

QUEER IN FANDOM: A USES AND GRATIFICATIONS ANALYSIS OF  
THE KATY PERRY FAN COMMUNITY ON TWITTER

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Online fandom communities exist as a hub of subcultural construction for people across the globe. For queer people, fandom represents a space to safely converge over mutual interests. Previous research has focused on queer fans and popular music fans independently, often taking a pathological approach. This study qualitatively examines queer participants in the Katy Perry fandom through surveys and one-on-one interviews. The theoretical backbone of the study is built around uses and gratifications theory, seeking to understand motivations for fandom participation. The concepts of the heteronormative matrix and queer resistance are additionally incorporated to analyze how LGBTQ+ fans combat societal norms. This research found seven motivations for queer fans to participate in online fandom, providing insight into an understudied community.

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By

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## CHAPTER 1

### PURPOSE OF STUDY

Online communities have been generating since the dawn of the Internet, according to Smith and Kollock (1999). With the rise of digital ecosystems and social media, it is easier than ever for individuals to create and join online communities (Katz & Aspden, 1997). This connectedness provides a level of reach that was previously unheard of, connecting people from all corners of the globe. By the year 2001, nearly 90 million users in the United States had participated in an online group. Research by Horrigan, Rainie, and Fox (2001) notes that 79% of those users remained in contact with their online groups, exhibiting online communities as a “virtual third place” for bridging global ties and bonding relationships. The Center for the Digital Future (2008) indicates that online community members feel as strongly about communities online as those in the real world.

Online music fandoms are notorious hubs of this subcultural construction, with fans converging their interests on a multitude of online platforms. Being active in fan communities comes with a collective understanding, allowing a space in which fans feel free to express their identities specific to the group (DeLuca, 2018). In the existing literature on fandom studies, much research has focused on sports, television, and communal identity construction (Schimmel, Harrington & Bielby, 2007). Within the literature is a lack of focus on the queer experience in fandom (Rosenblatt & Tushnet, 2015). Scholars in the latter wave of fan studies questioned this conceptualization of fandom, noting that diverse sociodemographic groups convene in the fan world (Sullivan, 2019).

In a society built on heteronormativity, many queer people seek out their own communities based on their mutual, minority identities. With a severe lack of overall

representation in media generally, online fandom creates a safe space for queer individuals to converge over a mutual interest. Fandom presents a community in which queer people have agency, freedom to express themselves without the risks of the physical world, and the ability to make their voices heard. Much of this issue stems from what is known as the heterosexual (or heteronormative) matrix; the invisible norm that defines all people as heterosexual until explicitly stated otherwise. Taking this matrix into account, fandom presents an often idyllic space for those coded invisible within the model. Rosenblatt and Tushnet (2015) explain that with more and more research being done within the LGBTQ+ community, the lack of literature on queer fandom leaves a huge gap.

This thesis seeks to examine queer-identifying individuals in the context of pop music fandom. Specifically, I look at the participation of queer individuals in the Katy Perry fandom. Katy Perry is a global superstar, falling into the category of pop female artists with an unquestionable queer following such as Madonna, Cher, Lady Gaga, and Beyoncé. Perry is the third most followed person on Twitter at the time of this writing (only behind former President Barack Obama and pop star Justin Bieber) at 108 million followers. Much of her engagement comes from the Twitter fandom community in which this study seeks to examine. With the scale of her online presence, the Katy Perry fandom is the quintessential community to examine the modern queer experience.

Queer experience in online music fandom is important to study in order to understand and possibly help reconstruct contemporary society that is built on the aforementioned heteronormative matrix. Bauble and Dhaenens (2014) note that the heteronormative matrix benefits from particular institutions (ex. marriage), practices (ex. reproduction), norms and values (ex. monogamy) that are ‘designed’ to preserve the matrix. For this reason, forms of



cultural resistance to heteronormativity are necessary for re-imagining the world to incorporate the queer experience. Scholars such as Dhaenens (2012) argue that “queer resistances within popular culture are articulated by strategies of queer deconstruction or strategies of queer reconstruction.”

This research is important to learn how queer music fandoms work within themselves to create a unique queer resistance, forming social relationships in an online space that resists the erasure of queerness in the physical world. By questioning hegemonic positioning of heteronormativity, queer fandom becomes a catalyst of understanding the global stretch of social media. Similar to the impetus of this study, as noted by Hayes and Ball (2010), slash fandom challenges heteronormativity by “dismantling rigid identity positions defined by heterosexual traditional discourses and reconstructing them as transgressive sexualities and/or gender identities.” This idea is corroborated by early fan scholar Hebdige, who argued that fans use symbolic transgressions to “briefly expose the arbitrary nature of the codes which underlie and shape all forms of discourse” (Hebdige, 1979, pg. 90-91).

Though slash fandom and popular music fandom operate independently, the focal point of challenging normative positions parallels through a look at queer community. It is important to look at fandom in queer communities to understand globalized community building, specifically in minority groups who may not be accepted in their physical reality. For scholars, this research broadens the scope of fandom and queer research – creating space to enhance understanding of queer communities and media usage. Without deliberate research on queer studies, one cannot expect societal norms to break on their own volition. Researchers must be purposeful in studying minority communities in service to the literature, academic advancement, and betterment of the world.

I sought to learn about potential gratifications of online fandom, identifying ways in which it may be used to create community for LGBTQ+ people. Sullivan (2019) notes the power of fandom in creating a collective interpretation of culture and building a sense of group cohesion amongst members. Fandom studies scholars Jonathan Gray, C. Lee Harrington, and Cornel Sandvoss put the need for this research simply when they argued “fandom matters because it matters to those who are fans” (Gray, Sandvoss, & Harrington, 2007, p. 1). To fulfill this thesis project, this paper reviews existing literature around fandom, online communities, and the queer experience. From here, I identify the used theoretical framework and methods. Finally, the results of the study and a discussion of the findings are explained in depth.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Convergence Culture and Fandom

The term *fandom*, as a cultural studies concept, describes a subculture of individuals with a shared common interest in a given subject (Duffett, 2013). The members that make up fandoms are commonly known as fans. For this study, it is important to denote the distinction between casual consumers of media and what constitutes a fan. Fans engage with content, dissect it, and discuss it with those in their given community. According to Jenkins, “one becomes a ‘fan’ not by being a regular viewer of a particular program but by translating that viewing into some kind of cultural activity, by sharing feelings and thoughts about the program content with friends, by joining a ‘community’ of other fans who share common interests,” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 41). Fans are emotionally invested in a given media object, building communities around them.

Fans have a deep relationship with a given media text, creating cultural universes specific to their interests. Literature on fandom studies define the idea of a fan as:

a person with a relatively deep, positive emotional conviction about someone or something famous, usually expressed through recognition of style or creativity. He/she is also a person driven to explore and participate in fannish practices. Fans find their identities wrapped up with the pleasures connected to popular culture. They inhabit social roles marked up as fandom. (Duffett, 2013, p.18)

According to Fiske (1992), subcultures of fans converge over a chosen repertoire of media and celebrities and celebrate them in various ways. This idea of convergence makes up much of the initial research on fandom, in what is known as convergence culture. Henry Jenkins (2009), the father of this media theory, acknowledged convergence culture as a space in which the flow of media content from industry to audience creates a power dynamic over the creation, distribution, and control of content. With the evolution of technology, Jenkins initial theory has translated into

the more specified idea of participatory culture and collective intelligence. Taking into consideration our globalized society, a more apt definition of fandom has been found to reflect the wide scope of fannish activities. Sandvoss offers a definition, stating:

[Fandom] is the regular, emotionally involved consumption of a given popular narrative or text in the form of books, television shows, films, or music, as well as popular texts in a broader sense such as sports teams and popular icons and stars ranging from athletes and musicians to actors. (Sandvoss, 2005, p. 8)

According to Jenkins (2009), a participatory culture (i.e., fandom), is defined as having five distinct features. These features exist as a checklist for what makes a fandom, including:

1. Having relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement
2. Having strong support for creating and sharing one's creations with others
3. Having some type of informal mentorship whereby what is know by the most experienced is passed along to novices
4. Where members believe their contributions matter
5. Where members feel some degree of social connection with one another

The features of participatory culture coincide to create a basis for what fan communities are on a large scale. Behind these overarching factors is an important intersection between popular and political culture that truly defines each individual fandom (Driscoll & Gregg, 2011). Therefore, the propositions cannot be taken out of the context of an individual fan community. Jenkins idea of participatory cultures builds an important backing narrative to understanding fandom communities. When the five features of fandom are met, groups solidify a sense of purpose of understanding, which can lead to mutually beneficial outcomes for members (Sullivan, 2019).

The following background literature seeks to break down the structural imperatives of convergence culture as it applies specifically into the niche area of online popular music fandom, relegating into the Katy Perry fandom specifically. A review of literature includes fandom dimensions, online communities, and various kinds of fandoms. An overview of fan stereotypes

is presented, including the pathological and non-pathological approaches to research, the heteronormative matrix, and queer identification within fandom. Finally, an overview of the Katy Perry fandom is detailed, explaining its place as a legitimate area of study for fan research.

### Dimensions of Fandom

The research on fandom posits that there are four dimensions of the created social universes that serve as a function of fandom including sociality, religiosity, productivity, and ideology (Fuschillo, 2018). These four functions help us understand the motivating roles in participating in fandom to gratify specific dimensions. In essence, these propositions show the alternative sites (fandoms) and their functions that people use to challenge societal norms and experience less dehumanizing forms of sociality.

#### Dimension 1: Sociality

Sociality refers to the way in which fandoms form a shared identity and create interpersonal bonds that reflect those of an extended family (Jenkins, 1995). These bonds function as a support system for fandom members, especially in times of hardship in day-to-day life. The idea of sociality in fandom has been examined since the 1990's, in which a collective consciousness was thought to be an important dimension of fandom (Bacon-Smith, 1992; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Generally, a fandom's persistence relies on the socialization of new members, whom are integrated by the existing community (Schau, Muniz, & Arnould, 2009). Researchers Cova, Kozinets, and Shankar (2007) note that fandoms are organized by social structure in accordance to experience and knowledge of a media object. Together, these concepts round out the dimension of sociality in fandom.

