the longest running subversive sitcom, *The Simpsons* (1989) has satirized everything from the American dream to environmental issues to the violence on television (Great American Rebels, 2002). These television shows satirically criticized many of society's shortcomings in an attempt to create an open dialogue about how to resolve them, much in the same vein that fan-fiction writers indirectly comment on the lack of substantial LGBT representations in mainstream television.

Cooper (2003) applies Hall's methods to analyze gay humor in *Will and Grace* (1998), upholding that ostracized groups have long used humor and satire as a means of resistance. Cooper found that self-deprecating humor on this show forced viewers to look inward, reexamining their own views, while the protest humor satirically commented on society's prejudices. While *Will and Grace* features two openly gay characters in its main cast as written by an openly gay creator, Fiske (1986) argues that in order for a show to be popularly received it must be polysemic, open to multiple interpretations depending on an audience's social perception. This mirrors Hall's (1993) claim that societal positions can directly influence interpretation of a media. Similarly, Livingston (2006) finds that regular viewers of daytime soap operas accurately decode meaning from only the characters they like, feel sympathy towards or simply identify with. Most importantly, Livingston champions for the importance of audience interpretation in media studies, recognizing the changing landscape in the role of the viewer as no longer passive, but rather actively engaging with television.

Perks (2012) analyzes audience interpretations of satirical stereotypes of African-Americans in her examination of the skits performed on *Chappelle's Show* (2003). She maintains that viewers derived three variant decoding positions from the skits: accepting the text's message
as a surface meaning, finding deeper connotations in the humor in a derived meaning or outrightly refusing to accept the show's ideological inferences in a neutral reading (Perks, 2012). The harder a viewer works to decode a television scene's message, the more likely they are to interpret a positive reading. Perks argues that the process of decoding allows viewers to be more engaged with a media, influencing and exercising their perceptional abilities in the process.

Steiner (1988) originated these claims, concluding that sometimes a viewer can resist Hall's intended reading of a media, resulting in what she calls oppositional decoding. Oppositional decoding occurs when the interpreter resists the ideological implications of what a media has encoded, and then recodes a message for themselves. In the case of fan-fiction, queer readings of television by online writers result in a subversion of characters as homosexual, creating the basis and inspiration for their stories. Woledge (2005) sees slash fan-fiction as a refreshing break from the hegemonic attitudes and values disseminated by television, challenging the very essence of the entertainment industry's power of shaping beliefs through subversive interpretations.

Booth (2014) furthers this claim, arguing that fan-fiction subverts hegemonic ideals by parodying the characters’ origins in mainstream media by a literary mode of subversion known as the carnivalesque. Bakhtin (1984) originated the term as a celebration of subversion and resistance to authority, inspired by historical medieval carnivals of early Europe. Carnivals were largely a time for subversion, an “ideological counter-intuitive space for redemptive and assertive rebellion” (Booth, 2014, p. 401). During these church and state-sanctioned times, society’s values and norms were playfully inverted, exposing the shortcomings of the hierarchical structures of society by mocking them (Shave, 2004). Through the use of humor, masquerades and performance, hegemonic hierarchies were challenged, mocking people in power, history, traditions and laws that may have prohibited subversion (Owens Patton &
During Carnival, communities that were otherwise socially or spiritually restricted by the powers that be were allowed brief liberation, with “players” such as the “fool, madman or clown” partaking in subversion (Danow, 1995, p. 4). Carnival’s medieval folk humor represented “the social consciousness of all the people,” voicing their grievances and concerns through the use of subversive humor, so as to avoid incarceration (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 92). Bakhtin’s notions of carnival and the carnivalesque are intertwined, yet distinguishable; the carnival is what happens, while the carnivalesque is authored, “[juxtaposing] traditional society transgress the boundaries and borders as it reveals an alternative world order” (Owens Patton & Snyder-Yuly, 2012, p. 368). The carnivalesque subverts social identities and norms, challenging and displacing hegemony, but ultimately reconfirming heteronormative roles and power structures (Lindley, 1996). This dichotomy is interesting in that carnivalesque allows subversion, with the discerning knowledge that what is inverted would not otherwise be acceptable in mainstream society.

Bakhtin (1984) outlines several aspects in which the carnivalesque can be performed, notably grotesqueness, ritual spectacles, comic verbal compositions and hierarchy reversal. For Bakhtin (1984, p. 303), grotesqueness was a “gross exaggeration and hyperbole” of the human body “through bodily excess, through body transgression, or through sheer bodily volume” (Booth, 2014, p. 402). These notions acted as a subversion of the normal world, inverting the mundane as spectacle. Yol Jung refers to these rebellious aspects of the Carnivalesque as a “nonviolent technique of social transformation,” able to encourage resistance to hegemony among the performers and the audience (1996, p. 271). Eagleton contends that the Carnival “is a licensed affair in every sense,” discussing subversion as a subtle yet continuous form of resistance, opened to interpretation as well as censorship by the Powers That Be (Yol Jung on
Eagleton, 1996, p. 273). Still, Yol Jung (1996) maintains that the Carnivalesque may transcend and reverse status quos through its playful rebellion, highlighting humor as an important part of Bakhtin’s theory. Other scholars have argue that Bakhtin’s brand of carnivalesque no longer applies to modern times, but media theorists have re-approached his ideas as imaged-carnivalesque, existing in electronic media through which aspects of oral culture and storytelling have resurfaced. Owens Patton & Snyder-Yuly (2012) apply Bakhtin’s concepts of carnivalesque to reality programing, specifically America’s Next Top Model (2003), suggesting that the scripted chaos and impromptu challenges evoke a new form of the carnival. They conclude that the judges on the show outlandishly challenge hegemony through fashion, all the while reinforcing issues of dominance in areas like race, gender and power. Booth (2014) applies a carnivalesque lens to analyze parody pornography, incidentally comparing it to slash fan-fiction, crediting both for reestablishing the carnival online. By Bakhtin’s guidelines, Booth categorizes slash fiction’s queer readings as grotesque subversions of traditional masculinity into fan-created homosexual relationships. Similarly, Shave (2004) utilizes carnivalesque to examine the Harry Potter (2001-2011) series and the fan-fiction derived from it, concluding that slash mocks societal norms resisting and subverting heterosexuality. Booth (2014) further notes that fandom is in itself grotesque, growing outside of the original narratives’ borders in the carnivalesque sense, not in body but as hyperbole, which can be said for fan-fiction as well. Inspired by the subversive narratives in popular fan-produced stories, this study will explore LGBT themes as presented in the first two seasons of MTV’s Teen Wolf, a show with a large online following and a plethora of fan-fiction.
Chapter 3: Methodology

