

DESPERATELY SEEKING THE PRODUCER:  
AUDIENCES, IDENTITY, AND THE MARGINS OF THE INTERNET

Elena Rosa Maris

A DISSERTATION

in

Communication

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania

in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2018

Supervisor of Dissertation

---

John L. Jackson, Jr.

Richard Perry University Professor

Graduate Group Chairperson

---

Joseph Turow, Robert Lewis Shayon Professor of Communication

Dissertation Committee

Jessa Lingel, Assistant Professor of Communication

Guobin Yang, Grace Lee Boggs Professor of Communication and Sociology

Nancy Baym, Principal Researcher, Microsoft Research

DESPERATELY SEEKING THE PRODUCER:

AUDIENCES, IDENTITY, AND THE MARGINS OF THE INTERNET

COPYRIGHT

2018

Elena Rosa Maris

*For my extraordinary parents, Mary and Dianna*

## Acknowledgements

This project is the outcome of my unlikely and meandering journey toward a Ph.D. My ultimate destination as a scholar was by no means ever assured, and I believe that my many detours on the way (in the U.S. Army, working with at-risk youth, living on the Ringling Bros. circus train, etc.) only enriched my work. They also helped me keep perspective, something vital for anyone in the Academy. There were a million reasons why I might never have completed this dissertation. I acknowledge those struggles here because I'd be remiss to represent the process of writing a dissertation and obtaining a Ph.D. as uncomplicated or easy, especially for a queer woman of color at an elite institution. Still, I did complete it. And I'd like to use this space to acknowledge those who made it possible through their example, mentorship, support, friendship or love.

First, I'd like to thank everyone who participated in this research for taking the time to share their thoughts about media, audiences, and industries as well as their own personal experiences and beliefs. I so appreciate your generosity and candor. This dissertation was made possible due to the support and encouragement of my dissertation committee: Dr. John L. Jackson Jr., Dr. Nancy Baym, Dr. Jessa Lingel, and Dr. Guobin Yang. John, from the very beginning you told me my background enriched the work I was doing, when others made me feel it was a detriment. It has meant so much to have you as a role model. Jessa, I'll never be able to thank you enough for all you've done. You truly walk the walk. Nancy, there aren't enough thanks in the world. Your steadfast belief in me and this project truly made all the difference. Your mentorship changed my life.

Bradford Owen, my "Forever Advisor," you were my first academic champion and I'm lucky to call you friend. Mihaela Popescu, thanks for taking me seriously from the very beginning. Chris Finlay, thanks for all your support. Thank you to Katherine Sender for providing encouragement and excellent feedback even when I was just some MA student at a conference. Also for, along with the amazing Adrienne Shaw, guiding some of my earliest work on this project. Litty Paxton, I learned so much TAing for you. I appreciate your support when I needed it most. Thank you to Carolyn Marvin and Joe Turow for your early support; so much of the dissertation is influenced by your scholarship. I was fortunate to have met some amazing scholars in the last few years: Laura Grindstaff, Sonia Livingstone, Peter Lunt, and Susan Douglas all influenced my thinking on this project and provided encouragement. I'm so lucky you all happened to pass my way!

In Summer 2017, I was fortunate to do an internship with the Social Media Collective at Microsoft Research. The experience was formative and advanced my thinking on this project and internet research in general. Everyone was so welcoming, and it was a privilege to participate in the rich intellectual life of the lab. Thanks especially to Nancy Baym, Tarleton Gillespie, and Mary Gray for being amazingly smart, supportive and FUN mentors! Also, thanks to Dylan Mulvin and Dan Greene. Dan, thanks for believing in me, and for all of those pep talks. Sharif Mowlabocus, I'm so thrilled our paths crossed at the lab. Thanks for being a supportive listener right when I needed it and for fielding my endless queer theory questions! Ysabel Gerrard: Who knew my soulmate would be a basic AF Brit? I can't imagine that summer without you. You'll forever be my BBF –

thanks for always keeping me on my worst behavior. Sarah Hamid, I'm so glad we became friends! I can't thank you enough for talking me down during those late-night writing sessions! You're brilliant and powerful and I can't wait to see all you do!

Many thanks to my ASC tribe. Joanne Murray, thanks for always having my back and for being a stalwart advocate for grad students. Deb Porter, thanks for reaching out early and always making me feel welcome. To the SEE Center: Emily Hund, Sam Oliver and Rosie Clark-Parsons – I don't know what I would have done without you. I'll miss spontaneous "hot goss" and pop culture chats, but Group Text is forever! And so is our friendship – I love ya'll! Also, thanks to my ASC friends Ope Akanbi, Natalie Herbert, Emily LaDue, Lee McGuigan, Jonathan Pace, Jasmine Salters, Kristin Schumaker, and Allie Volinsky.

Writing this dissertation wouldn't have been possible without the support of my amazing friends. Vanessa, thanks for seeing me through all of my crazy adventures! I love you, bestie! Also, thanks to Dora Bautista, Jann Her, Kie KwanHull, Andrea Miller, Kacie Phillips, Rita Singh, and Michelle Van Wolferen. You are all warrior princesses!

I have been incredibly blessed, and I thank God for getting me through the challenging dissertation process. I also want to thank those who are no longer here to see me reach this milestone, but who I owe so much. My grandmother Evelyn was my first best friend and teacher. She taught me a love of learning and that I could do or be absolutely anything. Grandma, your example has never left me. I love you. Charles, there was a time we were just two cousins playing basketball in a Chicago alley. You were such a sweet, smart kid. Losing you last year was hard, especially as I entered new, exciting worlds. Every time I accomplish something, I do so knowing you should be right here beside me. I love you, Tookie. Oscar, you were a brilliant and funny guy who we lost way too young. I'm sorry you never knew the impact you made in my life. Charles and Oscar, I lost both of you to the streets - my promise to you has always been that I will do my best to help other kids get out. And finally, Todd, I never expected to become friends with an actual clown. But you were so much more than that. I will never forget our adventures with the circus, or how kind you were to this confused First of May. I aspire to your wit and wisdom, and I miss our travels together. See you down the road, my friend.

Fobazi, you have been my rock. I am so thankful to have had you by my side these last two years. You never once doubted me, and I don't doubt that you will accomplish absolutely anything you choose. You inspire me to be brave. I love you.

To be the first in my family to earn a Ph.D. is a humbling honor, especially because any of my achievements in life were made possible due to my parents' endless guidance, support, and faith in me. Mom and D, I can never thank you enough for all of the sacrifices you made to ensure I had the resources and confidence to pursue anything I might dream up. Mom, you taught me confidence, that no piece of paper could ever define me, and to never say no to an adventure. You will always be my hero. D, you taught me that I'd always have to work twice as hard, but that it would be worth it - and to never settle. Most of all, I thank you both for the examples you set. You are the two strongest women I've ever known. I love you.

**ABSTRACT****DESPERATELY SEEKING THE PRODUCER:  
AUDIENCES, IDENTITY, AND THE MARGINS OF THE INTERNET**

Elena Rosa Maris

John L. Jackson Jr.

Ang (1991) noted that for media industries, "...television audiences remain extremely difficult to define, attract and keep. The institutions must forever 'desperately seek the audience'" (p. ix). I contend that just as often, media audiences "desperately" seek the producers and industries that create media content. I argue that focusing on how audiences imagine media industries and the possibilities and limitations for influencing them and the content they produce, is vital to understanding audience/industry interactions and influence. Further, these constructions provide a lens through which to examine the impact of identity and technology on these phenomena. I articulate, deploy and argue for the utility of an "imagined industry" analytic framework meant to demonstrate the concept's value in revealing nuanced results and implications that reflect the complexities of audience/industry interactions in the digital age. The dissertation examines two audience groups that organize online to influence media industries: the heavily LGBTQ and feminist fan group "Xena Movie Campaign" (XMC), and the Christian-conservative activist group "One Million Moms" (OMM). The project is a comparative case study; methods include historical analysis, participant observation, in-

depth interviews, and analysis of online content and trade and popular press. Findings reveal both groups share the following primary “imaginings” of media industries: (1) “the industry is exclusive, insular and motivated by profit,” (2) “the industry is wrong,” and (3) “the industry is risk-averse.” Based on these imaginings (informed by very different ideologies), both groups design and deploy digital tactics to influence media industries. I describe these tactics and industrial responses. I conclude that scholars must look beyond traditional approaches to active audiences. I argue for a focus on social constructions and against a preoccupation with efficacy. Finally, I highlight that the ideologically opposed groups identify as similarly marginalized by their imagined industries, thus demonstrating increased confusion over the location of “center” and “margin” online. I provide a provocation to queer theory that to resist co-optation in the digital age, it must sharply define its goals, tactics and parameters.