## Dimension 2: Religiosity

The dimension of religiosity theorizes that fandom can function under the guise of a religious-like phenomena. Previous literature notes that fans “use metaphors from religion to refer to intense emotional experiences of texts that our culture doesn’t give them adequate vocabulary to talk about” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 21). It is commonly emphasized that the religiosity dimension supports fandom communities towards a moral epicenter of their given cultural object (Kozinets, 2001). Important to the discussion is the notion that religiosity is a by-product of fan practices, rather than a preceding ontological perspective (Hills, 2002). This idea underscores religiosity as a function of fandom. Ultimately, the research emphasizes that this dimension stems from sociality, “or the way religious beliefs, rituals, and traditions support communities to rise and thrive” (Fuschillo, 2018, p. 32).

## Dimension 3: Productivity

The third dimension of fandom, productivity, focuses on the fan-made creation of texts that contribute to the cultural economy. Fiske posits that fans turn their “semiotic productivity into some forms of textual production that can circulate among – and thus help to define – the fan community” (Fiske, 1992, p. 30). There are several forms of fan production, from fan fiction to blogging to event planning. The literature asserts that these different forms of production lend way to three forms of working consumers, namely: collaborators, industry emulators, and entrepreneurs (Cova & Dalli, 2009).

Collaborators are fans who work directly with a given company or brand, providing content for brand improvement and exposure. Typically, fans turn into faux employees for the company by providing a “voluntary unpaid contribution” (Sullivan, 2019). The company or brand then profits off of the knowledge and skills of fans in improvement of their business.

Examples of this type of productivity include the Harley-Davidson brandfest (McAlexander & Schouten, 1998) and the LEGO collaborative program (Antorini, Muniz, & Tormod, 2012).

Industry emulators act as traditional professionals, developing personal products and doing marketing work (Dolbec & Fischer, 2015). Examples of this include bloggers in all different niches, those who produce fan versions of a given television series, or event organization based around a specific media object. Specific instances include *Survivor* online reality games, *One Tree Hill* television show conventions, and *Star Trek* fan productions (Antorini, Muniz, & Tormod, 2012).

The third type of fan production, entrepreneurs, typically stem from when a fans ideas contrast with the strategies of a brand (Goulding & Saren, 2007). Fans may go on to translate their ideas into competing companies or products. An example of this is illustrated by Cova and White (2010), in their discussion of Warhammer fans. Exploited by the company for improvement suggestions and an added premium cost, fans formed their own company and created a separate, but similar, game. They then became a competitor of the original company, meeting the true idea of entrepreneurship. Overall, productivity is a way for fans to commodify their fandom experiences and produce meaningful texts.

#### Dimension 4: Ideology

The final dimension, ideology, notes that fandoms are often a form of popular culture that oppose the dominant ideology of society and the capitalist market (Fuschillo, 2018). Fiske (2010) argues that popular culture may come from a particular perspective, but dominant ideologies cannot control audience reactions or constructed meanings. Ideology is ever shifting, formed by social allegiances and the refusal to succumb to the powerful (Fiske, 2010, pg. 37). Research notes that fans generate alternative types of economic commerce, including bartering,

sharing, and gift-giving that contrasts the dominant ideology of monetary exchange (Kozinets, 2002). Fuschillo (2018) posits:

...consumers strive to escape the modern dehumanizing logics of the capitalist monetary-based market to experience new forms of social life where the economy – through practices of bartering, gift-giving, and sharing – fosters human ties instead of threatening these. (Fuschillo, 2018, p. 5)

The literature shows that consumers strive to escape the capitalist market in reformation of dominant ideas through sociocultural forces (Scaraboto, 2015). Fandoms generate new ways to create and distribute value, through production and trading of a given innovation (Figueiredo & Scaraboto, 2016). Ultimately, the ideology dimension seeks to explain how fandoms challenge societal norms, both economic and social, through more pro-social ideologies such as the “gift economy,” “moral economy,” and “sharing economy” (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013; Fuschillo, 2018).

### Online Fandom Communities

With the rise in new media, platforms such as Twitter, Tumblr, and Reddit have created spaces for online fandom communities. Geography is no longer a primary consideration, allowing for individuals across the globe to participate in fandom. These online fandoms often use social media as a hosting platform. Social media is defined as “a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technical foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2020, pg. 61). Wiatrowski (2013) argues that these “cyber” communities are just as legitimate as physical communities, stating that a given social network in which a fandom gathers acts as “a proxy for the physical individual in an online world.” In online fandom participation, fans have the ability to present themselves however they want, some using their real identities while others use an anonymous persona. This deviation from the physical world creates a safer space for many who



may experience judgment and shame in the physical space for their fandom engagement or personal identity.

Simply defined, online fandom communities are digital spaces in which “individual fans have the reduced cost of accessing group experiences that transcend conventional boundaries of social structures and ideologies for identify construction” (Lee, Tak, Kwak, & Lim, 2019). This transcendence of geographic and social barriers creates an intangible sphere for fans to build interpersonal relationships and construct both collectivist and individualist identities (Booth, 2015). In the context of online fan communities, the often served function is to celebrate and discuss a given celebrity. Many times, fans display an admiration for a celebrity echoing an actual social relationship. Through this common interest and sentiment, fans also bond and build social ties amongst other members of the community (Phua, 2012). Research by Kim and Kim (2017) posits that online communities serve a number of functions for fans, variant on their particular usage. These attributes include social interaction, information quality, and contents.

Lewis (1992) notes that fandom communities are increasingly less exclusive given their online status, as there is no turning anyone away online and new members are free to join without a gatekeeping process. Social media has created a new standard of presence in fan communities, coming in various forms dependent upon the medium. Reddit includes an upvote/downvote system. Facebook utilizes a “like” and “share” feature. Twitter, for example, uses “likes” and “retweets” to notify and show presence within fandom. Communication via tweets, direct messaging, and following of other fans establishes the intangible world of Twitter fandom from which this study operates. Jensen (2017) argues,

Fans have moved from place to place, leaving technological shortcomings behind, discovering new features, establishing and de-constructing fandom spaces. Fans use the different sites to express different aspects of their fannish activities and fandom; they

create and maintain a participatory community revolving around their passion. (Jensen, 2017, p. 148)

Many scholars have examined the crossover between online spheres and the concept of community in an effort to describe how relationships are formed amongst fans. Feenberg and Bakardjieva (2004) assert five hallmarks of “community with parallels in the online world.” These include: “identification with symbols and ritual practices; acceptance of common rules; mutual aid; mutual respect; authentic communication” (Feenberg & Bakardjieva, 2004, p. 5). DeLuca (2018) posits online fandom communities in particular embody these five elements. Examples include ritual practices (watching a music video release together and sharing screenshots or religiously streaming a new album as a group) to acceptance of common rules (no sharing of paparazzi photos out of respect) to authentic communication (sharing life stories, discussing world issues, welcoming members into the group).

### Twitter as a Fandom Platform

Twitter, founded in 2006, is a social networking service that operates as a free platform. Among various social media platforms, Twitter is the fastest growing (Bennett, 2013) with over 330 million users (Twitter Data, 2019). Features of the platform include: 280-character tweets, the ability to retweet, favorite, and reply to tweets, follow and unfollow users, and add photo, video, and audio content. Twitter provides a unique space for fans to converge as their access to celebrity Twitter accounts is free of barriers. Interlocution between fan accounts and celebrity accounts can and does occur, regardless of number of followers on either end.

In reference to fan communities on the platform, the specific terminology for these Twitter users collectively is “Stan Twitter” (Gaillot, 2017). The origin of the term comes from the 2000 release “Stan” by Eminem, merging the words ‘stalker’ and ‘fan.’ (O’Keeffe, 2014). Radulovic and Haasch (2018) note that Stan Twitter is synonymous with Fandom Twitter. In this

sect of Twitter, users engage with their respective communities in discussion of a number of specific interests, ranging from K-pop to boybands to specific celebrities. O’Flynn notes that many users on Stan Twitter also commonly overlap with LGBTQ+ Twitter communities (2018). “[S]tans aren’t just superfans, they’re a community of like-minded souls coming together, unified under the banner of wanting to see their chosen celebrity flourish,” argues the *Huffington Post* (Whitehead, 2017).

Previous research by Highfield, Harrington, and Burns focused on Twitter as a fandom technology during major media events. The literature states “[Twitter] serves as a back channel to television and other streaming audiovisual media, enabling users to offer their own running commentary on the universally shared media text” (Highfield, Harrington & Bruns, 2012, p. 1). This study provides an example of how Twitter is used by fans to develop shared ideologies and group cohesion. In 2011, Twitter itself noted its role in mass media events, listing the MTV Music Awards, BET Awards, and FIFA Women’s World Cup final as events generating the most tweets per second throughout the year (Highfield, Harrington & Bruns, 2012). This data shows the power of Twitter in forging and fostering group communication.

### Variants of Fandom

Many audience subcultures exist within the fandom universe. It is important to note their similarities and differences in acknowledgment that each community has their own standards and beliefs, though all culminating under the pretext of a fan group. In his very definition of fandom, fan scholar Sandvoss (2005) argues that by definition, fandom is “the regular, emotionally involved consumption of a given popular narrative or text in the form of books, television shows, films, or music, as well as popular texts in a broader sense such as sports teams and popular icons and stars ranging from athletes and musicians to actors” (Sandvoss, 2005, p. 8). The

breadth of this definition lends itself to the sheer number of different fandoms.

Perhaps the most important variable in comparing fandoms is the stigmatization of different fans. For instance, fantasy fans are labeled geeky and fanatic by societal stereotypes. This stereotype overlaps with that of gamers and comic book readers, perceived as lonely, socially awkward, immature, and freakish (Gagliardo, 2013; Kower, Griffiths & Oldmeadow, 2012). In his seminal work, Jenkins (1992) notes that even the word “fan” (short for “fanatic”) associates fandom with “madness and demonic possession” (Jenkins, 1992, pg. 13). “Media portrayals and researchers alike have depicted celebrity and popular media culture fan behaviors as pathological, rather, than a normal and natural expression of social and aesthetic affinity” (Cohen, Atwell, Anderson & Tindage, 2017, pg. 3).