The popularity of the Sterek ship among fan-fiction fans should come as no surprise, given the actual homosexual character's exclusion from much of the show's storylines. The overwhelming amount of fan-fiction based on queer readings of Teen Wolf, combined with the producers' tongue-in-cheek acknowledgement of this online activity, creates an interesting dichotomy in which these fan-produced narratives are acknowledged with no actual significance in the show’s plot. For these reasons, a qualitative descriptive design with a combined carnivalesque and queer theory approach was selected for this study. Bakhtin’s (1984) satirical carnivalesque approach was selected because fan-fiction writers’ digital appropriations act as a means of resisting and subverting the limited LGBT themes found in Teen Wolf. This paper unfolds with an analysis of how the show itself addresses queer characters and content, using Bakhtin’s (1984) carnivalesque categories of grotesqueness, comic verbal compositions, ritual spectacles and hierarchy reversal. The potential for queer resistance in the form of fan-fiction subverting established straight characters has inspired this study's research questions:

RQ1: How does Teen Wolf approach homosexuality?

RQ2: How do Teen Wolf's producers allude to fan-fiction on screen?

RQ3: Is fan-fiction an effective form of queer resistance?

This study seeks to fill a void in the research examining whether the limited portrayals of gay men on television are aided or stunted by fan-fiction writers’ subversion of hegemonic heteronormativity through user-generated content. Previous studies have looked at the slash fiction that comes out of television shows with only straight characters, but none have examined a series with openly gay characters and abundant slash fiction. To investigate the research questions, a textual thematic analysis of the show's episodes involving gay characters or
storylines will utilize Bakhtin’s brand of subversion, the carnivalesque. A purely subversion-focused theory approach would call attention to how *Teen Wolf* articulates queer characters and content, negotiating traditional norms and values. Queer theory will identify specific homoerotic moments on the show, as well as how the producers have incorporated fan-fiction’s most popular queer readings into the show’s narratives. Putting these two theories together will demonstrate how *Teen Wolf*’s fan-fiction writers actively engage in resistance through queer readings of the show, challenging the powerful influences of heteronormative hegemony on network television and as a societal structure. This study is inspired by the popularity of fan-fiction in the *Teen Wolf* fandom, providing a ripe case study of how a participatory culture such as fan-fiction can shape a media's audience. This paper seeks to examine if user-generated content can act as a form of queer resistance to a still-running network television show with openly gay characters.

3.1 **Data Collection**

The method of data collection used was a thematic descriptive analysis conducted during a two-week period between January and February 2015. All 24 episodes of *Teen Wolf*’s first and second season were analyzed for queer and subservice content, as defined by queer theory and Bakhtin’s (1984) carnivalesque categories of grotesqueness, comic verbal compositions, ritual spectacles and hierarchy reversal. The criteria for which episodes were analyzed were determined by the show’s initial presentation in its first season and its predecessor, when the show’s creators become fully aware of the fan-fiction based on the show. Midway through the second season, the show’s popularity, both in ratings and online, prompted MTV and Viacom to renew *Teen Wolf* for a third season of 24 episodes, doubling the 12-episode format of the show’s first two season. This full season order, along with several re-castings and a shift in tone, resulted
in a retooling of the show from its initial conception. For these reasons, only *Teen Wolf*’s first two seasons were analyzed. Each episode was analyzed four times, for an in-depth exploration of LGBT representation on network television. In order to not neglect any important aspects, the researcher previously designed an outline of possible queer content, including sexual talk, homoeroticism and comparison of LGBT themes to heteronormativity. During the third thematic analysis of each episode, identified queer or subversive content was transcribed by the researcher and digitally input in a thematic database. The fourth analysis of each episode ensured accuracy and confirmed the completeness of the information.

3.2 **Data Analysis**

The analytical work was carried out in four steps. First, *Teen Wolf*’s first 24 episodes were analyzed to obtain a sense of the whole series. The second step was to analyze each individual episode, looking for dialogue or scenes that described plausible conceptions of queer or subversive content, as stated in the study’s aim. A total of 75 scenes were identified. The third step of the analysis was to transcribe dialogue or scenes containing gay or carnivalesque imagery, then compare them to reveal similarities and differences in relation to the aim of the study. These scenes were then grouped into different patterns, in an effort to achieve an overarching map of how these themes might connect. The themes were not preset, but rather emerged from the text, as explored through the show’s own narrative. These thematic patterns were then analytically examined to detect queer or subversive aspects in the show’s scenes requiring categories to describe their conceptions.
The fourth step was a final analysis of the 24 episodes to ensure the accuracy of the transcriptions and themes. A final pattern was observed, analyzing the series as a whole and the specific scenes in their new thematic context. Five descriptive categories emerged from the text. An example of a scene from the episode “Abomination” (Taylor, 2012), features the characters of Stiles and Derek unwillingly clinging to each other in the middle of a swimming pool. Hunted by a paranormal creature, the two men are forced to keep each other afloat while they wait for help, leading to the conception forced cooperation. This was then grouped into the descriptive category of homoeroticism. The descriptive categories were devised with the described constructed content in mind.

3.3 Setting the Scene: Teen Wolf

The objective of this study is to examine the content on a still-airing network television show with both LGBT content and a large collection of slash fiction based on its characters. Specifically, the content analysis focuses on homoeroticism, gender, sexual identification and LGBT themes as humor on Teen Wolf. Acknowledging that primarily heteronormative narratives drive Teen Wolf’s storylines, this study seeks to examine how user-generated content can affect how the show’s characters negotiate and resist heteronormativity on screen. Teen Wolf premiered on MTV on June 5, 2011, and while it shares its title with the 1985 Michael J. Fox movie of the same name, the two have little else in common (Gliatto, 2011). The story is set in the fictitious town of Beacon Hills, California, and revolves around Scott McCall, as played by Tyler Garcia Posey, one of the few leading Hispanic actors on television. Scott is the titular high school aged lycanthrope, trying to navigate life after being bitten by a werewolf. He is aided in his quest to
navigate enemy wolves by his best friend, Stiles Stilinski. Causing friction for the duo is anti-hero Derek Hale, a brooding alpha werewolf who takes Scott under his wing. Rounding out the residents of Beacon Hills are Allison, Scott's love interest, and Lydia, a classmate of Allison's (Tucker, 2011). A host of secondary characters have been introduced throughout the MTV series' four seasons, including Danny, an openly gay lacrosse player, Peter Hale, Derek's uncle and the series' primary villain, as well as a legion of new adversaries. The show's romantic subplots and gratuitous homoerotic shirtless scenes have earned it a strong online following among gay men and women, a subculture of whom have taken to writing their own interpretations of the characters and their romantic exploits, resisting Teen Wolf's heteronormative hegemony through fan-fiction. In a fan Q&A with series creator Jeff Davis on the show's official Tumblr page, the openly gay Davis explained that he aims to portray a world without homophobia because of his desires for a world like the one on his show (Davis, 2013). The following analysis will determine if even a show with openly gay characters engages in affirming heteronormative ideals, justifying the need for its fans to engage in queer resistance.
Chapter 4: Findings