## Table of Contents

<b>Copyright Notice .....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>Table of Contents .....</b>	<b>viii</b>
<b>List of Tables .....</b>	<b>xi</b>
<b>Chapter 1 - Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Selection of Cases .....	5
Case Study: Xena Movie Campaign .....	7
Case Study: One Million Moms .....	9
Literature Review.....	11
Media Industries: Cultures of Production .....	11
LGBTQ/Sexual Minorities and the Digital.....	27
Research Questions.....	34
Methods.....	35
Comparative Case Studies .....	40
Data Gathering and Analysis .....	41
Research Participants.....	45
Dissertation Chapter Overview.....	47
<b>Chapter 2 - Identity and Organizing as Audiences: XMC and OMM in Historical Context.....</b>	<b>54</b>
Finding your Community ... and your Cause.....	55
XMC & Finding Your Community.....	55
OMM & Finding your Community.....	59
Setting a Precedent: A Tactical Lineage.....	64
XMC and Setting a Precedent: A Tactical Lineage .....	64
OMM & Setting a Precedent: A Tactical Lineage.....	68
Seeing “Results” and Defining Success.....	71
XMC & Seeing “Results” and Defining Success .....	71
OMM & Seeing “Results” and Defining Success.....	78
XMC and OMM Now: Reluctant Activists .....	86
XMC Reluctant Activists.....	86
OMM Reluctant Activists.....	91
Conclusion .....	94



<b>Chapter 3 - Imagined: The Industry is Exclusive, Insular and Motivated by Profit</b>	<b>97</b>
Tactic: Power Recognizes Power.....	100
XMC & Power Recognizes Power .....	100
OMM & Power Recognizes Power.....	103
Tactic: Learn the Game.....	105
XMC & Learn the Game.....	106
OMM & Learn the Game.....	109
Implications of Imaginary and Tactics .....	111
<b>Chapter 4 - Imagined: The Industry is Wrong .....</b>	<b>116</b>
XMC Imaginary (The Industry is Wrong) .....	117
OMM Imaginary (The Industry is Wrong) .....	121
Tactic: Educate the industries and society .....	125
XMC & Educate the Industries & Society.....	126
OMM & Educate the Industries & Society.....	130
Implications of Imaginary and Tactics .....	141
<b>Chapter 5 - Imagined: The Industry is Risk-Averse .....</b>	<b>146</b>
Tactic: Negotiate Delicately .....	148
XMC & Negotiate Delicately .....	149
OMM & Negotiate Delicately .....	152
Tactic: Speak with our Dollars .....	156
Tactic: Courting Controversy .....	157
XMC & Courting Controversy .....	158
OMM & Courting Controversy .....	159
Implications of Imaginary and Tactics .....	161
<b>Chapter 6 - From Community to Ridicule: Industrial Responses to XMC and OMM</b>	<b>165</b>
Industrial Responses to XMC .....	167
Building community: Creatives' identification with fans.....	172
Artistic Authority and Creative Control .....	178
Industrial Responses to OMM .....	184
Ridicule and Confront.....	185
Private Overtures and "Secret" Allies.....	188
Discussion.....	194
<b>Chapter 7 - Conclusion.....</b>	<b>199</b>
Revisiting the Results of the Dissertation.....	202

Beyond Active Audiences: Implications for the study of media audiences and industries in the digital age ..... 206

    The Question of Efficacy: Embracing the Interpretive Perspective ..... 210

    The Question of Tactics: Co-Opting Queer? Queer Theory in the Digital Age . 216

**Appendix: Participant Observation ..... 230**

**Bibliography ..... 231**

### **List of Tables**

Table 1: “Core Informants:” Xena Movie Campaign (XMC) and *Xena* fans

Table 2: “Core Informants:” *Xena*-Associated Industry

Table 3: “Core Informants:” One Million Moms (OMM)

## Chapter 1 - Introduction

Remember, you can support this popularity by continuing to watch Xena on Netflix and Hulu to give the show modern-day ratings! Keep talking about Xena on social media, and keep telling friends about the show! Invite friends to like Xena Movie Campaign! Demonstrating the popularity of Xena: Warrior Princess is a surefire way to guarantee a return of the franchise. We live in a new era where fans come first, and we have the power to ask for what we want in our entertainment!

- Post from the “Admins” - Xena Movie Campaign Facebook, July 21, 2015

Way to go! “The Real O’Neals” has officially been cancelled after only two seasons. IMM<sup>1</sup> asked ABC network to cancel this sacrilegious and sex-filled program and followed with an email campaign urging sponsors to pull their support. Public outcry, sluggish ratings, and primarily a lack of advertisers played a major role in the blasphemous show's cancellation! Your support is making a HUGE difference, and your voice was heard loud and clear again! Keep up the great work!

- Post from the official One Million Moms Facebook, May 17, 2017

In 1991, Ien Ang told us that: “Despite television’s apparently steady success in absorbing people’s attention, television audiences remain extremely difficult to define, attract and keep. The institutions must forever ‘desperately seek the audience’” (p. ix). The social media posts above illustrate how two contemporary audience groups imagine they can make changes in the media content they consume through getting the attention of those who produce it. This dissertation centers these types of audience imaginings and tactics by asking what it looks like as *audiences* desperately seek media producers and

---

<sup>1</sup> While this dissertation uses OMM as an acronym for One Million Moms, the group itself tends to use IMM as shorthand for the group name.

industries. I argue that focusing on the ways audiences imagine media industries, and the possibilities and limitations for influencing them and the content they produce, is vital to better understanding audience/industry interactions and influence. Further, it provides a lens through which to examine the impact of identity and technological tactics on audience/producer relationships.

The social media posts above demonstrate the confidence these relatively small audience groups have in their ability to reach out and change very powerful media industries. This confidence and the expectation that the internet will bridge the traditional distance between audiences and industries in many ways reflects the current digital and political age. In 2016, Donald Trump won the United States presidential election. Many attributed this win to Trump's use of the internet to reach (primarily rural, white conservative) voters who increasingly considered themselves marginalized in American society. Immediately following the election, some 4chan users excitedly celebrated the Trump win they felt *they* initiated through their online tinkering and trolling, one shocked user writing on the boards: "We actually elected a meme as president." A CNN headline soon asked, "Did the internet elect the president?" while NY Mag proclaimed, "Donald Trump won because of Facebook." Suddenly, it seemed possible that audiences and users had effected drastic political change in the most powerful American institutions.

These headlines would have us believe that average internet users wield extraordinary power – if this is true not just for politics but for popular culture, what does this power look like? What are its limits? The internet is now ubiquitous enough that even its far corners (like the "dark web") are identifiable by the majority. If such spaces are now acknowledged in the mainstream, then where are the internet's margins, and who

resides there? What about the digital suggests to the user notions like mainstream and marginal? Numerous scholars have explored questions about who is included and excluded on the internet. However, in this dissertation I ask if the internet has entered an era in which almost any group can envision themselves as residing in, and acting from, its margins. And what does this tell us about “where” power is located online?

These theoretical provocations stem from the results of the dissertation’s empirical work on the ways that two audience groups imagine powerful media industries and the possibilities for influencing them, as well as the digital tactics they deploy to do so. While these cases in many ways are very far from the dynamics that shaped the 2016 political election, they tell a story about the ways that people organize themselves online and imagine their power and limitations to change institutions, and centrally: media content itself. The dissertation examines two case studies of online audience groups who come together online to influence media industries: the heavily LGBTQ and feminist fan group “Xena Movie Campaign” (XMC) and Christian conservative organization “One Million Moms” (OMM).

These case studies illustrate how both groups engage in digital tactics to fight the power of “mainstream media” through their identifications with marginalized identities. The members of both groups can be considered marginalized in multiple ways. First, audiences are marginal populations within the power structures of the culture industries. As Livingstone (2004) noted: “...the separation of producers from audiences (or consumers), and the power imbalance between them, is of course the prime subject of media and communications research” (p. 79). Further, women comprise the majority of the membership of both groups. Finally, both groups identify as marginalized in larger

society, and in particular in popular culture, through their own intersecting identities. A large part of XMC's mission stems from a desire for increased and quality media representation of strong women, older women, and queer individuals and relationships. Members of OMM come together through their shared identities as, primarily, heterosexual Christian mothers and grandmothers. They see it as their mission to oppose what they believe is a problematic increase in media representations of sex, non-heteronormative gender and sexuality, vulgarity, anti-Christian messaging, and sometimes, violence.

Though both groups simultaneously envision themselves as acting from the margins, they pursue diametrically opposed cultural goals. They have operated during the tenure of what could be considered both allied (President Donald Trump for OMM, President Barack Obama for XMC) and oppositional (President Donald Trump for XMC, President Barack Obama for OMM) political administrations. In her work on gender theory, Judith Butler (2011) pointed to Mary Douglas's contention that "all social systems are vulnerable at their margins" (p. 180), and indeed queer theory and other theories of identity and power often posit that (at least some) power is lent to tactics acted upon from a marginalized place. Warner (2002) said about counterpublics: "Their members are understood to be not merely a subset of the public but constituted through a conflictual relation to the dominant public... A counterpublic maintains at some level, conscious or not, an awareness of a subordinate status" (p. 423). This dissertation uses Warner's concept of counterpublics to understand the ways that these two groups think of themselves and their relationships to media industries. Further, it examines how both groups' tactics might relate to queer theory's goals, particularly its mission of disrupting

notions of social identities as natural or fixed. Using the project's empirical results, the dissertation calls for queer theory to account for the increasing use of "queer" digital tactics for heteronormative means. It also raise larger questions about how identity and the vastness of the contemporary internet lead to a displacement of concepts like "center" and "margin," and thus confusion about who resides (and acts from) where online.

### **Selection of Cases**

The cases were selected because of key similarities and differences. XMC and OMM are similar in a number of important ways. First, the cases are alike because they share the common goal of trying to influence media content. Also, members of both share a common identity as (primarily) women and operate in a common site of practice online: Facebook. Both Facebook groups currently have around 91,000 "Likes," suggesting a similar scale for study. Both groups began campaigning around the same time (XMC in 2011, OMM circa 2012), primarily through their Facebook groups. Both have made impressions in wider popular culture and can serve as emblematic of similar groups that exist.