These stereotypes exist in contrast to fandoms such as sports. Research notes that sports fans may even be more involved with the object of their fandoms, yet they receive less stigmatization on a large scale. For example, a sports fan may paint himself in team colors to attend a game, while a media fan may paint himself as a media object to attend a ComicCon. Regardless of presentation or similar actions, the sports fan will rarely be regarded as “creepy,” while a media fan is immediately labeled as such (Zubernis & Larsen, 2012). The difference in stereotypes presented by this example illustrate an important factor in fan research, pathology. When discussing popular music fandom, pathology plays a role in how we think of specific audiences. This must be noted in an effort to move away from the fanatic and obsessed label often put on those expressing interest in objects outside of societies norms.

### Popular Music Fandom

A large part of the existing literature on fandom takes a pathological perspective, such as that by Lewis (1992.) Lewis argues that the line between a normal fan and an excessive one is

when a blurring occurs between fantasy and reality. The stigmatization of fans is especially relevant in the area of popular music, as teenagers and women as early as the eras of Frank Sinatra, Elvis, and The Beatles were criticized for being too obsessed. Literature by Stever (2009) takes a contradictory approach to being a fan, arguing that pathological celebrity worship is only one type of fan. While some fans exist that exhibit borderline-pathological behaviors towards celebrities or certain media, there are many others whose commitment to a celebrity does not intervene with carrying on a normal, healthy, satisfying life (Stever, 2009).

Of the little research that exists, most in the popular music niche focuses on women and girls as fans. Gender stereotypes are inherently present in popular music fandom, given that most music and artists popular among women are trivialized. Sheila Whiteley (2000) argues that the taste of young women has been largely ignored. Andrews and Whorlow (2000) provide reasoning, noting that “discourses concerned with ‘teenyboppers’ (young girls aged 8-15) construct them in terms of their naïveté, as immature and undiscerning consumers or cultural dupes entering into fandom as a time filler between adolescence and adulthood” (Andrews & Whorlow, 2000, p. 255-256). The term “fangirl” is often used as a pejorative label to ridicule enthusiastic female fans (Click, 2009).

This research steers away from the pathological approach, as fandom is a multidimensional phenomenon. As Jenkins demonstrated in *Textual Poachers* (2012), it is possible to look beyond stereotypes by letting fans speak for themselves. His research sought to reestablish the existing narrative through interviewing fans and examining their productions. Researchers do recognize that fan activities exist on a continuum, with contingent levels of engagement (Abercrombie & Longhurt, 1998). Given that fandom has often appealed to

historically oppressed groups, fandom practices therefore have become a space for resistance (Sullivan, 2019).

### Slash and Television Fandom

Similar to the research on women in fandom, queer individuals in fan communities are severely understudied. The existing literature on queer fandom focuses primarily on television and slash fandom, with papers centering around queer shows such as *The L Word* (Cameron, 2017) and *Queer as Folk* (Hunting, 2012). Slash fandom refers to fiction created by audiences that detail an emotional and/or sexual relationship between members of a given media text. Slash originated from the world of television fandom, but has been translated largely to persons in literature, sports, and music. An example of slash comes from the *Star Trek* universe, in which a romance was created by fans around Captain James Kirk and Vulcan Science Officer Spock. According to Sullivan, slash fiction is created to “challenge the existing gender boundaries of the popular text itself by introducing the notion of homosexuality into a mainstream, heterosexual narrative” (Sullivan, 2019, pg. 204).

Research on queer television fandom has focused largely on shows that demonstrate LGBTQ+ characters acting in accordance to societal norms of heterosexuality (Westerfelhaus & Lacroix, 2006; Meyer, 2010). Primarily, research has sought to understand television representations of gay characters, and how fans reject such hegemonic discourse by subverting traditional institutions and creating new cultural products (Dhaenens & Bauwel, 2014). In an intersection between television and slash fandoms, soap operas have been studied alongside few cable television shows to explore queerness in this context (Villarejo, Davis & Needham, 2009; Dhaenens, 2012). This research provides a critical lens for analyzing queer fandoms, specifically the heterosexual matrix and its subsequent construction and deconstruction by queer fans.

## Fandom as Resistance

Fandom has always been for those on the outside of the homogeneous notions of society. John Fiske notes that fans and fandom are “associated with the cultural tastes of subordinated formations of the people, particularly those disempowered by any combination of gender, age, class, and race” (Fiske, 1992, pg. 30). In his research on television culture (Fiske, 2002), argues that fans resist their negative stereotypes in society by creating their own space and establishing ownership over certain media. In this way, fandom is a form of political resistance. Audiences autonomously engage in the construction of their own self-identity, rather than being boxed in by institutional constructions (Gray, Sandvoss, & Harrington, 2007).

Fan studies therefore constituted a purposeful political intervention that sided with the tactics of fan audiences in their evasion of dominant ideologies, and that set out to rigorously defend fan communities against their ridicule in the mass media and by nonfans. (Gray, Sandvoss & Harrington, 2007, p. 2)

In escaping societal ridicule, fans create alternative sites in which their experiences are less dehumanizing and more socially welcomed. This is important in reference to queer communities, as the physical world often presents barriers to expression for LGBTQ+ people. In fact, research shows that LGBTQ+ people have a higher prevalence of mental health disorders than heterosexual people (Meyer, 2003). This is termed minority stress, and refers to how constant discrimination creates a stressful social environment, causing mental health issues (Meyer, 2003). Evidence by Meyer argues that factors such as “stress processes, including the experience of prejudice events, expectations of rejection, hiding and concealing, internalized homophobia, and ameliorative coping processes” contributes to the social ridicule (Meyer, 2003, pg. 1).

## Heterosexual Matrix and Queer Deconstruction/Reconstruction

In using fandom as a form of resistance, it is important to understand the framework that

makes up our societal concept of normal sexual identities and behavior. Judith Butler, in her popular work, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) established what is known as the heterosexual matrix. The matrix as defined by Butler acknowledges:

designated that grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, gender and desires are naturalized...a hegemonic discursive model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expression through a stable gender that is opposition-ally and hierarchically defined through compulsory practice of heterosexuality. (Butler, 1990, p. 208)

Simply put, Butler identifies that our society has established heterosexuality as a normalized identity, leaving those with opposing identities on the outskirts of normality. Queer theorist Halberstam (2005) posits that the matrix relies on fixed gender and sexuality notions, “feigning universality” and “heteronormative discourse as hegemonic.” For queer people, the matrix is successful in exclusion and depreciation for the queer persons lack of conformity. In an effort to break the heterosexual matrix, fandoms often serve as a space for queer resistance.

Dhaenens postulates that queer deconstruction “exposes how heteronormativity operates” while queer reconstruction strategies “represent queer and viable alternatives to the heteronormal” (Dhaenens, 2014, p. 4). These resistance strategies have been employed primarily in researching television, though an extension can be made to understand other queer centric media spaces. There are a number of strategies for queer deconstruction and eventual reconstruction, which are briefly explained.

Queer deconstruction strategies are primarily concerned with defying the heterosexual matrix by exposure and subversion (Dhaenens, 2014). The literature poses three strategies to queer deconstruction, including: the strategy of exposure, the strategy of contradiction, and the strategy of parody. The exposure strategy essentially demonstrates the nonsensical categorization of sexuality in society. This includes viewing sexuality in terms of good, bad, natural, and



unnatural. Instances of this, for example, include heterosexuality, homosexuality, monogamy, marriage, promiscuity, and non-procreative sex (Dhaenens, 2014). These concepts illustrate how the conventions of heteronormativity impact all people, not even just those identifying as queer. By exposing these factors, queer deconstruction takes place.

The second strategy, that of contradiction, seeks to reveal dissonance amongst the reigning ideological framework. To do this involves “injecting instances of queerness in settings and situations that are dictated by heteronormative principles...functioning as contradictions to the heteronormative environment” (Dhaenens, 2014, p. 6). Researchers note that albeit brief, these instances can help others question their limited mindsets and potentially rethink their fixed ideologies. An example of this strategy is found in the show *Torchwood*, in which two rival cowboys paused in a fight scene to share a kiss (Pullen, 2011). This challenges stereotypes, and surprised viewers when the masculine hero expressed same-sex desire. The final strategy, parody, is often used to question compulsory heteronormative ideals. Devices such as exaggeration and role reversals often come into play, specifically in expressing critiques of the past. This strategy is used to a lesser extent, though powerful when used (Hutcheon, 2000).

Queer reconstruction is concerned with reconstructing narratives to show queer sexual tendencies as normal, not inferior, or stigmatized. The two main types of reconstruction strategies include representing queerness as comprehensible, and depicting queer experiences as a viable and valid way of existence (Dhaenens, 2014).

The concepts of marriage, home, family, and reproduction, and the articulation of these institutions and practices to norms and values, such as monogamy, stability, or longevity, are based on the idealization of the heterosexual matrix. However, each of these institutions and practices holds the potential to be subversively re-articulated. (Dhaenens, 2014, p. 8)

This idea of rewriting the scripts of heteronormativity are rich within fandom. The literature, as shown, positions fandoms as a unique space in which both political resistance and identity construction take place. Though this is known to be true, little research has looked at these concepts of queerness and fandom on a niche scale. The existing gap in the literature posits the impetus for this research. This thesis seeks to add to the online fandom discourse in looking at what factors motivate queer participation in online pop music fandom. Ultimately, my aim was to understand the queer experience and fill the lack of existing literature on the topic.

### Katy Perry Fandom

In 2008, Katy Perry made her debut into pop music with her hit single, “I Kissed A Girl.” Daughter of Pentecostal pastors, Perry tantalized and, in some ways, scandalized mainstream music with her self-professed bi-curious anthem (Trust, 2015). Branding herself a gay icon from early on, Perry personified individuality and eclecticism with an over the top persona, bubblegum pop performance, and LGBTQ+ activism. Perry continued her upward mobility into the spotlight in 2010 with the release of her quintessential album, *Teenage Dream*. Her sophomore release made history, becoming only the second album to have five number one singles, tying her with Michael Jackson and his album, *Bad* (Servin, 2012). Her subsequent albums, *Prism*, *Witness*, and *Smile*, which followed in 2013, 2017, and 2020, were all massively successful. To date, Katy Perry has sold 18 million albums and 125 million singles, making her the fifth best selling digital artist in the United States (Recording Industry Association of America, 2019).