Five descriptive categories emerged from the text when analyzed through a combination of Carnivalesque and queer theory lens. These five qualitative descriptive themes examine how *Teen Wolf* articulates hegemonic heteronormativity in relation to the LGBT content found in its fan-fiction: (a) homoeroticism; (b) “the other” as humor; (c) questioning of sexuality; (d) female characters; (e) genuine portrayals of gay characters. Selected dialogue from the show illustrates each descriptive category.

4.1 Homoeroticism

The gay community’s *Camp sensibility* has often relied on a long-standing tradition of over-sexualization, with great emphasis on physical appearance. Wood (2004, p. 53) refers to this as a “history of gay beauty,” assigning importance to a muscular appearance so as to avoid being identified as a gay male or ridiculed as effeminate. Rothmann (2013) compares LGBT obsession with body image to ancient Greece’s adoration of athleticism and masculinity, concluding that the gay community’s attempts to ascribe to society’s hegemonic masculine ideals are futile, given their sexual orientation. In recent years, preoccupation with body images has transcended the LGBT community, manifesting itself in mainstream films and television. Mainstream actors are held to an exaggerated standard of beauty, common in industries such as fashion modeling or advertising. Network television, in particular, has subscribed to these ideals, casting actors of above-average physical appearance to anchor their shows, resulting in a cross-section of beauty and the mundane of everyday life. In several episodes of *Teen Wolf*, the series’ characters are depicted shirtless or scantily clad, alluding to their strength and dominant
masculinity within their pack. The series’ high school setting allows for storylines to occur in the locker room or on the lacrosse field, masking homoeroticism in socially approved masculine activities. These scenes perfectly encompass Bakhtin’s (1984) carnivalesque notion of grotesqueness, exaggerating the human body through sheer volume.

In the opening scene of the show’s first episode (Davis, 2011), the main character Scott McCall is shirtless in his bedroom, threading the net of his lacrosse stick. He tosses it on the bed and begins doing pull-ups on workout equipment in his room. His best friend, Stiles Stilinski, convinces him to search the woods in the middle of the night for the other half of a body that was reportedly found by joggers. An asthmatic Scott is attacked and bitten by something in the woods. The next day, Scott experiences increased sense of hearing, smell and reflexes at lacrosse practice, what Bakhtin (1984) would refer to as a hyperbole of what an average human is capable of. That night, Scott wakes up shirtless in the woods after having fallen asleep in his bed, coming face-to-face with the same monster that bit him the night before. Scott demonstrates exaggerated physical feats while trying to escape, setting the show’s campy tone from the beginning. Scott’s muscular body seems at odds with his self-described “nerdy” demeanor (Davis, 2011), establishing an exaggerated body image standard for the series. Though Scott is the titular character of the series, fan-fiction writers largely ignore him, focusing their narratives around Stiles and Derek.

Derek Hale is introduced in the first episode. Older than the high school students, he mysteriously appears wherever Scott is. In the woods, Derek tackles a once again shirtless Scott, who is having trouble controlling his new abilities. Derek backs Scott against a tree, as he explains he is trying to help:

Derek: Is it really so bad, Scott, that you can see better, hear more clearly, move faster than any human could ever hope? […] You’re gonna
need me if you wanna learn how to control it. So you and me Scott, we’re brothers now.

The older werewolf dramatically articulates the fraternal bond the two will share, metaphorically equating their friendship to teammates or a military brotherhood, maintaining an air of masculinity in their relationship. Camp and queer sensitive viewers may note the homoeroticism in their encounters, which larger audiences may read as complying with masculine hegemonic ideals. Both characters exemplify a hyperbole of not only human senses, but strength, with shirtless scenes often times elapsing to show each man’s body committing the ultimate bodily exaggeration (Bakhtin, 1984): becoming part wolf. In “The Tell” (Macer, 2011), Derek is exercising shirtless in his living room, mirroring Scott’s workout scene in the first episode. The camera pans between close-ups of his upper body as he flexes and sweats, dropping suddenly to perform one-handed push-ups. The muscle worship and exaggeration (Bakhtin, 1984) of Derek’s body ends abruptly as he is attacked by werewolf hunters, taking the episode from one campy extreme to another. The show’s scripted chaos, along with its subversion of everyday bodies as spectacle, evokes a televised form of the carnivalesque. The ease and frequency at which muscular male bodies are exploited on Teen Wolf also furthers its foray into Camp, maintaining a heightened sense of reality in which every character is perfectly sculpted and coiffed. Schnoebelen (2001) links the process of shaping, tucking and the rearranging of bodies to meet cultural convinced doctrines of beauty to the muscular ideals found in the gay community. This exploration of muscle adoration allows queer sensitive viewers to easily read the series as homoerotic or gay. Queer readings evolve far beyond what is shown on screen, subverting the hegemonic ideals of the show, culminating in active resistance through fan-fiction.
In “Magic Bullet” (Sinclair, 2011), Derek is shot with a silver bullet, leaving him incapable of shifting into a wolf. Unable to find Scott, he comes to Stiles for help, forcing the two adversaries to work together. Stiles brings him to the animal shelter where Scott works, where a weakened and shirtless Derek is bleeding from the bullet in his forearm. The injured werewolf shows Stiles a handsaw, explaining that if a cure cannot be found, he will have to cut off his arm. When Stiles refuses, Derek dramatically reaches for him from across an examination table, pressing the two men’s faces together. Derek, now sweating from the poison spreading through his arm, menacingly growls in Stiles’ face until he agrees. Scott arrives with a cure, but Derek passes out from his injuries as Stiles hovers over him, holding his face in both hands. The over-the-top nature of the scene is common in supernatural thrillers, but given Teen Wolf’s lack of female presence, the proximity of male characters is easily interpreted as homoerotic, or flat-out homosexual, by queer viewers. These homoerotic scenes are not only used as evidence of an attraction between Stiles and Derek by fan-fiction writers, but are frequently used as the beginning of stories in which the two characters take their relationship into homosexual territory.