Although they share larger goals and some facets of identity, OMM and XMC also differ greatly in very obvious ways. XMC comes together because of a love for a certain media text, with a desire to influence the industry that makes it. OMM comes together because of a concern about, (or even hate for) specific types of media and a desire to influence the industries that make them. XMC is a fan group with activist leanings. OMM calls itself an activist group, but could also be labeled anti-fan, what



Gray (2003) called “fans’ Other” (P. 71). Gray (2003) described anti-fans, and the need to study them, thus:

This is the realm not necessarily of those who are against fandom per se, but of those who strongly dislike a given text or genre, considering it inane, stupid, morally bankrupt and/or aesthetic drivel. Fan studies have taken us to one end of a spectrum of involvement with a text, but we should also look at the other end to those individuals spinning around a text in its electron cloud, variously bothered, insulted or otherwise assaulted by its presence. (p. 70)

It is in this oppositional relationship and other contradictory characteristics (e.g. queer vs. anti-queer), that the cases represent a useful comparative case study. Still, it is important to note that the politics of this research do not recognize the two groups as opposite ends of a “typical” political or ideological spectrum. While XMC campaigns for queer media representation, and OMM for the erasure of queer identities in media, it would be wrong to assume there is a “neutral” middle ground to these demands. The politics of XMC’s activism are oriented toward justice and equality. The opposite of equality is oppression, and most of OMM’s politics seek to exclude and oppress difference<sup>2</sup>. The political stance of this dissertation is that no politics of oppression should be legitimated in the public sphere or society. Overall, comparing these cases allows for: (a) discerning what might be unique to fan audiences and what not; (b) finding what is distinctive about queer practices from conservative practices; (c) identifying commonalities in the groups’ practices and how they imagine media industries; and (d) methodologically providing a reflexivity check.

---

<sup>2</sup> I should note that this project’s critique applies to almost all of OMM’s “politics,” which include homophobia, transphobia, sexism, anti-choice, anti-feminism, and more. Still, as will be discussed further, some OMM demands are recognized as legitimate, such as their activism against media’s objectification of women. Still, even these demands are often performed in the name of oppressive ideologies. For example, the demand against objectification is probably made in service to conservative ideals of femininity and purity.

### **Case Study: Xena Movie Campaign**

*Xena: Warrior Princess (Xena)* was a syndicated TV fantasy series that aired from 1995-2001. The series chronicled the adventures of fictional ancient Greek warrior Xena, her path to redemption from villain to warrior for good, and her relationship with her sidekick, Gabrielle. *Xena* became a cult hit and, for some time, the highest rated series in first-run syndication. Xena was adopted by many viewers as both feminist and lesbian icon. Large groups of fans soon formed communities online to discuss the series' lesbian subtext (and later "maintext") that they insisted was central to the relationship between Xena and Gabrielle. Hanmer (2014) demonstrated that online *Xena* fan fiction communities "allowed many to discover a capacity to embrace forms of lesbianism and different ways of being in the world" (p. 620). Young (2005) noted, "*Xena* was the first cult hit of the Internet age: the face that launched a thousand Web sites." *Xena* production personnel soon took notice of these websites and began playing increasingly openly with the sexual possibilities for Xena and Gabrielle. Media scholars have noted the influence of fans on the *Xena* text through unusually participatory relationships between fans and producers (Gwenllian-Jones, 2000; Hamming, 2001; Hanmer, 2014). It may have been partly due to these close relationships that the fandom persisted long after the series finale and continued to hold out hope for a *Xena* revival.

In 2011, 10 years after the *Xena* finale, a Facebook page was created called Xena 2011 Movie Campaign. The page/group name was later changed to simply Xena Movie Campaign (XMC). The site was created by fans of the series to, according to the page's first ever post, "unite all Xena fans to speak as one voice to NBCUniversal (who owns

the rights) that there is a financial gain to be made by making a movie NOW with LL (Lucy Lawless) & ROC (Renee O'Connor).” Not long after the page’s creation, the founder became nervous that NBCUniversal might sue her for copyright infringement. Others who had become active with the XMC Facebook page assured her this wasn’t a risk as the studio had a long history of turning a blind eye to fan-created *Xena* content. Still, she remained hesitant and the others urged her to hand XMC over to them, which she eventually did.

XMC today retains the same mission and is run by a team of 8 administrators and a support team of about 40 volunteers. The page currently has over 90,000 Facebook “likes.” The administrators and volunteers work together to strategize and deploy various marketing and communications tactics and campaigns in order to boost the popularity of the *Xena* property and fandom and to encourage media industries to revive the franchise with a new *Xena* product (preferably a film). In August 2015, NBC announced they would be rebooting the series and had signed Javier Grillo-Marxuach as showrunner. Grillo-Marxuach is a well-known TV writer and self-identified *Xena* fan. XMC celebrated the announcement and continued lobbying for the content they felt would be most important to the reboot. What followed was a series of struggles and disappointments as many in XMC feared the reboot was being approached all wrong. Their concern grew in April 2017 when it was announced that Grillo-Marxuach had left the project over creative differences with the network, followed by an announcement by NBC that the project had been scrapped altogether. Today, XMC continues their quest to have a hand in making a new *Xena* series or film a reality.

### **Case Study: One Million Moms**

One Million Moms (OMM) is a website with associated social media pages that organizes audiences/users who are concerned about the values communicated in the content of mainstream media. OMM was created by the American Family Association (AFA), a non-profit organization founded in 1977 that promotes conservative Christian values. The following excerpts from their mission illustrate the primary goals of the AFA:

The mission of the American Family Association is to inform, equip, and activate individuals to strengthen the moral foundations of American culture, and give aid to the church here and abroad in its task of fulfilling the Great Commission... AFA believes that a culture based on biblical truth best serves the well-being of our nation and our families, in accordance with the vision of our founding documents; and that personal transformation through the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the greatest agent of biblical change in any culture.... We believe in holding accountable companies that sponsor programs attacking traditional family values. We also believe in commending those companies that act responsibly regarding programs they support. (American Family Association, 2017)

The Barna Group, an evangelical Christian polling firm, ranked AFA as the seventh most effective group in rallying Christian evangelical voters in the 2016 elections. The AFA has been designated a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC, 2018).

OMM is a division of AFA that specifically considers themselves a place for mothers (although membership is open to all) to organize and act online as concerned audiences and/or activists. The OMM website defines itself and its mission thus:

Mom, are you fed up with the filth many segments of our society, especially the entertainment media, are throwing at our children? Are you tired of all the negative influences our children are forced to contend with? If so, we urge you to become a member of OneMillionMoms.com. OneMillionMoms.com, a division of the American Family Association, was begun to give moms an impact with the decision-makers and let them know we are upset with the messages they are sending our children and the values (or lack of them) they are pushing. Our goal is to stop the exploitation of our children, especially by the entertainment media (TV, music, movies, etc.). Mom, OneMillionMoms.com is the most powerful tool you have to stand against the immorality, violence, vulgarity and profanity

the entertainment media is throwing at your children. It is time to fight back! (One Million Moms, 2017)

Some of the primary campaigns OMM leads are against media representations of abortion, LGBTQ characters and relationships, sexually explicit material, and other content they consider anti-biblical or anti-Christian.

One Million Moms began around the year 2009<sup>3</sup> and in 2012 one of their first, and most infamous, large-scale campaigns was launched against JC Penney's hiring of comedian and out lesbian Ellen DeGeneres as a spokesperson. Their efforts did not succeed but like many subsequent OMM campaigns, the attack on DeGeneres garnered much attention from the media and public. The OMM Facebook page currently has over 90,000 "likes" and continues to be a meeting place for OMM members to share content and discuss their concerns about the mass media. The group remains quite visible on a national scale, often as a joke for more liberal internet users. A click-bait style headline found online proclaims: "8 Hilarious Protests One Million Moms Launched This Year" (Williams, 2013). Indeed, the moms who participate are currently often framed as amusing or insane in most media coverage of their activities. A 2016 Huffington Post headline reads: "'One Million Moms' is Going Totally Ballistic over this New Zales Ad," with a subheading that states: "They need to take 1 million chill pills" (Hanson, 2016). Similarly, a 2017 Huffington Post article states: "One Million Moms is freaking out about this Gay Cartoon Kiss" (Nichols, 2017). Despite this ridicule, members of the group

---

<sup>3</sup> Monica Cole, Director of One Million Moms, indicated to me that although the group existed loosely and more as a concept prior, she began her work in 2009 and large-scale public attention mostly began with the 2012 campaign against JC Penney and Ellen DeGeneres.

continue working to influence media industries and content in order to achieve their goals.

### **Literature Review**

In the following section, I review literature relevant to questions about media industries and audiences, identity and the digital. Because my dissertation examines the ways audiences work to influence industries (and how media industry workers and more largely, industry cultures, think about and respond to this activity), I begin by providing an overview of studying media industries with a particular emphasis on studying cultures of production. In line with this focus on industries, I then discuss the constructed nature of audiences. Next, I provide an overview of audience studies, followed by a deeper review of work on active audiences. Using media industries' construction of audiences as a conceptual model, I identify gaps in the literature around audience constructions of media industries. Finally, I review the literature on queer theory and digital/internet studies, followed by a discussion of the areas where these two literatures overlap, and provide some background for a later argument in the dissertation that queer theory often fails to account for heteronormative co-optation of "queer" digital tactics, thus illustrating a need for queer theory to define its goals, tactics and parameters.