In 2015 Perry won a Guinness World Record for most Twitter followers, and was the first person to hit 90 million followers on the platform (Katy Perry Fandom, 2020). Her overall fan following is massive by the numbers, with figures such as: 108 million on Twitter, 65 million on

Facebook, 103 million on Instagram, and millions of other followers across Youtube and Spotify. In an effort to create a space for fans to convene, Perry launched KatyCats.com, a social networking site created in June of 2017. Coined the “official home of the KatyCats” this site welcomes users to chat with fellow fans, receive exclusive content, free meet and greets, and occasionally chat with Katy Perry on a specified forum (KatyCats.com, 2020).

Her social media presence has served a greater function in building a bilateral relationship with fans. Perry claims, “I don’t want to be above my audience, I want to be one with my audience” (Iley, 2012). This authenticity shows itself in her loyal online following, in an arena in which fans feel human-to-human connection rather than mere self-promotion. Perry emphasizes her humanity in provision of support for her fans, monikered “KatyCats” at large. This sentiment is echoed in the literature, as noted by Chung and Cho (2017), “[t]hese new media environments have narrowed the distance between audiences and celebrities and have altered the role of audiences from that of mere spectators or admirers to “friends” of celebrities” (Chung & Cho, 2017, p. 482).

Leveraging her popularity, Perry has been outspoken in support of the LGBTQ+ community, earning awards from The Trevor Project and the Human Rights Campaign for her work. For example, Perry dedicated and donated profits from her music video, “Firework” to the It Gets Better Project – “a worldwide movement against harassment of LGBTQ youth” (Hernandez, 2017). She has been outspoken in support of the transgender community, rallied for marriage equality, and supported victims of the deadly shooting at the Orlando gay nightclub, Pulse, in 2016 (Artavia, 2020; Hernandez, 2017). In awarding Perry with the National Equality Award, HRC President Chad Griffin commented,

We are thrilled to honor Katy Perry for using her powerful voice and international platform to speak out for LGBTQ equality. Her compelling advocacy, from the stage to

the campaign trail, has had profound effect on the lives of LGBTQ people — and, in particular, young people. Katy’s message of inclusion and equality continues to inspire us and the world. (HRC Staff, 2017)

As her platform has grown, Perry has become synonymous with the idea of individuality, equality, and being yourself in spite of the conventions of the world. Her unique engagement with fans, paralleled with her empowerment messaging, has led to a devoted fanbase – many identifying as LGBTQ+. In exploration of her uniquely cultivated fandom, this project includes survey responses from a sample of 81 self-identified KatyCats. Additionally, a smaller sample of three self-identified LGBTQ+ KatyCats conducted one-on-one interviews for more in-depth data. Particularly in this text, the process of identity building is explored among LGBTQ+ fans and their online community, enabled by social media. The literature aforementioned frames this analysis.

#### Research Question

What factors motivate participation in online fandom for queer-identifying fans?

## CHAPTER 3

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### Uses and Gratifications

For the purposes of this study, I approached the data from a uses and gratifications theory (UGT) framework. Uses and gratifications, simply, is an attempt at understanding how and why people and audiences seek out specific media to meet their needs (Katz, 1959). Seminal scholar Cantril (1942) poses these social and psychological needs as applicable to an array of media contexts, typically mimicking the presiding medium of the time. For example, UGT has been studied in reference to radio listeners (Cantril & Allport, 1935; Herzog, 1940); print media including newspaper and magazine readership (Berelson, 1949; Payne, Severn, & Dozier, 1988); and television viewership (Rubin, 1994). Recent studies have used UGT to move away from traditional media and into the online world. Research on the application of UGT within new media has focused largely on the internet generally (Grant, 2005; Ruggiero, 2000), cellphones (Grant & O'Donohoe, 2007), and social media (Harridge-March, Dunne, Lawlor, & Rowley, 2010; Blight, 2016).

UGT has five major assumptions defining media and its various users which must first be relayed to further understand UGT within social media. The assumptions of UGT are as follows: (a) audiences are active and use of media is goal-oriented; (b) certain needs are gratified by people when using media; (c) media competes with other resources as need-satisfying sources; (d) users of media are aware of their motives, media use, and interests and therefore have expectations of media to help with media selection and need gratification; and (e) audiences are the only ones capable of assessing the value and quality of media (Katz, 1959; Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973).

Under the umbrella framework of UGT, it is known that social media gratifies a variety of needs for users, dependent upon their approach and usage of the particular mediums. As a tool for studying online audiences, Ku (2013), notes, “People choose to use a particular computer-mediated communication technology, instead of other media choices, to communicate with others in order to fulfill their particular gratification needs” (Ku, 2013, p. 573). With origins in communications literature, studies have shown that uses and gratifications are a good predictor of media consumption and use (Kaye & Johnson, 2002). This positive connection between gratifications and media usage indicates that UGT is an ideal framework of which to examine a niche social media community, expanding the research in this area.

In the context of Twitter, it was found by Johnson and Yang (2009) that social motives are important to Twitter users. Previous research by Chen (2011) examined how Twitter is used in the UGT context. The study found that Twitter users established gratification through “an informal sense of camaraderie” with other users, satisfying a need for connection. This phenomenon can be explained by UGT due to the theoretical proposition Chen (2011) noted; “communication behavior is goal-oriented and purposeful in that people choose based on their needs, wants, or expectations to participate or select media messages, using social and psychological factors as a guide or filter” (Chen, 2011, p. 757).

Seidman (2013) suggests that information gained through social media helps build and maintain interpersonal relationships, thus helping need fulfillment to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). As noted by Wellman and Gulia (1999), social media is additionally used to meet like-minded individuals as well as “to receive companionship and social support.” Identified in a study by Joinson (2008), there are seven motivations for Facebook use among college students, including: shared identities, social connection, content, photographs, social investigation, status

updates, and social network surfing. This research provides a clear example of the theory in an online mediated context, offering support for this type of academic inquiry.

To understand the subject of queer fandom through this perspective, focus should be on specified needs gratified through social media use. Though used widely across many disciplines, UGT is particularly relevant in helping to explain online media and social sites. UGT is useful in the context of popular music fandom given the heuristic value of this approach paralleled alongside queer individuals use of online communities. Simply, uses and gratifications give explanation to how audiences (in this case, queer-identifying Katy Perry fans) seek out online-mediated mediums to gratify a psychological need.

In order to accurately study UGT, a framework must be employed with proven effectiveness in previous research. This study focuses on the framework employed by Whiting and Williams (2013), in their study examining and identifying the “uses and gratifications that consumers receive from using social media” (Whiting & Williams, 2013, p. 363). Their study compiles and synthesizes four frameworks available in the literature, including: Palmgreen and Rayburn (1979), Korgaonkar and Wolin (1999), Papacharissi and Rubin (2000), and Ko, Cho, and Roberts (2005). Whiting and Williams selected these frameworks based on relevance to social media, proven repetitive use in the literature, and focus on the internet. For this project, the Whiting and Williams cohesive framework was chosen given the goals of the original study and their parallel to the goals of this study. Their original research sought to demonstrate the importance of UGT, apply it to social media, and identify uses and gratifications of social media usage. The goals here are the same, only in the context of queer online fandom.

According to the chosen framework (Whiting & Williams, 2013), there are seven motivations for the audience within social media use, including: (1) social interaction; (2)

information seeking; (3) passing time; (4) entertainment; (5) relaxation; (6) communicatory utility; and (7) convenience utility. These motivations represent the themes in which data gathered in this project was coded for. A brief explanation of each theme follows.

### UGT Motivations

*Social interaction* is unambiguously defined as the use of various social media platforms to interact and communicate with others online. Previous research studies have implemented this theme under a number of titles, including companionship (Palmgreen & Rayburn, 1979), interpersonal utility (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000), and social motivation (Korgaonkar & Wolin, 1999). Scale items from the literature for this theme include meeting others with similar interests and belonging to a group. Simply, this usage theme explains the impetus to interact with others online. In an effort to examine queer fandom members, this theme largely encompasses the idea of LGBTQ+ people seeking out others with similar life experiences and interests.

*Information seeking*, according to Whiting and Williams, is defined as “using social media media to seek out information or to self-educate” (2013). This uses and gratifications theme is pulled from research on using the internet to gain information, coming from Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) and Korgaonkar and Wolin (1999). The usage of this theme in the current study categorizes fans’ motivation for engaging with fandom to learn and explore, both about their fandom and other worldly issues.

The next motivation, known as *pass time*, is a construct explaining social media usage to fill time and engage users in their free time. Palmgreen and Rayburn (1979) first used this theme in reference to research on UGT and television viewing. In a study on internet usage, Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) also utilized this construct. Scale items ranged from “I use the internet when I have nothing better to do” to “I use the internet to occupy my time.” In this study, *pass time*



includes any mention of fandom participants using Twitter to counter boredom or merely occupy time.

Motivation 4, *entertainment*, draws from four studies, including: Palmgreen and Rayburn (1979), Korgaonkar and Wolin (1999), Papacharissi and Rubin (2000), and Whiting and Williams (2013). This type of usage is defined in this instance by using Twitter for both entertainment and enjoyment. A related factor, escapism, also falls under this umbrella. Escapism is defined here as “pleasurable, fun, and enjoyable” (Whiting & Williams, 2013, pg. 365).

*Relaxation*, the fifth measure, is defined by using social media to relieve the stresses of everyday life. The distinguishing factor between the theme of relaxation and the theme of entertainment comes from Whiting and Williams (2013). They note that entertainment is focused on enjoyment, while relaxation is focused on stress relief. Studies done by both Palmgreen and Rayburn (1979) and Korgaonkar and Wolin (1999) use these dimensions. Relaxation in this context accounts for data from Twitter users who get online as a relief from everyday life. This theme includes queer fandom members who use Twitter as escape from their physical reality.

The sixth motivation is *communicatory utility*, defined as “communication facilitation and providing information to share with others” (Whiting & Williams, 2013, pg. 365). Investigated originally in reference to television viewing (Palmgreen & Rayburn, 1979), this theme is transformed for this study to examine usefulness in conversation. Meaning, communication brings value and builds discussions; unlike social interaction which defines conversation for conversations sake. Examples of this may include the dissemination of educational materials or resources.

*Convenience utility*, the seventh and final theme and motivation, is defined as “providing

convenience and usefulness to individuals” (Whiting & Williams, 2013). Previous studies have used the convenience construct in studying internet uses (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000), interactive advertising (Ko, Cho & Roberts, 2005), and online shopping (Korgaonkar & Wolin, 1999). Examples of this may include using Twitter to conveniently find information, spread information, speak to a friend, or interact with a celebrity user.