Stiles and Derek’s involuntary cooperation becomes a running gag throughout the series, with the two characters often being forced to work together to help Scott. A scene in “Wolf Bane” (Roessler, 2011) is widely regarded by Sterek fans as proof that the pairing has enough chemistry to spark a relationship. The scene is heavily homoerotic and begins with Stiles arriving home from school to find Derek hiding out in his room after being mistakenly accused of committing a number of vicious murders in the first half of the season. Now a wanted fugitive, Derek comes to Stiles, the town sheriff’s son, for help. Stiles awkwardly makes small talk with his father in the hallway, trying to distract from the man hidden on the other side of the door.
Stiles hesitantly returns to his room to confront his secret guest, but not before Derek threateningly pushes him against his bedroom room, in a quasi-embrace:

Derek: If you say one word—

Stiles: Oh, what do you mean, like, “Hey dad, Derek Hale is in my room, bring your gun”?

(Derek sizes Stiles up)

Stiles: Yeah that’s right. If I’m harboring your fugitive ass it’s my house, my rules, buddy.

Stiles slaps his left hand across Derek’s shoulder and the two slowly takes turns looking down at the spot. Derek nods, agreeing while reaching over to straighten out Stiles’ jacket. With a smile on his face, Stiles begins to do the same, but Derek threateningly lunges at the younger man. “Oh my God” (Roessler, 2011), Stiles blurs out as he walks away. The tension in the scene, as well as the proximity of the characters, has inspired many fan-fiction writers to elaborate on the interaction. Despite the show’s rampant homoerotism, the main characters continue to identify as straight. This has inspired many fan-fiction writers to reconstruct the narrative, expanding homoerotic scenes into actual homosexual relationships, subverting the show canonical narrative. Through fan-fiction, the show’s homoerotic moments are fully subverted into queer storylines, exploring sexual relationships between Teen Wolf’s straight characters. The show has spawned a popular pairing in Stiles and Derek, known in the fandom as Sterek, subverting otherwise heterosexual characters into homosexuals, exaggerating canonical homoeroticism into queer resistance. The popularity of Sterek amongst Teen Wolf fans has encouraged the show’s writers to increase the characters’ interactions and introduce tongue-in-cheek humor that acknowledge fan-fiction on-screen, further inspiring even more queer readings.
4.2 “The Other” as Humor

*Teen Wolf*’s camp sensibility allows its creators to insert subversive comical verbal compositions and sight gags in between the over-the-top supernatural fight scenes. Well aware of the popularity of fan-fiction based on the show, its writers regularly rely on one-liners and misunderstandings in place of genuine LGBT depictions. Though the show has an openly gay character, he is often used as a catalyst for humor by his straight teammates. Rothmann (2013) warns of the dangers of using comedy to present sexual minorities, arguing that mainstream audiences may uncritically decode the humor. Lynch (2002) mirrors these claims, adding that the use of humor has long been employed in retaining superiority among specific groups, or as Meyer puts it, may simply imply that “the other” is “somehow irrational or inferior” (2000, pp. 315, 323). Rothmann (2013) concludes that gay men on television often play the role of the clown or scapegoat for exaggerated non-heteronormative ideals, as is unfortunately the case with *Teen Wolf*. In the show’s second episode (Davis, 2011a), Scott visits the lacrosse coach’s office to discuss his doubts about an upcoming game:

- **Scott:** I’m having some personal issues.
- **Coach:** Is it a girl?
- **Scott:** No?
- **Coach:** Is it a guy?
- **(Scott nervously looks around)**
  
  You know our goalie Danny is gay.
- **(Scott is still confused)**
- **Scott:** Yeah I know, coach, but that’s not it.
- **Coach:** You don’t think Danny’s a good-looking guy?
Scott: I-I think he’s good-looking. But I like girls! That’s not it anyway…

This scene demonstrates Bakhtin’s (1984) carnivalesque notion of comical verbal composition, with Scott being flustered by someone mistaking him for a gay man. The joke safely navigates Hall's (1993) model of Encoding/Decoding with the common societal notion that homosexuality is something funny, quirky or at the very least different. Danny and his sexuality are commonly used throughout the first season as comic relief. In the episode “Pack Mentality” (Vlaming, 2011), Scott and Stiles are discussing their weekend plans, as Stiles comes to a realization:

Stiles: I don’t think Danny likes me very much.
Scott: I asked Allison on a date and now we’re “hanging out.”
Stiles: Am I not attractive to gay guys?
(Scott rushes off down the hallway)
Stiles: Wait, Scott! You didn’t…Am I attractive to gay guys? You didn’t answer my question.

Like the earlier scene in the locker room, the subject of dating once again leads the conversation to the character of Danny. Stiles is left standing in the school hallway, flustered at the thought of not being attractive. His comical verbal composition (Bakhtin, 1984) is a distinct nod to the fan-fiction writers, who regularly portray him as a homosexual. The scene is played for laughs, and even on a show with openly gay characters, Danny is understood to be distinct from the rest of the group, a theme that is easily picked up by viewers because of its very real parallels outside of the show's canon, exemplifying Hall's (1993) institutionalized ideals imprinting on a media. Stiles questioning his sexuality becomes a recurring gag throughout the last half of the first season, a transparent attempt by the show's writers to engage with the slash
fandom, all the while using Danny's sexuality as the conduit for the humor. In “Formality” (Macer, 2011a), Scott is suspended from the winter formal, but sneaks in nonetheless. He forces Danny to dance with him in a clever ruse to avoid being kicked out by their coach:

Scott: Danny! Danny, dance with me!

Danny: What?

Scott: Dance with me!

Danny: No!

Scott: Please? Right now! Right now, come on!

(Scott forces the taller man onto the dance floor, throwing his arms around his shoulder)

Coach: McCall, you’re not supposed to… What the hell are you doing?