### **Media Industries: Cultures of Production**

There is an extensive body of scholarship (theoretical and empirical) on the political-economic power structures at work within the creation, ownership and distribution of media (e.g. Herman & Chomsky, 1988; McChesney, 2004; Mosco, 2009).

However, as du Gay (2003) argued, this type of work often reduces the production of culture to “...a question of ‘economics’ alone.” He continues: “Processes of production are themselves cultural phenomena in that they are assemblages of meaningful practices that construct certain ways for people to conceive of and conduct themselves in an organizational context” (p. 7). With an eye toward these practices, and in a line of inquiry separate from political economy (though the two remain quite interconnected), others document and analyze the cultures of production within powerful media industries (Gitlin, 1983; Caldwell, 2008; D. Johnson, 2013). While macro level work on media industries is crucial, these cultural, micro level examinations of the people, groups, organizations, and practices within larger media conglomerates provide important understandings of the components that make up larger media systems. As Johnson (2013) noted about the aims of studying production cultures, “structural approaches too frequently stop at who owns media channels without paying full attention to social complexities and tensions within that conglomerated media environment” (p. 10). Gitlin’s (1983) early work on the culture of the prime-time television industry provided a key model for later studies of production cultures within media industries. Gitlin emphasized the importance of studying an industry “...whose products take up more of this civilization’s waking hours than any pursuit besides work...” (p. 16).

Caldwell (2008) called the film and television industries’ norms and social patterns a “production culture” and explained that studying it, “means looking more closely at ‘the culture of film/video production,’ especially as its conventions and craft habits are threatened” (p. 7). Here, Caldwell’s explanation of the aims of his own project

demonstrate well the thrust of a production culture study that examines the industry from a primarily ethnographic lens:

My project is also less about finding an “authentic” reality behind the scenes” – an empirical notion that tends to be naïve about the ways that media industry realities are always constructed – than it is about studying the industry’s own self-representation, self-critique, and self-reflection... Like Geertz, my project aims to “look over the shoulder” of film and television workers in terms of the “interpretive” nature of their practices. But beyond this I also hope to suggest how these industrial “critical” or “theorizing” artifacts, rituals, and mediated forms of reflexivity express an emerging but unstable economic and social order in Hollywood.” (p. 5)

These constructions of media industries, as they emerge from both within and outside of smaller industrial networks, groups, activities and norms, are particularly of concern in this dissertation project. Notable studies in a similar vein have focused in on industry-specific phenomena like the popular book industry (Radway, 1984, 1997), TV talk shows (Grindstaff, 2002), TV medical dramas (Turow, 2010), marketing professionals targeting LGBT communities (Sender, 2004), and big media franchising (Johnson, 2013). Those studies all demonstrated ethnographic understandings of, and emphasis on, the cultures of media industries and their understandings of audiences. This project continues this tradition using two case studies in order to make a contribution to scholarship on popular culture and identity, and more specifically, the ways gender and sexuality play a role in constructions of media industries and audiences.

***Imagined/constructed audiences.***

Whether through political-economic frameworks or culture of production lenses, many scholars of media industries examine the ways their members think about the audiences for the content they produce. Particularly of interest here are studies that detail



media industries' conceptualizations (Ang, 1991), and subsequent segmentation (Turow, 2006) of media audiences. Ang's work on industrial understandings of the audience, for example, examined "how the institutional point of view gives rise to the production of knowledge in which 'television audience' is constructed as an objectified category of others to be controlled" (p. 4). Similarly, Turow (2013) explained that a constructionist view of media audiences suggests "that media practitioners fundamentally create their audiences" (p. 270).

Scholars have traced the roots of the theoretical conceptualization of the constructed (Turow, 1982) or imagined audience, from early theories of social interaction (Litt, 2012) and social constructionism (Turow, 2013; Turow & Draper, 2014). Litt stated that the "imagined audience is the mental conceptualization of the people with whom we are communicating, our audience. It is one of the most fundamental attributes of being human" (Litt, 2012). In fact, the concept has often been used to describe interpersonal communication and interaction, with Goffman's (1959) theories of self-presentation resting on the notion that individuals adapt their behavior to suit different audiences. Litt (2012) noted that though audiences cannot always be known, individuals behave in response to the audience they imagine: "Researchers have concluded that the mere imagined audience can be just as influential as the actual audience in determining behavior (Baldwin & Holmes, 1987; Fridlund, 1991)" (p. 331). Similarly, Turow and Draper (2014) pointed to Berger and Luckman's (1966) work on the social construction of reality as leading to constructionism theories with "the underlying assumption that what people understood to be real was actually the outcome of social activities that created categories of meaning rather than reflecting an objective reality." Although often

used in larger scale understandings of the social, Taylor's (2004) description of a social imaginary is also relevant here: "...the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations" (p. 23). Importantly, Taylor noted that social imaginaries often take hold from the top-down: "It often happens that what start off as theories held by a few people come to infiltrate the social imaginary, first of elites, perhaps, and then of the whole society" (p. 24).

So, from the work above, we see that "imagined audience" points to the people or groups with which we imagine we communicate; this is a core trait of human communication and not always tied to a more traditional understanding of media audiences (particularly within the traditional "producer-text-audience" model). Still, the media industries' various ways of constructing their audiences are increasingly theorized within an imagined audiences framework. In this media industries frame, the imagined or constructed audience refers to industrial conceptions of individuals and groups that consume content. Ang's (1991) work usefully demonstrated the ways industries think about, seek, define and measure their audiences. These industrial practices have, in many ways, transformed in the digital age. Indeed, Baym (2013) explained the increased reliance on digital data: "industries have appropriated the digital traces audiences leave as they traverse media in order to better understand and manage audiences. Yet, Baym continued, by demonstrating that, "The use of these data to understand audiences fits into a tradition of measurement nearly as old as mass media." So, much as in earlier eras of mass media, industrial constructions are often tied to target markets, demographics, niche

audiences, etc. Understanding how members of media industries construct their audiences in these ways can help to illuminate how media is produced, to what ends and the culture surrounding that production.

A number of scholars have conducted important work on the implications of industrial constructions of audiences. Ang's (1991) "Desperately Seeking the Audience" demonstrated how, in the television industry, notions of audience were constructed as objectified categories to be controlled, always contingent on institutional arrangements and structural constraints. The "audience as commodity" approach has a long, controversial history, beginning with Smythe's (1977) initial provocation that audiences are manufactured by media industries as commodities, and continuing with critiques (Murdock, 1978) that this view overemphasized the economic while ignoring cultural dimensions. The audience commodity concept has continued to be refined and re-articulated in many useful ways (Bermejo, 2009; McGuigan & Manzerolle, 2014). Notably, Turow documented ongoing attempts by media industries to construct (2013; Turow & Draper, 2014), segment (2006), and track and assess (2006, 2011, 2017) audiences. The above work on cultures of production and industrial constructions of audiences provide methodological and conceptual models for much of this dissertation that focuses on audiences, audience construction of media industries, and industrial responses to audience tactics.

### ***Audiences.***

As the scholars above called for increased attention to industries (and their considerations of audiences), others argued we should look more closely at the audiences

themselves. Discussing the complexity of even identifying what constitutes the audience, Bird (2003) asserted that it “is everywhere and nowhere” (p. 3), particularly because audiences are made up of people who are not predictable and who understand and interact with media in different ways. Fiske (1987) described the concept of the “active audience” as comprised of two primary claims: “that the television audience is composed of a wide variety of groups and is not a homogenous mass; and that these groups actively read television in order to produce from it meanings that connect with their social experience” (p. 84). Turow (2013) noted that scholars inclined to call audiences active:

...would likely note the word (audience) privileges consumption over production in an environment very much involved in both, often at the same time. That some academics prefer users, producers, and similar terms indicates how important the awareness of individuals’ power in the digital world is to them. (p. 272)

While there is much work on active audiences, Henry Jenkins’ (2006a, 2006b, 2013) work on fans and convergence culture led the way in conceptualizing the active reader in the digital age. Work on media activists also often looks at active audiences who organize to influence media.

It is important to note that within the work in this dissertation (and in most scholarship), “audience” is a complex term with multiple meanings. When discussing industrial conceptions of audiences, I do so while always acknowledging the constructed nature of audience as a knowable set of people, typically a market or other social imaginary. In fact, it is these constructions I wish to highlight. (It is the same when I dub something a media industry, which itself consists of real people but is constructed as a knowable entity - which it is not). When I research what I also call audiences (in this project: a fan group and an activist/special interest group), I mean that I recognize the individuals and groups within them as having self-organized or self-identified as an

“audience.” I defer here to Ang’s (1991) description of such practical use of the term “audience.”