This thesis seeks to expand research on social media and entertainment in both the context of Twitter and fandom. Past literature notes a number of observations on UGT within social media and the internet. As social media has a specified set of motivations, this research seeks to discern unique motivations and gratifications for queer fandom Twitter users based on the aforementioned framework. Taking these goals into consideration, the coding process now has an established list of motivations and themes from which to synthesize data using a UGT theoretical analysis.

## CHAPTER 4

### METHODS

In this study, participants on the platform Twitter were purposively invited to participate in an open-ended online survey. After data collection from the survey, interviews were conducted with some respondents to attain more in-depth information. The inclusion criteria for the research study were as follows: each participant must be from the United States, age 18 or older, and an active member of the Katy Perry fandom. Self-identification of queer status was also a variable, adjusting survey questions based on if a fandom member identified as LGBTQ+. In this context, queer identification is inclusive of those identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or any other non-heterosexual identifying sexuality. To ensure the inclusion criterion was met, participants were invited through the social media platform Twitter. There is an active Katy Perry fan community on the platform, and I have pre-established relationships with the community. This study did abide by ethical standards and institutional review board (IRB) approval was attained before research began.

Contact with potential participants was made through Twitter, using leaders of the community to spread a research study invitation. Figureheads of the fandom were initially contacted via Twitter, as I have an existing relationship with the community and its conciliators. An initial tweet was sent out by myself and select community leaders declaring a research study opportunity. I identified myself in the tweet, then included approved recruitment text leading potential participants to an online survey. The recruitment copy read:

Hello KatyCats! I am Maddison Poteet, a graduate student from the University of North Texas. This semester, I am studying the Katy Perry fandom and the accompanying online community. I am searching for participants to be part of this research! If you're a KatyCat over the age of 18 from the USA who identifies as a member of the LGBTQ+ community, I would love to have your participation! The link to the survey is included below. It should take no longer than 30 minutes to complete. Please email

**maddisonpoteet@my.unt.edu** if you would like more information on this study. All data collected will remain anonymous. Hopefully, this research can help others understand the importance of fan communities like yours!

The survey consisted of both demographic and open-ended questions to gain information from a significant sample of individuals. The initial survey was deployed via Qualtrics. Each participant was presented with an informed consent page at the beginning of the survey that includes a briefing on the purpose of the study, procedures, and confidentiality of their data. The demographic portion of the survey ensured the queer identification criterion is met. After survey data was collected and synthesized, some respondents who volunteered to participate in a qualitative interview to gather more information were interviewed.

Qualitative, one-on-one, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain in-depth information from some participants. Interviews were conducted on the Zoom platform, allowing for participants from across the United States. Participants were again briefed on the purpose of the study, procedures, and confidentiality of their data. Each participant was presented with an additional informed consent form utilizing Qualtrics which had to be read and completed before the study could proceed. All interviews were audio recorded utilizing audio recording technology. On average, each interview lasted no longer than an hour. All data collected from respondents was transcribed and coding was anonymized during the process.

As described by Braun and Clarke (2006), a thematic analysis approach was used to provide a rich description of the lived experience of queer identifying Katy Perry fans in the United States. The analysis process is made up of six phases, including: becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and preparing a write-up. I made use of both semantic and latent themes, identifying possible overlaps between surface level and deeper meanings. During the first step, I familiarized myself

with the data, reading transcripts and noting initial impressions from surveys. All data and transcripts were anonymized to maintain the confidentiality of respondents. Secondly, organization of data was done in a systematic and meaningful way. An open coding scheme was used initially to create chunks based on the data. After going through the data, the decision was made to use the themes outlined in research by Whiting and Williams (2013). As noted by Braun and Clark (2006), a theoretical thematic analysis process was used to code segments of data that were relevant to or captured an interesting take about the research question.

The next steps focused on searching for and reviewing themes. In Step 3, themes were found based on their significance throughout the surveys, interviews, and relevance to the research question. Codes were examined to fit together into a given theme, repeated until all data was covered and organized. Following this, Step 4 attempted to modify and further develop themes, including those outside the framework of Whiting and Williams (2013). These included dimensions of fandom as described by Fuschillo (2018) and the act of defying the heterosexual matrix laid out by Butler (1990). I looked over chunks and examined if the given data works with each theme. Themes were then extrapolated and examined to make sure there was no overlap and to determine if there were subthemes present.

The final step consisted of defining themes. This process aims to “identify the essence of what each theme is about” (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes were already outlined via the framework from a previous study (Whiting & Williams, 2013), though they had to be examined deeply to make sure the statutes held true for this study. A thematic map was used to visualize themes and conceptualize the relationships between themes. Finally, a write-up was produced to further this thesis in a meaningful way.

This exploratory study gathered 81 survey responses. Individuals were asked questions

such as why they joined a fandom, how being queer has impacted their experience, and why they use Twitter as a fandom platform. Specific survey questions can be found in Appendix A. Three one-on-one, semi-structured interviews (see interview guide in Appendix B) were done with volunteers from the Katy Perry fandom. Each identified as a member of the LGBTQ+ community, and answered questions about the queer experience in fandom. Responses ranged from 1419 words to 8215 words. The breakdown for gender included 42 female respondents, 38 male respondents, and 1 non-binary respondent for a total of 81 respondents. The age breakdown ranged from 18 to 58 years of age, with an average age of 22. The racial and ethnic background breakdown included: 48 white respondents, 16 Hispanic respondents, 7 Asian respondents, 6 mixed-race respondents, and 4 Black respondents. Some respondents joined the fandom as early as 2006, while others joined as recently as 2018.

## CHAPTER 5

### RESULTS

The analysis of survey responses and qualitative interviews found that several factors motivate participation in online fandom for queer-identifying Katy Perry fans (RQ1). Seven themes emerged, including: (1) social interaction, (2) information seeking, (3) pass time, (4) entertainment, (5) relaxation, (6) communicatory utility, and (7) convenience utility. The themes of pass time, relaxation, and convenience utility were present in the data but not as salient as the other four themes. These themes represent the uses and gratifications theoretical framework, and explain why users seek out this form of media.

#### Social Interaction

When participants were asked about their impetus for seeking out an online fandom, many of them pointed to the socialization theme as their overarching purpose. Within social interaction as a whole, several subthemes were present. These include being part of a group, meeting and connecting with new people, participating in discussions, and free self-expression. These smaller concepts are detailed in relation to the larger theme.

Participants repeatedly noted that they joined an online fandom to belong to a group. Fans mentioned seeking a community of people with shared interests as a space of belonging. For example, many respondents insisted the fandom was a place with “a sense of community and mutual interest on a specific niche topic” and “a group where I felt understood.” When asked what activities and conversations make up their fandom, participants shared a similar story of community building. Fans mentioned the creation of group chats, group meetups, and the sustained feeling of community. This sub theme is best summarized by a respondent who shared “it made me feel like I belong for the first time in years” and “I was looking for a place where I

felt understood, and I found it.” Community building is in direct correlation with the idea of meeting and connecting with new people, the next dimension of social interaction.

Participants unremittingly noted that they used the online fandom to meet and connect with people. Fans use the Twitter space to connect with other fans and people with shared interests. This was one of the stronger sub themes, mentioned by over half of the respondents. “Getting to know people all around the world was one of the most important things to me”, mentioned one respondent. Numerous survey respondents indicated they made lifelong friends. Several noted that their online friendships are more authentic than their “real life” friendships, as they share a common interest and admiration for an artist. One participant in the interviews said, “I definitely feel like because of my [fandom] Twitter I’ve formed the friendships I have today. We’re all over the world basically but because we spend time together at shows and like hanging out online, it really just created such a special bond.”

Numerous respondents noted that they use the fandom platform to participate in discussions. Participants expressed that Twitter “is like a whole arena of fans in real time that create interesting conversations” and a place “I’ve had my most genuine and open conversations.” Many respondents talked about the specifics of conversation within the fandom. Examples of a normal conversation amongst members include sharing experiences with Katy Perry, promoting new music, and theorizing about future album releases. At an almost equal rate, the fans described discussions outside of merely talking about the artist. A shared language was mentioned, in which participants have localized humor and slang native to their fandom. Conversations amongst members of the fanbase were evidenced to also revolve around members personal lives, sharing life problems and intimate details.

In addition to having personal conversations with members of the fandom, respondents



emphasized the feeling of being able to express themselves freely. Self-expression is the final sub theme within social interaction, and represents a highly salient concept. Numerous respondents referenced self-expression in reference to their queer identities. Respondents shared, “it [fandom] allowed me to become comfortable with being able to express myself so freely” and “it was super private and a sensitive topic to talk about my sexuality, but connecting with more LGBTQ+ people helped me feel more comfortable.” Repeated thematic words in survey responses include *accepted*, *genuine self*, and *no shame*. Fans expressed how important this act of self-expression is, showing how being accepted is incredibly positive for mental health and self-confidence. The concept of self-expression in this context can be summarized by an interview response. They stated they were able to express their sexuality more in the fandom knowing other people were gay, as opposed to talking with their family about it. Some respondents mentioned that there were no queer people in their hometown, so fandom provided a sense of community where they could express freely. Of the 37 respondents who answered the question “are you more comfortable with your own sexuality through your experience in online fandom?”, 30 responded yes.

Ultimately, the theme of social interaction was consistently present in survey responses. LGBTQ+ fans use the platform for a number of socialization dimensions, namely: (1) being part of a group, (2) meeting and connecting with new people, (3) participating in discussions, and (4) free self-expression.

### Information Seeking

Within the theme of information seeking, multiple categories of evidence were present. These include using Twitter fandom to get free information, look for news, and to see what is out there. These three dimensions are detailed in relation to the larger theme of information seeking.

A significant number of respondents said they used fandom as a space to get free information. Free references both the lack of cost as well as the ease of access to anyone. The community does not have any gatekeeping tactics, allowing even the most novice of users to find information. For several fans, they got online to find information before even being in the fandom. In fact, their search for information is what regulated the fandom initiation process. “I found myself wanting to know more about her (Katy Perry) and her updates, so I joined the fandom,” said one respondent. Others wanted to learn more about her musical career, past albums, and unreleased music. While most users reported information seeking in reference to the artist, others mentioned learning about the music business, charts, and pop music generally. Evidence of this dimension from the responses include “it is one of my favorite places to check for new information,” “I just wanted to be more informed” and “I’ve gained a lot of knowledge about Katy and her life.”