The music screeches to a halt as onlookers stare on at the coach in disgust, thinking he is being homophobic. He bumbles away telling the students to keep dancing, as Scott makes his entrance, leaving Danny and his unnamed date confused. This comical verbal composition's (Bakhtin, 1984) intent is confusing in its chastising tone of perceived homophobia, all the while once again using Danny for laughs. Hall (1993) maintains that a television show's messages will eventually produce a pattern of dominance, in this case bringing the peculiarity of homosexuality to the forefront of the show's attempts at comedy. The writers' missed opportunity to provide Danny with additional screen time and character development further alienates the character from his straight counterparts, giving fan-fiction writers reason to overlook him as well. These writers instead look to the characters they have formed a Parasocial Relationship (Schramm & Hartmann, 2008) with, resisting the text’s dominant reading to repurpose the character in their own stories. Through fan-fiction, slash writers fully realize the show’s attempts
at hierarchy reversal, paying equal attention to the characters as homosexual as the show does to heteronormativity. Fan-fiction writers take the show’s queer humor literally, subverting the straight characters into homosexuals, actively resisting the heteronormativity through user-generated content. Aware of Sterek’s popularity online, Teen Wolf’s producers continue to tease and hint at fan-fiction, without addressing the lack of genuine LGBT representation on their show, which inspires fan-produced queer narratives in the first place.

4.3 Questioning Sexuality

Early on in the show’s broadcast, the writers became aware of the large online following they had cultivated on social media, particularly the Sterek fans. The majority of Danny's scenes expand on the show's dominant pattern (Hall, 1993) of pairing homosexuality with humor, keeping the nods light hearted with no actual bearing on the main plots. Rothmann (2013) notes that these ritual spectacles (Bakhtin, 1984) mock culturally acceptable stereotypes, exaggerating homosexuality while continuing to affirm heteronormativity. A running gag throughout Teen Wolf’s first season involves Stiles asking if he is considered attractive to gay men, while Danny just so happens to be in the vicinity. In “The Tell” (Macer, 2011), a curious Stiles is seated behind Danny in class:

Stiles: Hey Danny, can I ask you a question?

Danny: No.

Stiles: Well, I’m going to anyway. Did Lydia show up in homeroom today?

Danny: No.

Stiles: Can I ask you another question?
Danny: Answer is still no.

Stiles: Does anybody know what happened to her and Jackson last night?

Danny: He wouldn’t tell me. […]

Stiles: One more question?

Danny: What?!

Stiles: Do you find me attractive?

Danny looks confused but does not answer. Stiles falls out of his chair in anticipation of a response as other students look on, causing what Bakhtin (1984) would refer to as a carnivalesque ritual spectacle. Stiles' proximity (Hall, 1993) to Danny and the growing ambiguity of his own sexuality demonstrate an onscreen acknowledgment of the show's online following, and a particular nod to fan-fiction writers. These fans' oppositional decoding of Stiles as homosexual in their writings has led the very writers of Teen Wolf to reevaluate a once straight character, demonstrating the power of resistance when multiplied by the speed and ease of sharing fan-created content over the internet. With Stiles’ emerging as the breakout character of both the show and its slash fiction coupled with the limited screen time given to its actual gay characters, it should come as no surprise that slash fans pay closer attention to a character who they are more invested in, placing the show’s openly gay characters on the back burner.

Teen Wolf's second season premiered on June 3, 2012, after a ten-month hiatus during which the show's writing staff became more aware of their fans' online activity, particularly the growing number of Sterek shippers. As Stiles is heavily featured in many Teen Wolf slash fiction, popularly "shipped" with Derek Hale, the second season sees Stiles' sexuality becoming more ambiguous, as well as more homoerotic scenes between the two characters. The creators' attempts at subverting stereotypical portrayals of gay men with the character of Danny failed to
resonate with audiences, as it strayed too far from institutionalized views of homosexuality (Hall, 1993) and as such a prominent number of slash fiction continues to ship the two straight males in fan-created relationships. Fan re-imaginings of the characters through slash fiction have led the show's writers to drop in subtle hints that they are aware of the online activity of fans, further diminishing Danny's impact. The insistence of the show's producers to hint at these stories in an effort to engage their viewers endangers the significance of having gay characters in the first place. Though not a main character, Danny's role has been reduced to a sounding board off of which the show's handlers can insert tongue-in-cheek nods to slash fans, negating the creator's initial encoding of a world without homophobia.

In the season two episode “Ice Pick” (Passmore, 2012), Stiles is admiring Scott’s new sense of confidence:

Scott: You know this thing’s gonna get out of control, and that makes me responsible.

Stiles: Alright, I’m with you. And I also gotta say this new found heroism is making me very attracted to you.

Scott: Shut up.

Stiles: No, seriously. Do you wanna try just making out for a sec? Just to see how it feels…

Scott laughs and pushes Stiles off screen as they walk on, amounting to nothing more than another gag and wink to the slash fans. The scene ends abruptly, but not before culminating in yet another carnivalesque ritual spectacle (Bakhtin, 1984), with Stiles once again questioning his sexuality. The scene's intention may have been meant as nothing more than a nod to Sterek’s Tumblr following, but once again that message is riddled down with real world connotations (Hall, 1993), instead further suggesting that there is something funny about two males kissing. In “Frenemy” (Davis, 2012), Scott and Stiles sneak into Jungle, a gay nightclub, in the hopes of
stopping the Kanima, a werewolf/lizard hybrid, from seeking out its next victim. As they watch
the creature climb in through a window near the roof, the pair also spots Danny entering the
same club. Upon walking in, Scott mutters, "Dude, everyone in here is a dude" (David, 2012),
and the shot pans to Stiles being caressed by drag queens with a deadpan look on his face. Once
again, aside from Danny, Stiles is the only character to be ever present at the mention of
homosexuality, demonstrating a theory's pattern of dominance (Hall, 1993). Given Stiles'
initially claimed heterosexuality, his inclusion in these lighter moments of humor regarding
homosexuality illustrates a shift in how the character is written as a direct response to the writers'
awareness of fan-fiction. Unfortunately, their unwillingness to fully commit to Stiles as gay, or
even bisexual, results in awkward sight gags and one-liners regarding his ambiguous status,
similar to how Danny's sexuality was used for comical effect throughout the show’s first season.
Any intention to merely engage with fan-fiction writers through hinting is lost in the decoding
process (Hall, 1993), leaving viewers confused and expecting further development. This
confusion results in a negotiated or neutral reading of the scene (Hall, 1993), in which the
intention has been shifted, contended or outright "re-coded" to be more in line with a fan-fiction
writer's interests.

Unable to stop the monster in “Frenemy” (Davis, 2012), the sheriff's department is called
after a number of clubgoers are paralyzed by the lizard creature's toxins. In the ultimate ritual
spectacle (Bakhtin, 1984) aimed at fan-fiction writers, Stiles unwillingly runs into his father, the
sheriff, and is asked what he is doing at the scene of the incident:

Sheriff Stilinski: What are you doing here?

Stiles: What do you mean, “What am I doing here?” It’s a club; we were clubbing. You know? At the club.