Whenever I refer to the social world of actual audiences throughout this book, I use the phrase nominalistically, as a provisional shorthand for the infinite, contradictory, dispersed and dynamic practices and experiences of television audiencehood enacted by people in their everyday lives - practices and experiences that are conventionally conceived of as ‘watching’, ‘using’, ‘receiving’, ‘consuming’, ‘decoding’, and so on, although these terms too are already abstractions from the complexity and the dynamism of the social, cultural, psychological, political and historical activities that are involved in peoples engagements with television.” (p. 13)

Ang’s acknowledgement of the messiness around the term audience works well in this project as much of the dissertation moves swiftly between “actual” and “constructed” audiences and industries. It is true also that the main concern of the dissertation is not to (re)define audience or industry, but rather to work on “the problem” of the relationships and constructions that flow between audiences and industries. In this way, the project falls in line with Nightingale’s (2011) claim that the field of audience studies: “...works best by identifying particular ‘audience problems’ and applying the best theories and research methods at our disposal to solving them” (p. 4).

### *Fans.*

Jenkins (2013) took a Fiskean approach to audiences through his pioneering work in fan studies, while deploying De Certeau’s (1984) theories of “making do.” By “making do,” De Certeau meant the tactics by which people navigate power structures in everyday life. De Certeau (and later Jenkins) argued that through their use of tactics, people can be called poachers. De Certeau (1984) identified the literal meanings of texts to be products of the social elite and positioned readers as potential poachers of the material they consume, regardless of original intent. He deployed Barthes’ description of reading as an

act: “that cultivates the desire to write” (p. 176). According to De Certeau, when we read we imagine, we create, and we never experience a medium that fully constitutes a hypodermic needle filled only with authorial intent or authoritative interpretation. De Certeau did not make strong claims about the political potential of reading/re-writing, but certainly framed the stakes as high:

By challenging consumption as it is conceived and (of course) confirmed by these “authorial” enterprises, we may be able to discover creative activity where it has been denied that any exists, and to relativize the exorbitant claim that a certain kind of production...can set out to produce history by “informing” the whole of a country. (p. 167)

De Certeau illuminated the process by which consumption becomes (constitutes?) production but also reminded about the tactic: “Whatever it wins, it does not keep” (p. xix).

The desire to (re)write original material is central to many fan communities and their negotiations of power with media producers. The earliest fan studies highlighted fans’ disempowered status within hierarchical power structures of media (Jenkins, 2013) and taste (Fiske, 1992). However, Jenkins (2006) argued that fans transform viewing into significant cultural activity. Similarly, Baym’s (2000) pioneering work on online fan communities demonstrated that the internet changed what it means to be a fan, particularly by allowing the creation of self-organized, meaningful communities.

Later, Jenkins (2013) argued online fandom could have wider (and perhaps revolutionary) outcomes within dominant culture, but also warned about the corporate media environment: “Allowing consumers to interact with media under controlled circumstances is one thing; allowing them to participate in the production and distribution of cultural goods—on their own terms—is something else altogether” (p. 133). Indeed, more recent waves of fan studies have taken a decidedly less optimistic view than Jenkins

(2013) and Baym's (2000) early work to demonstrate the cultural significance of fan activity, instead seeking to critique fan work as unpaid labor (Andrejevic, 2008) and recognize the increasing commodification of fandom (Gray, Sandvoss, & Harrington, 2007). Scott (2008, 2013) demonstrated that as media industries increasingly allow and even invite fan input and labor, such "empowerment" also often constrains and limits fans to contributions that reinforce corporate authority. Johnson (2007) noted that fans "serve a productive, industrial function" (p. 68). Still, though fan work to influence media industries has a long history, the digital era points to new spaces and tactics for such work. Savage (2014) argued that fan "save our show" campaigns demonstrate how fans have learned how to leverage their "viewing power" as audiences but also their "buying power" as consumer audiences. Fan savvy such as this should call us to further identify and interrogate such tactics and the ways they may conform to and/or disrupt industrial strategies and goals, not necessarily with a focus on particular outcomes, but on perspectives and practices.

### *Activists.*

Much work on media activism also looks at the ways that audiences work to intervene in big media. For the purposes of this dissertation, I'll be working with a definition of media activism that includes activism with goals to influence media in some way, not the broader understanding of media activism that includes wider activist goals achieved primarily through or using media (such as the Arab Spring). According to Chung and Kirby (2009), "In response to the domination of corporate America over media advertising/programming, media activists assume the role of culture jammers to

disrupt such cultural domination” (p. 35). Model investigations into this type of media activism include Wilson’s (2004) study on the ways that “activist” fans disrupted the reality show Big Brother and Hollar’s (2010) work on the coalitions of viewers who worked to oust Lou Dobbs from CNN for his views on immigration.

Montgomery’s (1989) landmark work on political advocacy or pressure groups that aimed to influence prime time television demonstrated well the approaches audiences sometimes take when working to influence media industries, as well as their motivations. She described a:

...long series of battles fought by political advocacy groups for influence over prime-time television. These conflicts have periodically transformed the normally placid landscape of prime time into a battlefield. In the war for the American mind, entertainment programs have become political territory. (Montgomery, 1989, p. 5)

More recently, Penney (2015) examined the campaigns led by the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) to censor network television fare. Thus, we see a number of wider political concerns involved in audience-led campaigns and organizations. While studies of social media activism often concentrate on major geopolitical events like the Arab Spring and Occupy movement, theories of social movements and the internet can help us make sense of audience/producer interactions. Further, studying such cases contributes to larger scholarship on social movements by providing insight into the ways these activist groups organize and act online.

***Audiences/Industries: Intersections, Interactions and Influence.***

Conceptually, much of the scholarship described above illustrated how media industries construct audiences that never actually exist as such. These imaginings on the part of industries importantly lead to action, including content creation and distribution.



While scholars note this construction and document industrial action as a result of it, others also note various audiences' ("audiences" as still never ontologically given, but organized as categories for study) active consumption, response, and (re)production of media. While it is useful to study such consumption through active audience, labor, transformative culture, and other lenses, there is a lack of organized inquiry into audiences' constructions of media industries. I argue that specifically attending to these constructions can provide valuable insights. This focus would also answer Turow and Draper's (2014) call for more multifaceted research on constructions in industry/audience relationships and interactions:

It would be fruitful...to explore the ways in which the creator-users construct media executives and their contributions with the ways the executives see themselves and their mandates. Drawing on Jenkins' discussion of the collaborative interactions between producers and participants, it is essential to understand how the users view themselves and their industry counterparts (p. 652).

Similarly, Johnson (2007) argued that in the digital media age, audiences are increasingly "invited in" by industry, and so "we should investigate the shift it points to in our conception of audiences, their antagonistic relationships to television texts and their position in relation to production" (p. 62).

Livingstone (2015) called for more attention to the audience's role in the circuit of culture where "production, text, institution, representation, governance, interpretation, and identity all find their place" (p. 442). I detailed above how it is widely agreed that "audience" is a complex term. Audiences are, of their nature a constructed reality (Ang, 1991; Turow & Draper, 2014). So too, to the people who make up audiences, is the industry that creates the material they consume. There is very little qualitative research that explores the black box that constitutes audience imaginings and understandings of

media industries, or that interrogates such findings. With this dissertation, I aim to contribute a theoretical and empirical project that begins the work of addressing these gaps.

I argue that the ways audiences conceive of media industries' members, norms, and the viability of various ways to engage (with) them all constitute an "imagined industry<sup>4</sup>." It is this imagination of industry that leads to audience behaviors and beliefs about the content they consume, as well as the potentials for influencing media content. Ang (1991) stated about television audiences: "Despite television's apparently steady success in absorbing people's attention, television audiences remain extremely difficult to define, attract and keep. The institutions must forever 'desperately seek the audience.'" However, as marketers, "big media" executives, showrunners, producers, writers, and even actors imagine who it is that their work reaches, audience members also have very specific ideas about who is "behind the scenes." Thus, if audiences prove both elusive and alluring for powerful media companies, we must acknowledge that often, audiences just as desperately seek producers.

The imagined or constructed audience - and in a perhaps more limited way the audience commodity - lends itself conceptually to the development of a framework for investigating "bottom-up" understandings of media. While an imagined industry may seem a mere flip of the classic imagined/constructed media audience, there are many ways in which it does not align with the underpinnings of that concept. The imagined industry is similar to the constructed audience in the core tenets that: 1) both concepts

---

<sup>4</sup> Although analytically I refer to media "industries" in plural to indicate the many varied media industries that exist including television, films, music, video games, etc., for the "imagined industry" framework, I use the singular "industry" to reflect that this singular was predominately used by the participants.

describe variously constructed groups' ("the media industry," "media audiences") imaginings of one another and the possibilities for engaging with those constructions, and 2) both exist as constructions because other individuals and groups see them as elusive and evasive, while also considering them potentially valuable when located and defined.

The imagined industry framework differs from the constructed audience in at least three important ways. First, while media industries must, by necessity, constantly consider audience, audiences generally think less often about media industries and contemplate them in less organized, procedural ways. Whereas audiences are located as the *raison d'être* for media industries, the individuals who make up various constructed audiences exist in modes outside their relationship to media (or media industries). More organized co-constructions of media industries generally occur when various audiences (viewers, users, fans, activists, etc.) come together for a purpose, such as engaging the text or industry, with engagement meaning actual communication/action with producers of media, or simply the convening of audience members together to contemplate text or industry. Such self-organized audience groups are what this dissertation concerns itself with most, although the ways that individuals construct media industries are certainly just as interesting and worthy of study. Second, and most crucial, industries construct audiences from a position of institutional power. Typically, audiences (both individuals and self-organized groups) are not trading on constructions of industry as a commodity. This may not be the case for audiences organized by groups with political-economic power and interests, but typically, it is a fundamental difference of the imagined industry that these constructions are not being generated from places of power. Third, and highly tied to the differences noted above, audiences typically do not attempt any structured

measurement of industries. This is because, unlike industrial constructions and segmentations of audiences as markets, audience imaginings of industry are almost never profit or commodity driven. Thus, we can see the ways that notions of imagined/constructed audiences can (and cannot) lend themselves to a framework for studying audience constructions of industries.