Respondents emphasized their use of fandom to get news and real-time updates. Twitter is the best place to get recent news, rumors, and leaks, according to fans. Live news on both Katy Perry and the world generally was a large factor. The ability to share news information quickly with your community was a repeated statement from participants. Fans routinely use the fandom as a way to get insider information, early access to concert dates, and insight into pop-up events. This type of information is not available in other media arenas, which makes fandom all the more powerful for fans. Specific language such as “daily updates” and “information about the small details” evidences this theme.

The final dimension within the information seeking theme is the simple concept of “seeing what is out there.” Respondents articulated that sometimes they got online not to look for anything in particular, but rather to see what information they might find. Others expressed that

they use fandom to find interesting content, knowing that they are in an ecosystem with people having similar interests. This dimension has coexisting data with the next theme of passing time, as well as the final theme, convenience utility. Overall, the three dimensions described provide evidence for the information seeking theme, namely: (1) access to free information, (2) looking for news, and (3) seeing what is out there.

### Pass Time

Multiple respondents reported using the fandom space to pass time. This includes dimensions of curing boredom and occupying free time. Responses towards this theme were incredibly straight forward, stating “it’s just a place to spend your time” and “something to do when bored.” In reference to passing time, fans noted different conversations and experiences they had. For instance, some noted they would video chat with other fans to pass the time, while others would share memes. Evidence also comes from a few repeated phrases, including passing the time by “talking about our personal lives,” “discussing and analyzing music,” and “planning meetups.”

This motivation was present consistently, often in tandem with other themes like social interaction and entertainment. Fans report spending often a large amount of time online as a means of curing boredom, all while engaging with content and other users. One respondent summarized the idea of passing time and the availability of the platform in saying “having an online fandom is like having a space where you can go to constantly.” This idea leads into the fourth theme found in this study, entertainment.

### Entertainment

When posed with the question of motivation for fandom participation, one of the strongest themes that emerged was that of entertainment. For this dimension, several variables

were found including pure entertainment, enjoyment, and escapism. This theme contains all mention of fandom for personal pleasure and escape from the real world, as outlined by Whiting and Williams (2013). Both factors of entertainment and escapism are detailed.

In terms of entertainment, respondents mentioned the joy they receive from participating in fandom. “It’s more fun to interact with each other online,” said one respondent. Most instances of this dimension mention their love for Katy Perry directly as a means of enjoyment. For some fans it’s the music, for some it is having endless things to talk about, and for others it is Katy Perry herself. The forms of entertainment vary widely across responses, but several make mention of tour speculation, breaking down outfits, and even discussing album cover art. In referencing why they sought out fandom in the first place, a participant said, “honestly, to keep myself entertained. There’s so much going on in the world that a few online friends that like what you like makes it a little easier.” This mention of easing worldly anxieties is an excellent segue into the other dimension of entertainment – escapism.

The concept of escapism in this context primarily speaks to how queer people use fandom as a safe space. A number of responses mentioned an unaccepting home life, using fandom to escape from loneliness and ridicule. “It’s like a way to escape a hard reality,” stated one respondent. Another shared, “many people use online fandoms as an escape from everyday prejudice they face for being queer.” In describing how fandom is used as escapism, respondents reported feeling unsafe in their physical worlds, versus the safety of the fanbase.

“There is still constant danger and judgment being queer in everyday life,” described one participant. Many respondents echoed this sentiment, arguing that it is scary to be yourself in everyday life out of fear. Safety was a big concern, and respondents mentioned how in-person you don’t know the attitudes and beliefs of those around you. Several fans expressed that they

always had to be on high alert when out in public. One interviewee noted that they only try to go out in public after making themselves over to present in a traditionally masculine way. They reported that this measure is taken in order to avoid any potential dangers they might face as a queer person. Statements such as “it’s much safer online,” “you don’t have to hide in fandom,” and “you can be more open online” evidence the use of fandom for escapism.

In this sense, escapism merges with entertainment to create a space in which queer fans not only feel safe, but also feel accepted for who they are. This increases the entertainment theme and lends credibility to the various dimensions. Both enjoyment and escapism are summarized well by a survey respondent who said, “being queer in an online fandom feels so good. You never get any stupid looks from people. You never feel wrong. You are who you are and everyone is seeing you as a person, not just someone who is gay.”

### Relaxation

The relaxation dimension showed up in multiple survey responses, though some of its data points were more relevant to the dimensions of passing time and entertainment. For that reason, relaxation was one of the lesser reported themes. When relaxation did show up, the dimensions primarily included stress relief through fun, laughter, and happiness. Respondents largely commented that they found happiness and stress relief through an increase in self-confidence.

Specific responses in this dimension include “it made me more confident to try and make friends in real life,” “brought me confidence to be who I am and enjoy what I enjoy,” and “it brought me out of my comfort zone and taught me that being my authentic self is amazing.” An increase in confidence as a means of stress relief also leads into fandom as a space which fosters discussions on mental health. Many fans reported instances of increased emotional wellbeing,

specifically through Katy Perry, her messaging, and fandom generally.

Mental health came up multiple times, including references to once suicidal thoughts, personal values, and newfound beliefs in bodily autonomy. Several fans stated that being in the fandom helped them recover from thoughts of self-harm. “Fandom saved my life, no exaggeration. I did not have any support system before fandom,” wrote one respondent. Another shared, “I was clinically depressed and also anorexic. It helped my mental health a lot.” As previously stated, relaxation as a theme was present throughout the survey responses. While many fans did not directly correlate their experience with relaxation, they did comment on the dimension of stress relief particularly.

#### Communicatory Utility

Participants reported a high rate of using social media for utilitarian purposes. Specifically, they noted useful conversation and communication that brings value as primary motivations for fandom participation. Many fans expressed this theme through the sharing of useful information, both in the realm of fandom and on worldly issues. Others used fandom as a means of personal growth, or to build discussion on how to increase musical chart positions. This differs from the first theme, social interaction. In social interaction, conversation is for the sake of socialization. In communicatory utility, conversation is for the sake of bringing value and building discussion. These smaller concepts are detailed in relation to the theme as a whole.

For a number of respondents, they reported wanting to be online to find out how others got one-on-one opportunities with Katy Perry. “Wanting to learn about others fan experiences and how to get experiences like theirs,” expressed one respondent. Others reported wanting to build discussions on how to increase sales for new music releases. Fans described, “some activities would include promoting our artist’s music when it’s released,” and “organize

streaming parties on music platforms for her songs to help them chart.” This usefulness of conversation facilitates evidence for this theme.

Within communicatory utility, several participants described using fandom as a means to improve their language skills. “Since English is not my mother tongue it has absolutely helped me improve my English language and communication skills,” said one response. In addition, others listed an increase in ability in both vocabulary and grammar. Some respondents claimed their main motivation of joining fandom was to learn English, specifically to be able to communicate with their favorite artists and friends online.

Perhaps the biggest dimension within communicatory utility is that of broadening perspectives. A number of respondents expressed having discussions on issues happening around the world. This act, they said, broadened their knowledge and empathy for others. “I realized...there is a lot of hate in the world, and by educating ourselves, we can be just a little kinder and more understanding,” stated a participant. Several responses pointed to being educated on worldly issues, interestingly noting that they wouldn’t have known about them otherwise (had it not been for fandom). Petitions, discussions, and the scope of cultures around the world were repeated concepts. This point is summarized well by an interview participant, who stated, “I think that the best thing that has happened...is growing up with such a world knowledge. You know people from all over the world, different cultural practices, things going on.”

#### Convenience Utility

The final theme, convenience utility, references using fandom due to its ease of access and free content. For some this was free news, while others emphasized the easy opportunity to communicate directly with Katy Perry. Twitter as a platform is built to foster bilateral

communication – an incredibly convenient feature to reach celebrities who are often inaccessible. This theme was evidenced a number of times just as the others, but is straightforward in nature.

Specific mentions of convenience utility in the data include reference to “keeping up to date with news,” “wanting to feel more involved in the music community online,” and “provided me with opportunities to interact with Katy Perry.” Evidence of convenience utility also came up in other themes, most notably, information seeking. The crossover of data shows that convenience is often tied to an intake of information. Twitter is an ideal platform for this, as there are no associated costs or qualifications for access. In this way, convenience is a primary motivation for fandom participation.

In summation, seven themes were present in the survey and interview data. All themes were strong, though the dimensions of pass time, relaxation, and convenience utility were less salient than the others. These results provide insight into motivations for fandom participation, specifically for queer identifying Katy Perry fans. A dimension of queer resistance ran consistently through all seven themes. These concepts are discussed in the following section, including a relation of the findings to the idea of heteronormativity and queer deconstruction and reconstruction.



## CHAPTER 6

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study has adopted uses and gratifications theory (Katz, 1959; Cantril, 1942; Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973; Ku, 2013; Kaye & Johnson, 2002; Chen, 2011; Whiting & Williams, 2013), focusing on ways in which social media is used by audiences to gratify certain needs. Because of the focus on queer fans, effects of the heteronormative matrix (Bauble & Dhaenens, 2014; Dhaenens, 2012; Butler, 1990; Halberstam, 2005) and queer resistance (Fiske, 1992; Fiske, 2002; Gray, Sandvoss, & Harrington, 2007; Dhaenens, 2014) have been incorporated into the study. The focus of this study resides in the context of queer identifying Katy Perry fans, as a means of examining a specific fandom and developing a rich description of their motivations. With this information, I argue that fandom is a space used to meet a number of needs; including, being a somewhat idyllic space for queer people to resist societal norms.

The research question asked about the ways in which queer-identifying fans are motivated to join and participate in online fandom. The study found that queer fans are motivated towards fandom in a number of ways, finding seven specific themes in the data. The seven motivations accounted for through the data include: (1) social interaction, (2) information seeking, (3) pass time, (4) entertainment, (5) relaxation, (6) communicatory utility, and (7) convenience utility. Based on these findings, fans use online fandom to meet both personal and utilitarian needs. Fandom functions as a unique queer resistance, forming social relationships in an online space that resists the erasure of queerness in the physical world.