Sheriff: Not exactly your type of club.
Stiles: Uh. Well, Dad, there’s a conversation that we need to have.

Sheriff: You’re not gay!

Stiles: What? I could be!

Sheriff: Not dressed like that.

The Sheriff’s deadpan response to his son’s faux coming out perfectly exemplifies a carnivalesque ritual spectacle (Bakhtin, 1984), unfortunately relying on the very socially accepted stereotypical descriptions of gay men the show first set out to dispel. The comical verbal composition also blurs the line of Stiles’ sexuality, hinting to fan-fiction writers that Teen Wolf’s writers are aware of their stories. Stiles’ proximity to homosexuality once again furthers the show’s pattern of dominance (Hall, 1993). Upset that the banter is getting them nowhere, the sheriff asks what the two are doing at a crime scene, and Stiles lies to him, saying they took Danny out to get his mind off of his recent break-up. The encounter not only teases fans with the misdirection that Stiles is about to come out to his father, but also blatantly continues the pattern (Hall, 1993) of using Danny and his homosexuality for humor and as a nod to slash writers. With only another gag as a result of Stiles’ ambiguous sexuality, fan-fiction writers continue to weave their own intricate stories based on the character, culminating in a hierarchical reversal of the show’s straight narratives. Like the show’s homoeroticism and humorous LGBT references, fan-fiction writers take Stiles questioning his sexuality a step further, subverting him into a homosexual in their work. The character of Stiles, half of the popular ship known as Sterek, allows these writers to insert some of themselves into their favorite character, acting out the very queer narratives the show fails to address, actively resisting heteronormativity through queer readings.
4.4 Female Characters

*Teen Wolf* only features two female characters in its main cast. In the first episode (Davis, 2011), Scott’s developing werewolf senses start working overtime when he meets Allison Argent for the first time. Scott’s heart starts beating faster as she enters the room, audible to only himself and the viewer. This audio effect not only elevates the series’ camp sensibility within the first few scenes, but also is another example of the carnivalesque’s grotesque body exaggerations (Bakhtin, 1984). The pair runs into each other again in the same episode, when Allison accidentally hits a dog with her car and pulls into the veterinary office where Scott works. In a rare moment of hierarchical reversal, the two discuss the situation:

Allison: Thanks for doing this. I feel really stupid.
Scott: How come?
Allison: I don’t know. ‘Cause I freaked out like a total girl.
Scott: You are a girl.
Allison: I freaked out like a girly-girl, and I’m not a girly-girl.
Scott: [...] Hey I’d be freaked out too. In fact, I’d probably cry. And not like a man either. Like the biggest girly-girl ever. It’d be pathetic.

Scott’s joke at Allison’s expense, while made to make her feel better, puts the series’ views of how gender should be performed on full display. Even in a fictional universe where werewolves are plausible, men are still expected to uphold their masculinity. Once again, the show’s campy dialogue teeters on subversion, with the real world implications of the character’s words preventing a full hierarchical reversal (Bakhtin, 1984). In the episode “Pack Mentality” (Vlaming, 2011), Scott and Allison sneak onto school property at night and embrace in a parked school bus. The interaction is too much for Scott to handle, and his transformation into a wolf is
triggered. With fangs and glowing yellow eyes, Scott’s libido is metaphorically onscreen as he attacks Allison. Though the sequence turns out to be a dream, the helpless young woman nonetheless becomes merely a damsel in distress at the hands of the werewolf’s primal, animalistic instincts. A carnivalesque exaggeration of masculine heternormativity, Scott’s fear of hurting Allison is overshadowed by the woman’s need to be protected. Allison’s role in the series is reduced to being Scott’s girlfriend, constantly in need of saving despite coming from a long line of werewolf hunters. The female character’s reduced role in the series is mirrored in the fan-fiction, where male-on-male relationships take center stage.

The other female character, Lydia Martin, is introduced as Stiles’ crush. In “Second Chance at First Line” (Davis, 2011a), Stiles encounters Lydia in the hospital. He takes the opportunity to talk to Lydia, but his advances are ignored as she is dating the captain of the lacrosse team. In “Pack Mentality” (Vlaming, 2011), as the entire casts eats lunch in the high school cafeteria, the captain of the team asks another student to move:

Student: How come you never ask Danny to move?

Danny: Because I don’t stare at his girlfriend’s coin slot.

Lydia giggles at the gay man’s response, seemingly condoning his misogyny. Danny implies that he is only allowed to sit near Lydia because his eyes do not wander, suggesting that he is not seen as a threat because of his sexuality. Danny’s sexuality may exist outside of society’s approved heternormativity, but his objectification of the female body for the enjoyment of men is not. In one short scene, Danny’s masculinity is undermined as nonthreatening, all the while diminishing Lydia to a sexual prize. Once again, one of only two female characters is reduced to a secondary role to the straight male character’s sexuality. Lunch ends with the
friends making plans to “hang out” (Vlaming, 2011) over the weekend, as Scott and Stiles discuss their roles in the group:

Stiles: God, it was like watching a car wreck. I mean, first it turned into the whole group date thing, and then out of nowhere comes that phrase…

Scott: “Hanging out?”

Stiles: You don’t hang out with hot girls. Okay, it’s like death. Once it’s hanging out you might as well be her gay best friend. You and Danny can start hanging out.

Stiles equates not dating a woman to being gay, implying that men cannot be friends with women outside of a relationship. Allison and Lydia’s roles within the circle of friends, as well as in the series, have never been more clearly laid out than in this scene. Their sole purpose is to be in a relationship with a straight male character, advancing the romantic subplots and providing the occasional damsel in distress. Though Stiles’ line of thinking supports aspects of heteronormativity, queer sensitive viewers have taken the lack of female characters as a pass to read queer in the abundant interactions between the males. Teen Wolf’s writers further fuel the fandom flames, inserting sight gags and one-liners with knowing winks at Sterek shippers, additionally ignoring their already sparse female lineup. Perhaps the show's most blatant form of ignoring its female characters in an effort to engage with fan-fiction writers comes in the second season's tenth episode, “Fury” (Davis, 2012a). In the sheriff’s department, Stiles and Derek are held hostage by the Kanima creature and its master, Matt. Paralyzed by the monster’s toxins, Stiles falls on top of Derek:

Derek: Get him off of me!