As was discussed above, the imagined audience has roots in human social interaction and communication, how we imagine who it is with whom we are communicating. A monolithic “media industry” exists more fictively than actually on the other side of the screen (film, television, mobile device, etc.). Just as there are actual people who consume media, there are actual people and businesses that make them. Turow and Draper (2014) noted the usefulness of work that provides “comparisons of ways user-creators construct media executives, construct the executives’ audience requirements and construct their contributions with the ways the executives see themselves and their mandates” (p. 654). It is this back and forth construction with which the dissertation is most concerned.

Media industries and audiences are mutually constitutive; their relationships and interactions are varied and complicated. Scholars who study production processes in media industries (Gitlin, 1983; Grindstaff, 2002; Johnson, 2007) and those who study audiences (Bird, 2003; Livingstone, 2015) call for increased work on their preferred member of the “Industry, Text, Audience” triumvirate. And, as in the case of the work conducted on constructed audiences, scholars seek to better understand the ways that one (industry) conceives of the other (audience). Turow’s (1984, 1997) proposed use of a resource dependence framework for understanding how media industries respond to

outside pressure groups is a strong example of such work on industry. There is less work that allows audiences to tell us about how they think about the industries that produce the media content they consume regularly, and what they view as the potentialities (if any) of influencing that content. Livingstone (2010) argued that scholars should conduct explicit audience research more often. In my dissertation, I'll argue that talking to audiences about how they think about and interact with media industries is crucial in understanding audiences and audience activity, as well as identifying avenues (and barriers) for audience influence in media. To ignore audience perspectives, strategies, and activities in these interactions is to privilege institutional narratives and policies.

Livingstone's (2015) commentary on the debate about active audiences reminds us that there is more to learn from audiences outside of the "active vs. passive" divide with which so much research has been preoccupied. In line with this, the point of my project is not to demonstrate an engaged audience through its complex thinking about the institutions that produce its entertainment. Audiences clearly imagine the institutions of media and have varying conceptions of how industries work, why, and if or how they can be influenced. Much research, especially in the areas of fandom and media activism, is conducted with this implicit assumption. Fan studies often look at the ways that (specialized) audiences think about and interact with media industries. Jenkins' (2006) work on active consumers in the digital age, Zubernis and Larsen's (2012) investigation of the relationships between fans and producers, and Johnson's (2013) examination of consumer interest and production in the face of large media franchises all make steps toward understanding how audiences think of industry. (Although, notably, not all of these projects actually ask audience members to speak for themselves regarding their

feelings about media industries, their norms, politics and activities, and the content they produce.)

Together, fan studies and media activism approaches have set the tone for much-needed future research that bridges audience and industry work, providing us with new and important perspectives on social constructions and power relations in the production and consumption of mass media. My project fills these gaps through an examination of two active audience case studies. I study two online audience groups (one fan-activist and one activist-interest group), their constructions of media industries and tactics for influencing them, and then examine related industry responses. A large part of my focus is also the roles of identity and technology in the deployment of audience tactics, as well as in the social and political interactions between audiences and industries.

### **LGBTQ/Sexual Minorities and the Digital**

Queer most typically refers to non-normative gender and sexual identities (i.e. those who are not heterosexual and/or cisgender). This project is largely concerned with audience groups comprised of those who inhabit such non-normative identities, and those who oppose the existence or mainstream acceptance of them. Queer, queering, and queer theory also often refer to more radical political identities and projects that oppose categorizations (especially binary) of gender and sexuality. Further, queer often implies an impulse to oppose or disrupt social constructions of normalcy.

The digital and the queer intersect and overlap in numerous ways. If, for example, as Lawrence Lessig stated, “code is law,” then the very bits endemic to the structure of

computers, and later, the Internet, are already queered. Lessig (2006) explained about code:

We can build, or architect, or code cyberspace to protect values that we believe are fundamental. Or we can build, or architect, or code cyberspace to allow those values to disappear. There is no middle ground. There is no choice that does not include some kind of building. Code is never found; it is only ever made, and only ever made by us. (p. 6)

The “us” in Lessig’s quote remains unclear, and that is because “the digital” is a structure designed and erected and maintained by countless individuals with varied identities and subjectivities. If we begin with computing pioneer (and gay man) Alan Turing and move forward to any number of individuals involved in structuring the digital, we see that in many ways, the digital has already, to some extent, always been queered. However, it is important to note that it is not *only* queer and that numerous subjectivities are entrenched in this infrastructure. For example, in a similar way with race, Keeling (2014) pointed out that the operating system Unix was embedded with the racial (and racist) logics of its developers.

The Internet has also proven a queered space from its inception. Larry Gross (2001) stated: “Whenever a new communications technology arrives on the scene it can safely be predicted that among its earliest users will be churches spreading the Christian gospel, and the creators and purveyors of explicit sexual imagery.” (p. 221). In line with this, Gross locates the early Internet as a space in which gay porn led to the formation of gay community and empowerment: “For isolated gays, porn can be an important means of saying ‘other gays exist.’” Gross pointed to a 1996 Associated Press article that noted “... gay men and lesbians are among the most avid, loyal and plentiful commercial users of the Internet. On any given evening, one- third of all the member-created chat rooms on America Online are devoted to gay topics” (p. 228). The Internet, which (perhaps

decreasingly) allows for a shroud of anonymity, has also proven useful as a safe and communal virtual space for sexual minorities and gender/sexual nonconformists:

With the growth of the Internet..., so too has there been greater use of the Internet by spatially and/or ideologically marginalised groups (Alexander, 2002; Fluri, 2006). Sexual minority groups, and/or those groups deemed sexually deviant, limited by the constraints of space, are able to interact through virtual media. These may take the form of bulletin boards, chat rooms, profile based sites and, with new technologies such as Grindr, location-specific networking through our cell-phones. (Ashford, 2009)

Thus, the Internet has time and again demonstrated its utility for those with non-normative gender/sexual identities.

Further, technology and the Internet are intimately (and increasingly) tied to the body and identity. Ashford (2009) argued, “Technology heightens our awareness of the fluidity of identity as never before” (p. 310). Light (2011) explained that “digital tools play a part in defining identity by enabling certain practices and ways of thinking,” noting that body monitoring technologies and “the nascent potential to combine continuous readings from multiple internal organs with ease – support ways of understanding ourselves driven by numerical and biological data and... this can be expected to percolate into how society responds” (p. 432). Indeed, the digital era has brought new understandings of the very definitions of body and space (Stone, 1995). These connections prove important when considering how heteronormative and queer bodily identities drive the digital tactics performed by this dissertation’s participants.

### ***Queering/Troubling/Hacking.***

“Troubling” provides a useful means of locating an intersection between the queer and the digital, and conceptually can be deployed to interrogate digital tactics performed by XMC and OMM. Digital hacking and queer troubling (or simply queering)



operate at strikingly similar levels and hold many of the same values and goals. Using drag as an example, Judith Butler (2011) argued that queering is constituted through parody that exposes the “fundamentally phantasmic status” of “the natural” (p. 200). Thus, queering or “troubling” was born as queer theory’s mission: a fundamental undoing of any suggestion that identities or other categories are fixed, natural, or normative. Much as troubling is foundational to queer theory, hacking also originated alongside the Internet. Coleman (2015) explained: “The nature of the Internet – a network built on software – makes it ideal for both play and exploitation; it is like a petri dish for pranking” (p. 35).

Queering and hacking share an emphasis on disrupting, tinkering, and chipping away at infrastructures. Halberstam (2011) stated his theoretical motivations within queer theory thus:

I believe in low theory in popular places, in the small, the inconsequential, the antimonumental, the micro, the irrelevant; I believe in making a difference by thinking little thoughts and sharing them widely. I seek to provoke, annoy, bother, irritate, and amuse; I am chasing small projects, micropolitics, hunches, whims, fancies. (p. 21)

Similarly, Light (2011) explained that queering is: “...problematizing apparently structural and foundational relationships with critical intent, and it may involve mischief and clowning as much as serious critique” (p. 432). In the same way, hackers work outside the official infrastructure of the Internet in order to undermine it. Stallman (2014) defined hacking as anything combining “playfulness, cleverness, and exploration...hacking means exploring the limits of what is possible” (p. 8).

The playfulness of queering and hacking signal the optimism associated with both. Butler (2011), Munoz (2009), and Halberstam (2011) conceive of queer theory as embedded with potentiality and hope. Kara Keeling (2014), working to queer

technological potentials, proposed a scholarly political project called “Queer OS” and explained that it understands “... queer as naming an orientation toward various and shifting aspects of existing reality and the social norms they govern, such that it makes available pressing questions about, eccentric and/or unexpected relationships in, and possibly alternatives to those social norms” (p. 153). Scholarly projects examining “hacks” through such a lens are meant to identify technologies and technological tactics that work to undermine hegemonic cultural prescriptions.