The study was successful in determining that the seven present themes fit into the four dimensions of fandom as laid out by Fuschillo (2018). These four functions help explain the motivating roles in participating in fandom. The initial dimension, sociality, refers to how

fandoms form shared identities and function as a support system for members (Jenkins, 1995). Responses from participants were consistent in regards to sociality, identifying a number of instances in which fans formed collective identities and bonds that reflect those of a familial structure. Participants expressed their individual struggles with prejudice towards the queer community, evidencing research by Bacon-Smith (1992) and Schouten and McAlexander (1995) who argued collective understanding as a positive means of socialization. The sociality dimension showed up in the themes of social interaction, entertainment, and relaxation.

Beyond the concept of socialization, the data pointed to consistency with the second dimension of fandom, religiosity. Research by Kozinets (2001) argues that fandom communities can become moral epicenters based on a specific media object. The data in this study shows religiosity as a by-product of fan practices. Participants felt moved by Katy Perry and the community at large towards betterment of the self, noting an increase in empathy and kindness overall. These findings align with previous research, particularly by Hills (2002) who claimed religiosity is produced by fandom, rather than acting as a prerequisite. Evidence for this dimension is found in the themes of social interaction, information seeking, and communicatory utility.

Fiske (1992) posited the third dimension of fandom, productivity, as how fans contribute to the cultural economy. Participants in this study utilized textual production on a broader scale through writing think pieces, recreating costumes, and fan art. These circulated products help define the community, including the creation of shared language. The productivity dimension is evidenced by data in the themes of social interaction, communicatory utility, and convenience utility. Cova and Dalli (2009) recognize these productions as meaningful contributions to the very core of a fandoms identity.

Research on the fourth dimension, ideology, argues fandom is a cultural form of opposition to the dominant ideology of society (Fuschillo, 2010). The themes of social interaction, entertainment, and relaxation evidence this dimension. Fans expressed their dissatisfaction with societies notions of LGBTQ+ people, expressing a shift in their own personal allegiances. Previous research by Fiske (2010) suggests dominant ideologies cannot control audiences. Participants regarded this to be true, showing pro-social attitudes through the moral and sharing economies.

Queer people have been victims of intolerance and prejudice in society at large for generations. Strikingly, fans have been referenced by previous researchers as often being associated with subordinated groups, disempowered by limitless combinations of gender, age, class, race, and sexual orientation (Fiske, 1992). For these fans, fandom is a form of political resistance. Fiske (2002) argues for the resistance of negative stereotypes through fandom participation. Participants described this experience through constructions of self-identity, forgoing the boxed in ideas of polite institutions. These findings are important in understanding why fandom is so important for queer people.

Research by Butler (1990) established the heterosexual matrix, explaining the hegemonic model that has been naturalized by society. This model identifies how heterosexuality has become the norm, leaving those who identify differently on the outskirts. Participants described this construction in a number of ways, mentioning both unaccepting home lives and safety concerns when in public. The additional concept of minority stress (Meyer, 2003) was incredibly identifiable through the data. Participants expressed instances of suicidal ideation, mental health deterioration based on a lack of acceptance, and instances of eating disorders. Based on these constructs, identifying spaces in which queer people feel safe and welcome is imperative.

In an effort to resist the heterosexual matrix, the research posits a number of deconstruction strategies. Dhaenens (2014) posits three strategies, though only two revealed themselves in this study. The strategy of exposure and the strategy of contradiction were evidenced in the data. For the exposure effect, participants revealed their normalization of homosexuality as ordinary and natural. Fans shared that they do not shy away from sharing their identities online. They expressed a level of exposure that does not exist in the physical world, exposing heteronormativity as merely an ideological construction.

The other strategy extrapolated from the data, that of contradiction, reveals dissonance among the reigning ideological framework. Dhaenens (2014) argues that this occurs when queerness is injected into settings that conform to the heteronormative environment. Within joining online fandom itself, queer fans contribute to this form of resistance. The online space widely parallels our physical society (Center for Digital Future, 2008). By just being open about their sexual identities online, fans represent queerness as normal, valid, and viable. Essentially, the two aforementioned deconstruction strategies were found to be employed within the Katy Perry fandom. Reconstruction as defined by Dhaenens (2014) mirrors fandom befittingly. The very existence of fandom dissents from the heterosexual matrix, as subordinated groups band together in resistance. Little research has been conducted on fandom in this context, and this study aims to fill that gap.

This study sought to take a new approach to examining fans. Past literature has focused on fans as pathological, arguing that fans are borderline obsessive and lack self-control. Researchers such as Lewis (1992) stigmatized the fan experience, stating that the line is blurred between reality and fantasy for fans. Stever (2009) offered a contradictory approach, negating pathological behavior as the norm for fans. This study built off of the argument made by Stever,

and confirmed fans as non-pathological. The reframing of fans in this way counters stereotypes and stigmas. Seminal scholar Jenkins (2012) called for researchers to look beyond stereotypes and let fans speak for themselves. This study put fans in a position to express their experiences freely, barring the confines of stereotypes. Through this research approach, evidence was found that those in fandom are able to carry out a normal, healthy lifestyle, evading original fan stigmatization.

### Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. First, the lack of previous literature on queer popular music fandom means this exploratory study had no proven framework from which to operate. The uses and gratifications dimensions were previously used to study television and the Internet at large, not specifically modern day Twitter. This leaves room for examining the motivations found within UGT, as there may be slightly different approaches upon further research. Second, the participants in the study were recruited through Twitter, advertised from my own account and those of popular fandom members. This could skew the overall sample, given that participants were recruited from a very niche point. Third, this study was limited to those on Twitter. Other fandom members on platforms like Facebook, Reddit, and Instagram may have variant experiences. Finally, this study lacks cultural diversity in responses. Participants were overwhelmingly white, leaving a gap in diverse perspectives.

### Suggestions for Future Research

As suggested by the limitations, this research is restricted to a niche population within queer pop music fandoms as a whole. Further research should consider exploring LGBTQ+ fans across various online platforms, including, but not limited to, Facebook, Reddit, Instagram, blogs, fan websites, and the internet at large. Additionally, researchers should aim to diversity

study participants across all sociodemographic variables. Meyer (2003) argued that queer people have a higher prevalence of mental health disorders than heterosexual people due to prejudice and stigmatization. Future research could focus solely on fandom as an outlet to social ridicule, integrating ideas of queer reconstruction with a psychological analysis of member motivations.

### Conclusion

The findings in this study offer a starting point for future studies on queer fans in the popular music space. The results found in this project address a gap in the literature with reference to queer identities in fandom. This study also critiques previous discourse's role in the stigmatization of fans as pathological among both researchers and society as a whole. Although progress is being made in queer deconstruction of the hegemonic positioning of the world, normalization of this community is far from where it should be. It is important that society be integrated with queer narratives and experiences as a means of dismantling prejudice. In addition, fandom studies are important in normalizing the fan experience and destroying stigmatization of particular groups. Fandom studies scholars Gray, Harrington, and Sandvoss summarize the impetus for this type of research simply, positing, "fandom matters because it matters to those who are fans" (Gray, Sandvoss, & Harrington, 2007, p. 1).

APPENDIX A  
INFORMED CONSENT AND SURVEY

**University of North Texas  
Informed Consent for Studies with Adults**

**Study Title: Music Fandom Study**  
IRB-20-60, approved 3/31/2020

**Person Responsible for Research:** PI, Dr. Gwen Nisbett; Student Investigator, Maddison Poteet

**Welcome:** Welcome to the Music Fandom Study! Thank you for your interest in this study. My name is Maddison Poteet and I am a master's student at the University of North Texas. On the next screen you will be presented with an Informed Consent page. Please read it thoroughly and digitally sign if you would like to continue participation. The survey is mostly short answer text questions – please answer as thoroughly as you can. If you are interested in participating further after the survey, I am recruiting people to participate in Skype audio interviews. Once you are done with the survey you will be presented with a completion page. This is the final page you will see. Thank you for your participation!

**Study Description:** You are being asked to participate in a research study. Taking part in this study is voluntary. The investigators will explain the study to you and will answer any questions you might have. It is your choice whether or not you take part in this study. If you agree to participate and then choose to withdraw from the study, that is your right, and your decision will not be held against you.

You are being asked to take part in a research study about participation in popular music fandom for queer-identifying people.

Your participation in this research study involves filling out an online questionnaire about your participation in the Katy Perry fandom. More details will be provided in the next section.

You might want to participate in this study if you want to share your experiences and views on participation in fandom. However, you might not want to participate in this study if you do not have the time to fill out a questionnaire taking approximately no more than one hour.

You may choose to participate in this research study if you are over or of the age of 18, a citizen of the United States, and a member of the Katy Perry fandom.

The reasonable foreseeable risks or discomforts to you if you choose to take part are equivalent to those that would be experienced in your everyday life, which you can compare to the possible benefit of expanding the overall understanding of fandom culture and community. You will not receive compensation for participation.

**Detailed Information about this Research Study:** The following is more information about this study, in addition to the information listed above.

**Purpose of Study:** The purpose of this study is to examine queer-identifying individuals within popular music fandom. Specifically, the researcher will be looking at the participation of queer



individuals in the Katy Perry fandom.

**Time Commitment:** Participation in this study is expected to last approximately one hour.

**Study Procedures:** Participants in the study will be asked to fill out an online questionnaire with open-ended response questions. The research will take place through an online program, Qualtrics. The subjects may interact with the student researcher, Maddison Poteet. The research will take place across a week in March. Subjects will be asked to complete the questionnaire and their participation in the study will be completed.

**Audio/Video/Photography:**

- **I agree** to be audio recorded during the research study.
- **I agree** that the audio recording can be used in publications or presentations.
- **I do not agree** to be audio recorded during the research study.

You may not participate in the study if you do not agree to the audio recorded. The recordings will be kept with other electronic data in a secure UNT OneDrive account for the duration of the study.

**Possible Benefits:** Participants may benefit from helping others and themselves expand the overall understanding of fandom culture and community.

**Possible Risks/Discomforts:** Possible risks or discomforts are equivalent to those that participants would experience in their everyday lives.