Matt: Oh, I don’t know Derek; I think you two make a pretty good pair.
The creature’s master looks directly into the camera with a sly smile. *Teen Wolf*’s writers momentarily break the fourth wall, providing Sterek fans with their most obscure wink yet, leaving many slash fans to assume, by way of falsely decoding the scene (Hall, 1993), that their online activity has not only been acknowledged, but may also have some influence on the two characters' development. It is interesting to note that even in the smallest of allusions to fan activity, Tumblr and online fandoms have impacted the show and its creators so as to influence its content. The phenomena further suggests that the internet is changing the ways in which viewers engage and decode a media, going as far as to impact the writers' creative decisions. Through resisting the show's limited homosexual representation by way of oppositional decoding of straight characters, fan-fiction writers have sparked negotiated characterizations in the very creators of the show, if only as a means to engage with these fans.

There is also the issue of a lack of female presence on both the show and its fan-fiction. Despite having been introduced as Stiles’ childhood crush, the character of Lydia is all but forgotten in lieu of once again forcing Stiles and Derek together. As the female characters are all but ignored on the show, so too is their characterizations in fan-fiction. These queer readings never expand upon the female characters, with fan-fiction writers instead choosing to explore the show’s male characters in homosexual relationships with each other. In fan-fiction, the male characters take on both feminine and masculine gender roles, rendering the show’s few female characters obsolete. Though issues may arise as to the treatment of female characters on the show and in user-generated content, queer readings in the form of fan-fiction nonetheless resist the heteronormativity on *Teen Wolf* and in network television.
4.5 **Genuine Portrayals of Gay Men**

In its second episode, *Teen Wolf* introduces Danny Māhealani, as played by Hawaiian actor Keahu Kahuanui, one of the few openly gay characters on television as well as a homosexual person of color. In a complete hierarchical reversal (Bakhtin, 1984), Danny is portrayed as hyper-masculine and comfortable with his sexuality. Playing against stereotype, he is the goalie of his school's lacrosse team, placing him in the locker room with the other male characters and subsequently in close proximity to the werewolf activity. From his initial introduction, the character is already at odds with not only other stereotypical portrayals of gay men on network television, but also consequently society's perception of what a gay man should act like, straying too far into foreign territory, as Hall (1993) would argue. His first appearance in the second episode (Davis, 2011a) is on the lacrosse field, where Danny is shown capable of holding his own amongst the straight members of his team. Most of his teammates are aware of his homosexuality and do not think anything of it. In “Co-Captains” (Vlaming, 2011a), as Scott exits the showers of the locker room, Danny recalls Scott elbowing him during the last game:

Danny: By the way, McCall, apology accepted.
Scott: I didn’t apologize.
Danny: Every time you got the ball tonight, you passed it to me.
Scott: Every time I passed the ball to you, you scored.
Danny: Apology accepted.

Danny walks out past Scott as he shakes his head and smiles. Despite becoming co-captain of the team at the end of the episode, Scott obviously has respect for Danny, regardless of his sexuality. This progressive portrayal of a young gay man contradicts some of society's dominant beliefs, resulting in a hierarchical reversal (Bakhtin, 1984). Hall (1993) explains that
the messages of a television show are constructed and disseminated in stages, and the significance of Danny's sexuality not defining who he is may not transition from the initial encoding stage through to the consumption stage where it should have been decoded by the audience. Hall (1993) argues that each step of the communication process is imprinted with institutionalized beliefs, keeping any message that is unrecognizable as such from delivering its intended purpose. The writers' hopeful depiction of a world without homophobia falls victim to prejudices from the real world, negating the message entirely, especially when coupled with the laughs at the expense of misunderstandings surrounding Danny's sexuality. In “Wolf Bane” (Roessler, 2011), Stiles and Derek enlist Danny’s help in tracing a text message connected to an ongoing murder investigation. When Danny refuses to help, Stiles suggests that Derek, who he introduces as his cousin Miguel, should change out of his bloodstained shirt:

Stiles: Hey Miguel, I thought I said you could borrow one of my shirts?

(Derek reluctantly walks over to the closet in Stiles' bedroom, undressing while the other boys continue talking)

Stiles: So anyway, I mean, we both know you have the skills to trace that text, so…

Distracted, Danny continually steals glances at a shirtless Derek, who is unable to fit into any of Stiles' shirts. Stiles takes notice and asks Danny for his advice:

Stiles: Hey, that one looks pretty good, huh? What do you think, Danny?

Danny: Huh?

Stiles: That shirt?

Danny: It’s. It’s not really his color.

(Derek once again undresses on the other side of the room)
Stiles: You swing for a different team, but you still play ball, don’t you, Danny boy?

Danny: You’re a horrible person.

Stiles: I know. It keeps me awake at night.

Derek is uncomfortable being flaunted in front of another man, negating any of the series’ hierarchical reversal in which all three boys are equal. Derek’s body is grotesquely (Bakhtin, 1984) on display again, this time at the center of a two-part joke in which Danny's sexuality is the punch line. The gag culminates in Derek smashing Stiles' head into a car steering wheel in a later scene (Roessler, 2011), slyly suggesting it is revenge for what occurred earlier with Danny. The interaction's intended message may have been as simple as equating the young gay man's hormonal urges to that of his straight counter parts, but given both sequences’ upbeat, airy and almost comical score, audience decode (Hall, 1993) it differently from heteronormative scenes. Once again, homosexuality is used as an agent for comedy, ostracizing Danny and complicating the meaning of Stiles and Derek's interaction within the show's pattern of using homosexuality as comedy. Slash writers, coming from more liberal backgrounds, are then more likely to interpret homoeroticism as perceived homosexuality, as suggested by Hall's ideas that different societal groups will perceive a message as being more in line with their personal views.

Season two’s episode “Frenemy” (Davis, 2012) features a rare moment of genuine hierarchical reversal (Bakhtin, 1984) when Danny just so happens to be at the same gay club Scott and Stiles have tracked a monster to. In a brief scene, Danny buys a drink and catches the eye of his unnamed date from the episode “Formality” (Macer, 2011a). His now ex is dancing with another clubgoer to a dance remix of “Danny Boy” by Exit 59. The bartender tries to console Danny:

Bartender: You’re better off without him.
Danny: It still doesn’t feel good.

Bartender: You know what will feel good? That guy.