It is important to note there are many pessimistic impulses in digital studies (Andrejevic, 2007; Zittrain, 2008; Morozov, 2011) and in queer theory (Bersani, 1995; Edelman, 2004). Still, in this dissertation, I argue that a queer utopianism in many ways falls in line with notions of agency and activist potentiality associated with technology. (p.11). Marvin (1988) recognized the potentials of subversion within communication technologies designed to control and order cultural acts:

New media embody the possibility that accustomed orders are in jeopardy, since communication is a peculiar kind of interaction that actively seeks variety. No matter how firmly custom or instrumentality may appear to organize and contain it, it carries the seeds of its own subversion.” (p. 8)

Similarly, Castells (2001) noted: “...the Internet is a particularly malleable technology, susceptible of being deeply modified by its social practice, and leading to a whole range of potential social outcomes - to be discovered by experience, not proclaimed beforehand” (p. 5). These impulses to not dismiss opportunities for agency are also embedded in queer utopianism. Halberstam charged that the academy spends too much time thinking about hegemony, and not enough considering counter-hegemony. Parts of this dissertation draw out useful connections between queer and technological tactics that might work to counter hegemony. Other parts interrogate what seem like easy

comparisons and celebrations of such tactics, and work to understand their meanings in the wider realm of the internet and politics.

*Challenging Queer Theory in the Digital Age.*

It is very important to note within the work done in this dissertation that queer theory and queering are often understood and discussed in relation to sexual minorities and/or the LGBTQ community. Indeed, these individuals and communities are typically the subject of works and studies using queer theory. Queer theory's critique of gender norms and heteronormativity often takes these as first steps to dismantling naturalizations of identity and other normative prescriptions. However, Alexander Doty (1993) stated as a concern in his work on queer readings of popular culture:

I want to construct "queer" as something other than "lesbian," "gay," or "bisexual"; but I can't say that "lesbian," "gay," or "bisexual" aren't also "queer." I would like to maintain the integrity of "lesbian," "gay," and "bisexual" as concepts that have specific historical, cultural, and personal meanings; but I would also like "lesbian," "gay," and "bisexual" culture, history, theory, and politics to have some bearing on the articulation of queerness." (p. xvii)

Doty goes on to quote Alisa Soloman's query: "Can queer politics be forged without a gay or lesbian identity? And what would that be like?" (p. xvii).

Sara Ahmed (2006) argued that queering can likely survive leaving behind gender and sexuality in favor of deviation:

If we return to the root of the word "queer" (from the Greek for cross, oblique, adverse) we can see that the word itself "twists," with a twist that allows us to move between sexual and social registers, without flattening them or reducing them to a single line. Although this approach risks losing the specificity of queer as a commitment to a life of sexual deviation, it also sustains the significance of "deviation" in what makes queer lives queer...Heterosexuality as a compulsory orientation...is a mechanism for the reproduction of culture, or even of the "attributes" that are assumed to pass along a family line, such as whiteness. (p. 161)

This disconnect in queer theory, in which some envision it as centered on a sexual politics bound to LGBT identities, and others locate its power in its politics of tactics that trouble normativity (possibly sans gender/sexual identity), is interrogated in this dissertation. Through the cases, the project explores important questions about what queer theory, in its present state, can and cannot do. What is lost when queering is reduced to deviance from norms? What is gained and risked in asking queer theory to define its parameters and goals? What role do media and technology play in the ways queer theory is understood and queer tactics are envisioned and enacted?

Through an examination of tactics deployed by (primarily white) LGBTQ and heterosexual women, the project challenges queer theory's apparent flexibility and alterity, seeing what happens when a theory's tactics become so widely understood and practiced (perhaps because of its past successes), that it suddenly potentially no longer works as a tool for its own creators. These concerns are not new, but are playing out more and more in the digital realm, where center and margin are becoming increasingly difficult to locate. It is a struggle with which other identity politics and theories have long been contending. An example is the move away from "colorblindness" in racial politics and activism so that the power of identity is not flattened or erased. Joshua Gamson (1995) pointed to a similarly useful example of the appropriative use of queer thought to block LGBTQ rights:

...pitfalls were evident in the 1993 fight over Colorado Amendment 2, which prohibits "the state or any of its subdivision from outlawing discrimination against gay men, lesbians, or bisexuals" (Minkowitz, 1993). The Colorado solicitor general, as reporter Donna Minkowitz put it, made arguments "that could have appeared in a queercore rant," promoting "a remarkably Foucaultian view of queerness as a contingent category, whose members can slip in and out of its boundaries like subversive fish" (Minkowitz, 1993:27). We don't have a group that is easily confinable," the solicitor general argued. Here, the fluidity of group

boundaries and the provisional nature of collective identity was used to argue that no one should receive legal benefits or state protection – because there is no discernable group to be protected. Although the solicitor-general-as-queer-theorist is a strange twist, the lesson is familiar: As long as membership in this group is unclear, minority status, and therefore rights and protection, is unavailable. (p. 401)

With this historical grounding in related phenomena, a goal of this dissertation is to deploy queer theory in ways it may and may not be intended for use, and explore the theoretical and political implications of the outcomes.

Identity and alterity are so central to both XMC and OMM that understanding how they imagine media industries through these identifications allows for a wider examination of the role of identity in audience interactions with powerful institutions. In sum, this dissertation aims to fill gaps in the literature about ways that audiences construct media industries, as well as provide empirical examples of particular imaginings and tactics adopted by two audience groups with very different goals. Further, the results of the dissertation point to wider trends in how digital tactics and feelings of marginality operate in the contemporary political environment. Finally, a goal of the dissertation is to demonstrate the utility of an “imagined industry” analytic framework to study complex and overlapping objects and phenomena in media studies.

### **Research Questions**

This dissertation examines the two case studies (XMC and OMM) as points of inquiry for questions about audience/industry relations. Further, the case studies are deployed to study the ways identity is related to power and marginality online. The dissertation explores the following research questions:

RQ1: How and why do some audience groups form and organize online?

RQ2: How do these audience members and groups construct or imagine media industries, industry practices, and opportunities/limitations for influencing media industries?

RQ3: What tactics (especially digital) do these audience groups deploy to impact or influence media industries and why?

RQ4: How are these tactics informed or impacted by identity? What does this tell us about the goals and limits of queer theory, especially in relation to the digital?

RQ5: How do members of media industries understand these audience groups, their constructions and tactics, and their potential/ability to influence industries?

Through the case studies, these research questions provide insight into interactions between media audiences and industries in the digital age. In addition, the questions allow for an exploration of the ways identity impacts understandings of power online, particularly in the contemporary political climate.

## **Methods**

In this dissertation, I employed qualitative methods, many of which could be considered ethnographic. Traditional and digital ethnographies employ reflexive and flexible (but rigorous) methods for understanding and representing people and culture with an emphasis on immersion, or “being there.” Indeed, works by Boellstorff, 2008; Nardi, 2010; Coleman, 2015; and Lingel, 2017, all demonstrate the usefulness of ethnographic methods for better understanding digital cultures. Lingel (2017) stated about her methodology when studying online countercultures (a method she calls “networked field studies”): “I am inspired by and rely on tools of ethnography without

necessarily meeting the standards for traditional definitions of this method, online or off’ (p. 16). In a similar fashion, I used the ethnographic instincts and practices that most appropriately and practically allowed me to explore my research questions, without claiming this work as a traditional ethnography. Below I describe the methods used for this dissertation, the strength of the reflexivity and flexibility offered by ethnographic methods, and how these translate to the digital, dispersed fields examined in this project.

Although this dissertation did not pursue a traditionally conceived fully “immersive” ethnography, I used multiple ethnographic methods to investigate audience groups and the industries they contemplate and attempt to influence. In order to learn about these phenomena, I conducted online and offline participant observation and interviewing, as well as online discourse, document and artifact analysis. Key to accessing and analyzing the data in this work are the ethnographic characteristics of reflexivity and flexibility.

The reflexive turn in anthropology and the use of ethnographic methods called for a rethinking of the notion of clear boundaries between the world of the researcher and the “researched.” This reflexivity is characterized by Hine (2015) as a “recognition that ethnographers to some extent construct the object that they purport to represent..., and the subjectivity of the ethnographer is acknowledged as key in shaping relations with the field and constructing knowledge of the setting” (p. 81). In my dissertation work, I studied fans of the TV series *Xena: Warrior Princess*. I am also a fan of the series. While I am not part of the organized group of fans I studied (or any organized group of fans for that matter), I was certainly in some sense already a part of their community. Some assert that ethnography should not be conducted by those already in the culture they wish to

research. Boellstorff et al. (2012) located that impulse as a part of early Malinowskian conceptions of ethnography and note that other ethnographic traditions allow for intracultural research. Those who study fans have also contributed greatly to the thinking through of how one studies a culture with which you are involved. Fandom scholars have taken to calling themselves “aca-fans,” with Henry Jenkins (2013) explaining:

There are at least three things at stake in the use of the aca-fan concept: the acknowledgement of our own personal stakes in the forms of popular culture we study, the accountability of the ethnographer to the communities we study, and the sense of membership or affiliation with the populations at the heart of our research. (p. xiii)

The reflexivity implied in that description resides in newer understandings of ethnography and qualitative methods more generally. Indeed, Lingel (2012) described her work studying body modification communities of which she is also a part, as “...not so much about infiltrating a community... (but) navigating one’s own evolving sense of belonging and not belonging” (p. 42).