If you experience excessive discomfort when completing the research activity, you may choose to stop participating at any time without penalty. The researchers will try to prevent and problem that could happen, but the study may involve risks to the participant, which are currently unforeseen level. UNT does not provide medical services, or financial assistance for emotional distress or injuries that might happen from participating in this research. If you need to discuss your discomfort further, please contact a mental health provider, or you may contact the researcher who will refer you to appropriate services. If your need is urgent, helpful resources include National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-TALK) and SAMHSA Treatment Referral Helpline (1-877-SAMHSA7).

This research study is not expected to pose any additional risks beyond what you would normally experience in your regular everyday life. However, if you do experience any discomfort, please inform the research team and/or contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-TALK) and/or SAMHSA Treatment Referral Helpline (1-877-SAMHSA7).

**Compensation:** No compensation will be offered for participation in this study. There are no alternative activities offered for this study.

**Confidentiality:** Efforts will be made by the research team to keep your personal information private, including research study, and disclosure will be limited to people who have a need to

review this information. All paper and electronic data collected from this study will be stored in a secure location on the UNT campus and/or a secure UNT server for at least three (3) years past the end of this research on a password protected computer on the UNT campus. Research records will be labeled with a code and the master key linking names with codes will be maintained in a separate and secure location.

Your participation in this study is confidential, and the information you provide cannot be linked to your identity.

The results of this study may be published and/or presented without naming you as a participant. The data collected about you for this study may be used to future research studies that are not described in this consent form. If that occurs, an IRB would first evaluate the use of any information that is identifiable to you, and confidentiality protection would be maintained.

While absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, the research team will make every effort to protect the confidentiality of your records, as described here and to the extent permitted by law. In addition to the research team, the following entities may have access to your records, but only on a need-to-know basis: the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the FDA (federal regulating agencies), the reviewing IRB, and the sponsors of the study.

**Contact Information for Questions About The Study:** If you have any questions about the study you may contact Maddison Poteet at [maddisonpoteet@my.unt.edu](mailto:maddisonpoteet@my.unt.edu) or Dr. Gwen Nisbett at [Gwen.Nisbett@unt.edu](mailto:Gwen.Nisbett@unt.edu). Any questions you have regarding your rights as a research subject, or complaints about the research may be directed to the Office of Research Integrity and Compliance at 940-565-4643, or by email at [untirb@unt.edu](mailto:untirb@unt.edu).

**Consent:**

- Your signature below indicates that you have read, or have had read to you all of the above.
- You confirm that you have been told about the possible benefits, risks, and/or discomforts of the study.
- You understand that you do not have to take part in this study and your refusal to participate or your decision to withdraw will involve no penalties or loss of rights or benefits.
- You understand your rights as a research participant and you voluntarily consent to participate in this study; you also understand that the study personnel may choose to stop your participation at any time.
- By signing, you are not waiving any of your legal rights.

Please click below if you are at least 18 years of age and voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

**Do you consent and agree to continue the study?**

### **Fandom Interest**

Are you interested in pop culture and/or music fandom?

### **Profile of Respondents**

Are you... male/female/non-binary?

Are you Hispanic/Latino?

What best describes your race/ethnicity?

How old are you?

### **Opening Questions**

What made you seek out an online fandom?

Was it easy to find other fans online?

How was the process of making friends online?

### **Fandom Community**

When did you first become part of the Katy Perry fandom?

What drew you to Katy Perry initially?

What took you from being a casual fan to a super fan?

Can you give me some examples of what the online fandom experience is like?

What activities and conversations make up your community?

How have you benefited from the online fandom experience?

Do you think there are subgroups within the fandom as a whole?

### **Identity Construction**

If yes, do those subgroups have different identities?

How has being in a fandom impacted your own personal identity?

Has your identity construction been impacted by Katy Perry herself?

### **Queerness in Fandom**

Do you identify as a member of the LGBTQ+ community?

If you self-identify as queer, did you identify this way before becoming part of an online fandom?

If you self-identify as queer, did being in a fandom impact your exploration of your sexuality?

At what point in your fandom experience did you disclose your sexuality?

Does queer identity play a role in parts of the fandom? If so, how?

How is your reception as a queer person in an online fandom?

Can you compare being queer in an online fandom versus being queer in everyday life?

### **Closing Questions**

What has changed the most about you since being in an online fandom?

Are you more comfortable with your own sexuality through your experience in online fandom?

If you identify as queer, what would you like others to know about your own experiences in an online fandom as a queer person?

APPENDIX B  
INFORMED CONSENT AND QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW GUIDE

**University of North Texas  
Informed Consent for Studies with Adults**

**Study Title: Music Fandom Study**  
IRB-20-60, approved 3/31/2020

**Person Responsible for Research:** PI, Dr. Gwen Nisbett; Student Investigator, Maddison Poteet

**Study Description:** You are being asked to participate in a research study. Taking part in this study is voluntary. The investigators will explain the study to you and will answer any questions you might have. It is your choice whether or not you take part in this study. If you agree to participate and then choose to withdraw from the study, that is your right, and your decision will not be held against you.

You are being asked to take part in a research study about participation in popular music fandom for queer-identifying people.

Your participation in this research study involves participation in a one-on-one interview about your participation in the Katy Perry fandom. More details will be provided in the next section.

You might want to participate in this study if you want to share your experiences and views on participation in fandom. However, you might not want to participate in this study if you do not have the time to participate in an interview taking approximately no more than one hour.

You may choose to participate in this study if you are over the age of 18, a citizen of the United States, and a member of the Katy Perry fandom.

The reasonable foreseeable risks or discomforts to you if you choose to take part are equivalent to those that would be experienced in your everyday life, which you can compare to the possible benefit of expanding the overall understanding of fandom culture and community. You will not receive compensation for participation.

**Detailed Information About This Research Study:** The following is more information about this study, in addition to the information listed above.

**Purpose of Study:** The purpose of this study is to examine queer-identifying individuals within popular music fandom. Specifically, the researcher will be looking at the participation of queer individuals in the Katy Perry fandom.

**Time Commitment:** Participation in this study is expected to last approximately one hour.

**Study Procedures:** Participants in this study will be asked to participate in an audio interview via Skype with the student researcher, Maddison Poteet. The research will take place across a week. Subjects will be asked to answer questions to the best of their abilities and their participation in the study will be completed.

**Audio/Video/Photography:**

- **I agree** to be audio recorded during the research study.
- **I agree** that the audio recording can be used in publications or presentations.
- **I do not agree** to be audio recorded during the research study.

You may not participate in the study if you do not agree to the audio recording. The recordings will be kept with other electronic data in a secure UNT OneDrive account for the duration of the study.

**Possible Benefits:** Participants may benefit from helping others and themselves expand the overall understanding of fandom culture and community.

**Possible Risks/Discomforts:** Possible risks or discomforts are equivalent to those that participants would experience in their everyday lives.

If you experience excessive discomfort when completing the research activity, you may choose to stop participating at any time without penalty. The researchers will try to prevent any problem that could happen, but the study may involve risks to the participant, which are currently unforeseen. UNT does not provide medical services, or financial assistance for emotional distress or injuries that might happen from participating in this research. If you need to discuss your discomfort further, please contact a mental health provider, or you may contact the researcher who will refer you to appropriate services. If your need is urgent, helpful resources include National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-TALK) and SAMHSA Treatment Referral Helpline (1-877-SAMHSA7).

This research study is not expected to pose any additional risks beyond what you would normally experience in your regular everyday life. However, if you do experience any discomfort, please inform the research team and/or contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-TALK) and/or SAMHSA Treatment Referral Helpline (1-877-SAMHSA7).

**Compensation:** No compensation will be offered for participation in this study. There are no alternative activities offered for this study.

**Confidentiality:** Efforts will be made by the research team to keep your personal information private, including research study, and disclosure will be limited to people who have a need to review this information. All paper and electronic data collected from this study will be stored in a secure location on the UNT campus and/or secure UNT server for at least three (3) years past the end of this research on a password protected computer on the UNT campus. Research records will be labeled with a code and the master key linking names with codes will be maintained in a separate and secure location.

Your participation in this study is confidential, and the information you provide cannot be linked to your identity.

The results of this study may be published and/or presented without naming you as a participant. The data collected about you for this study may be used for future studies that are not described in this consent form. If that occurs, an IRB would first evaluate the use of any information that is identifiable to you, and confidentiality protection would be maintained.

While absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, the research team will make every effort to protect the confidentiality of your records, as described here and to the extent permitted by law. In addition to the research team, the following entities may have access to your records, but only on a need-to-know basis: the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the FDA (federal regulating agencies), the reviewing IRB, and the sponsors of the study.

**Contact Information for Questions About The Study:** If you have any questions about the study you may contact Maddison Poteet at [maddisonpoteet@my.unt.edu](mailto:maddisonpoteet@my.unt.edu) or Dr. Gwen Nisbett at [Gwen.Nisbett@unt.edu](mailto:Gwen.Nisbett@unt.edu). Any questions you have regarding your rights as a research subject, or complaints about the research may be directed to the Office of Research Integrity and Compliance at 940-565-4643, or by email at [untirb@unt.edu](mailto:untirb@unt.edu).

#### **Consent:**

#### **Consent:**

- Your signature below indicates that you have read, or have had read to you all of the above.
- You confirm that you have been told about the possible benefits, risks, and/or discomforts of the study.
- You understand that you do not have to take part in this study and your refusal to participate or your decision to withdraw will involve no penalties or loss of rights or benefits.
- You understand your rights as a research participant and you voluntarily consent to participate in this study; you also understand that the study personnel may choose to stop your participation at any time.
- By signing, you are not waiving any of your legal rights.

Please choose one of the two options below.

- 1) **I have read the informed consent and agree to continue with the interview**
- 2) **I would like to opt out of the interview**

#### **Qualitative Interview Guide**

- How important is the community aspect of fandom compared to being a casual fan?
- How does your experience in online fandom translate to your everyday life?
- Is distinguishing yourself as a fan in real life important to you? If so, in what ways do you express your fan experience?

- Do you think there is a certain style (clothing, presentation, aesthetic, etc.) that members of your fandom tend to identify with?
- Do you think being in a fandom has had an impact on your life outside of the online world?
- Does queer identification in fandom alter your experience in any way?
- Do you find it easier to self-identify as queer in the online fandom space than in the everyday world?
- Is there anything about the queer fan experience that you would like to add?



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