Danny leaves the bar and walks over towards a shirtless male dancer as Scott and Stiles reach the bar. This short scene is the closest the series comes to a genuine hierarchical reversal (Bakhtin, 1984), with its gay character sharing in the romantic subplots. Most scenes in which Danny appears are contrasted and lightened by Stiles’ interruptions, lessening his impact and importance despite the character's milestone in LGBT representation on network television. Hall (1993) argues that no meaning is taken from a message if it is not articulated properly, explaining that each moment of a television series has its own conditions when it comes to how effectively the message is delivered to an audience. Though not a series regular, Danny has maintained a constant presence on the show, unfortunately becoming nothing more than the agent through which the show's writers nudge the fan-fiction writers watching the show with a knowing wink. The articulation of homosexuality and the actions of the characters on Teen Wolf, as well intended as they may be, still revolve around the unspoken notion that they are secondary to the heterosexual relationships, reinforcing the need for queer resistance by fan-fiction writers. Throughout the series, the character of Danny's homosexuality has been alluded to and discussed by various characters, including the lacrosse coach, Stiles, and even Scott himself. With the exception of Danny's best friend, none of the characters have ever shown any prejudice towards Danny because of his sexual orientation. The discrimination instead comes in the form of limited screen time, much of which is reduced to visual gags and pandering nods to fan-fiction writers, as well as a lack of character development, despite Danny having been on the show since its second episode. The character has had a number of off-screen relationships, the likes of which have only been hinted at in blink-or-you'll-miss-it jokes or mentioned in passing by other
characters. This limited inclusion of the show’s few gay characters may explain why the characters of Stiles and Derek are so popular among fan-fiction writers. Danny’s limited screen time has prevented viewers from fully identifying with the character. Fan-fiction writers turn their gaze to Stiles and Derek, two fully conceptualized characters, exploring their relationship through queer narratives, absent on screen. Even on a show with openly gay characters, fan-fiction writers must actively resisting society’s heteronormative ideals through subversive queer readings.
Chapter 5: Discussion

The distribution of user-generated content based on existing material recasting characters in roles different from that of their onscreen counterparts suggests there is something to be desired of the LGBT representations on network television. As people look to unwind with television, they let their guard down, allowing the ideas and portrayals on the screen affect their morals and perceptions. Television shapes the lens through which people see the world, actively swaying public opinion on minority matters that a larger portion of the population may not be overly familiar with. Storytellers then have a responsibility to depict diverse groups of people and situations fairly through television and other media because of its widespread availability and influence on shaping societal views. The advent of the Internet has allowed viewers to engage with television at their own leisure and speed, permitting new ways of engaging with media as well as interpreting its messages. Audiences looking to further connect with a show can re-imagine the characters they have come to know as more akin to their beliefs and routines through fan-fiction, resisting the very entertainment industry who limits their identification with characters in the first place.

Even a show where openly gay characters interact alongside their straight peers has amassed a large anthology of fan-fiction exploring homosexual storylines as written by the show's fans. User-generated content exposes a lapse between what the show's writers are trying to portray and how the show’s fans decode these messages. Teen Wolf's confusing position on homosexuality, with its insistent pattern of pairing it with comedy, negates the creator's initial intention to portray a world without homophobia. The gay centered humor and the limited screen time allowed to the show's gay characters restrict them more than homophobia ever could, resulting in their significance and overall importance to the fandom being overlooked for more
heavily featured and developed characters. Fan-fiction writers continue to re-imagine their favorite straight characters in homosexual relationships, demonstrating a lack in the show's queer content, a problem that transcends the show and plagues all of network television. These fans actively engage in resisting *Teen Wolf’s* heternormativity by creating their own queer content based on characters they have had Parasocial Interactions with. Many of *Teen Wolf’s* viewers are not as resistant to social change as the producers of network television, as evidenced by their desire to adapt their favorite characters into gay men through fan-fiction. Through the use of Parasocial behaviors, *Teen Wolf’s* Sterek fans identify the characteristics they would like to change to fit their image, crafting personally tailored stories based on the show’s characters. Fan-produced texts become resistant through dissemination and reception, allowing writers to broadcast their subversions of Hollywood’s texts to other fans (Dhaenens, 2012). Fan-fiction effectively acts as a nonviolent system of social transformation, subtly and continuously resisting the hegemony of the source material without fear of censorship from its original creators. Fandoms carve out their own digital space on web sites such as *Tumblr*, effectively resisting the hegemony of their favorite shows in an imagined form of the Carnival. On-screen acknowledgement of fan-fiction has resulted in some network television writers reverting back to stereotypical portrayals, using homosexuality as comedy as opposed to the genuine depictions fans crave, encouraging fans to create even more original queer content. Network television is content to confine queer stories to online communities, substituting pandering nods and gags at the expense of genuine LGBT representation, leaving room for further academic inquiries into how effective resistance in the form of fan-fiction really is. As the means of watching and interacting with television continues to change, its production and content remains more or less the same, proving that television’s hegemony represents the past generation. Fan-fiction writers
challenge these notions by reading their favorite texts as queer, openly resisting Hollywood’s heteronormative agenda.

The relationship between intended messages and audience interpretation then results in varying degrees of analysis. This study examined one show’s onscreen efforts to engage with online fans despite the creators not fully understanding why homosexual fan-fiction is so prevalent to begin with. The analysis finds that *Teen Wolf* relies on a camp sensibility to advance the show’s plots and messages, without any of the gay connotations traditionally associated with Camp. In its effort to make homosexuality more accessible for mainstream audiences, it affirms and reiterates hegemonic heteronormativity, justifying the need for LGBT resistance as performed by fan-fiction writers. Though the show does attempt subversion in its portrayals of homosexual acceptance, the campy carnivalesque banter on the show makes it more believable that a man can become a werewolf than that a man should openly love another man. Inspired by the queer readings of the show’s characters through fan-fiction, *Teen Wolf* too actively resists hegemony through inclusion of LGBT characters and themes, unfortunately reinforcing said hegemonic ideals to its viewers. As network television continues to explore new territory in the representation of minorities, fan-fiction writers will continue to challenge hegemony through their user-generated content.

In the era of social media, further exploration into how much a television show’s writers are influenced by slash fiction and the online activity of fans is needed. Likewise, this study also fills a void in academic research regarding queer theory and queer representation in media. The phenomenon of fan-fiction may allow audiences to create their own narratives, temporarily resisting the entertainment industry’s dissemination of dominant and institutionalized ideals, but only in the communities in which these stories are shared. Further exploration into how effective
this resistance can be is needed. User-generated content empowers viewers of a series to answer the call for more appropriate and well-developed gay content themselves, ultimately resisting network television’s hegemonic heternormativity as a whole. The inclusion of LGBT characters and storylines in prime time is no less astounding, given that homosexuality is still not widely accepted, but its representation on network television still has a long way to go. For now, it seems, user-generated content, and in particular fan-fiction, will continue to provide queer readings of popular characters for those seeking more LGBT narratives.
References


**Vita**

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