While studying *Xena* fans and navigating aca-fandom represents one challenge for reflexivity, studying the conservative, anti-gay, anti-choice OMM represents another. The OMM group is politically and demographically quite far from my own experiences and perspectives. Literature on working with groups opposed to your own politics and beliefs provides useful notes on staying reflexive about such work. Barrett-Fox (2010) explained about those who study hate groups:

Hate studies scholars want their research subjects to fail, even as they are invested in the work of hate groups. If we reveal our desire for their failure to our subjects, we risk losing access to them; but feigning sympathy for a hateful position is unethical. And if our subjects fail, we have little to report. Like workers at a weapons factory, we are successful because of conflict, even if we hate war. Untangling our investment while adhering to our professional codes of conduct, which generally stress transparency in our relationships with our subjects, and maintaining access to subjects whose positions we frequently do not respect, even



as we may feel genuine concern or even affection for them (Klatch, 1988), is a formidable task... (p. 17)

If ethnographic work is meant to make the familiar strange, and the strange familiar, then the case studies I selected allowed me to do just that. While my positionality dictated how I worked to be appropriately reflexive with each group, my overall methodology is highly invested in the reflexive as imperative to useful and ethical research. It also takes seriously Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw's (2011) contention that writing choices are especially key to reflexivity, and so I attended closely to my writing as I moved through the project.

In addition to aligning with the reflexive impulses of ethnography, my project demonstrates the validity of the claim by many anthropologists that research often need extend in multiple directions. Laura Grindstaff's (2002) work serves as a model for such a study, and she described the multi-directionality of her work thus:

Initially, I felt that, by immersing myself in the American television industry - one of the most powerful institutions in the world - I was studying up, but, if one accepts popular opinion about talk shows, I was also studying down...Of course, up, down, high, and low are relative, not absolute terms." (Grindstaff, p. 280)

In a similar way within my own work, ethnographic methods allowed me to not get caught up on hard boundaries when thinking of my subject(s) and location(s) of study. Studying audience groups in many ways is a study of the least powerful in a media process that is primarily dictated by powerful institutions. However, my dissertation also aimed to answer Nader's (1972) call for scholars to "study up" to better understand powerful institutions and their impact from the top-down. Thus, the project includes interviews with members of the media industries and also answers Nader (1972) and Radway's (1990) calls for the addition of examinations of corporate documents and history to ethnographic projects on the elite. As someone interested in media and how

people use it, I believe that to gain a more complete understanding of the forces at work within a media text, scholars must gain a nuanced view of the culture(s) that produce the text. Todd Gitlin (1983), who conducted an ethnography of the prime time television industry, explained that we cannot understand TV texts without understanding “who put the images on the small screen and for what reasons” (p. 13). Although my dissertation centers on audience constructions and tactics, I also consider these useful data about the institutions themselves, and a starting point for understanding institutions’ responding thoughts and strategies. Further, in studying how two groups primarily composed of white women who are able to organize and make themselves and their demands visible online, I also studied “up” in the sense that some of the perspectives and techniques investigated originate in places or identities that hold power in society. Thus, “studying up,” “down,” and following my research topic across a range of offline and online contexts are also vital to my research and my embrace of a flexible methodology.

This flexibility is also vital as my research often found me following my informants through both online and offline contexts. In their handbook for virtual worlds ethnographers, Boellstorff et al. (2012) argued for the legitimacy of online participant-observation and, taking it a step further, state that ethnographers must follow wherever their research questions take them:

We may situate our study completely within a virtual world, and it is entirely legitimate and productive to do so if our research is so constituted. We may also fly across the globe to meet participants in physical world locales to conduct interviews and attend fan conventions. Our research will almost always include journeying to other online locales such as forums, blogs, and wikis... Ethnography is a flexible, responsive methodology, sensitive to emergent phenomena and emergent research questions. There can be no argument for privileging certain locales or modes of study. Pertinent destinations and techniques issue from the aims of the research, and the choices of field site and method should be based on the questions motivating inquiry.” (Boellstorff et al. p. 6)

Due to the dispersed nature of studying XMC and OMM, this dissertation aimed to embody the methodological flexibility that is so valuably provided by ethnography and other qualitative methods. I followed both cases through multiple online and offline contexts and worked to study a variety of perspectives through interactions with multiple stakeholders for each group.

### **Comparative Case Studies**

This dissertation used two cases to investigate its research questions. Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg (1991) defined case study research as “...an in-depth, multifaceted investigation, using qualitative research methods, of a single social phenomenon. The study is conducted in great detail and often relies on the use of several data sources” (p. 2). Yin (2014) described the conditions under which using case studies is most appropriate:

Doing case study research would be the preferred method, compared to others, in situations when (1) the main research questions are “how” or “why” questions; (2) a researcher has little or no control over behavioral events; and (3) the focus of study is a contemporary (as opposed to entirely historical) phenomenon.” (p. 2)

The cases examined in this dissertation, Xena Movie Campaign and One Million Moms, were selected in order to investigate the phenomenon of audience groups coming together online to attempt to influence media industries and content.

I used these two case studies to identify and compare similarities and differences in each case’s specific perspectives and practices, as well as to provide a wider, and more complex and nuanced overview of the phenomenon overall. Feagin, Orum, and Sjoberg (1991) stated about the value of using more than one case study: “...some of our best research studies have involved a small number of case studies conducted in a

comparative framework” (p. 2), later explaining: “...the great strength of this form of research is that it does permit the observer to assemble complementary and overlapping measures of the same phenomena” (p. 19). Perhaps most importantly, I used two case studies in this project in order to represent and consider the perspectives of multiple stakeholders in the phenomenon analyzed, with a goal of understanding varied and diverse viewpoints and actions. Tellis (1997) emphasized the strength of case studies in this area:

Case studies are multi-perspectival analyses. This means that the researcher considers not just the voice and perspective of the actors, but also of the relevant groups of actors and the interaction between them. This one aspect is a salient point in the characteristic that case studies possess. They give a voice to the powerless and voiceless. (p. 8)

Giving voice to multiple stakeholders is key to the flexible ethnographic case study method I employed in this dissertation.

### **Data Gathering and Analysis**

I explored the research questions through participant observation (interacting and participating with both XMC and OMM on- and offline), analysis of online discussions and publicly available statements and policies made/posted by both groups as well as members of media industries, related news and trade press coverage, and in-depth interviews with audiences and industry personnel. This varied methodological approach worked to consider the ways audiences and industries interact and interrelate (Grindstaff, 2002; Radway, 1997; Turow, 2010; Zubernis & Larsen, 2012; etc.). Audience and industry were recruited online, audiences primarily through the XMC and OMM Facebook groups, and industry primarily through publicly available contact information found online as well as snowball sampling.

### ***Participant observation.***

Participant observation is conducted in this project with the goal of learning the cultures and goals of both groups, as well as identifying the ways the groups imagine industries, communicate, and plan and deploy tactics. Much of the participant observation for this project was conducted online by observing and interacting through the groups' official Facebook group pages. Observing both groups' online actions, discussions, and community happenings provided a primary access point to their cultural norms and typical beliefs and behaviors. The online comments posted to the public XMC and OMM Facebook pages quoted in this dissertation are presented verbatim, but without the users' screen names or the exact date posted. The Association of Internet Researchers recommends internet researchers ask themselves a number of questions regarding the ethical use and publication of online data. These include, "What are the ethical expectations users attach to the venue in which they are interacting, particularly around issues of privacy?", and if social media content is quoted directly, "What might be the ethical consequence of this in the long term?" (Markham & Buchanan, 2012, p. 8, 10). I elected to quote posts to the OMM and XMC public group pages because users were likely aware the posts were public (the pages are labeled "public") and would have adjusted their privacy expectations accordingly. Further, as both groups publicly make their missions/politics clear and considering most members' activist stances and strong support of the groups, along with their decision to engage related topics openly on public pages, I felt it important to allow the commenters' words to stand for themselves. Still, Gerrard (2017, 2018) has made convincing arguments for, and successfully implemented,

the practice of not quoting public social media posts verbatim so that users cannot be traced to their comments. While Gerrard's focus is vulnerable populations and/or those who wish to remain anonymous online, her privacy concerns about tracing social media posts to original users are important. Thus, to attempt to limit the tracing of commenter identities, the quoted posts are not presented with screen names or posting dates.

For XMC, in-person participant observation has been conducted at fan events (an official *Xena* convention and the Xenite Retreat). It appears that members of OMM do not meet in offline contexts in any organized way. Thus, for OMM, additional participant observation included immersing myself in their surrounding online environs. For example, OMM is a division of AFA, which also runs American Family Radio. The organization also sells DVDs and books, and recommends music. To better understand the OMM culture and members' perceptions of media industries, I worked to consume the information and materials they might likely encounter as part of their membership. While most of my methods are described in this chapter, see the Appendix for a table that details the modes of participant observation conducted with each group.

### ***Interviews and other data.***

In addition to participant observation, interviews provided much of the data for this project. Livingstone (2010) centered the import of the interview in audience research thus: "...when claims are taken for granted about what audiences do or think or understand - claims which are often homogenizing, dismissive, or patronizing - the very act of going out to speak with them can be critical" (p. 568). For this project, I had 8 "core" XMC informants and 5 "core" OMM informants. There were more core

informants for XMC due to increased industrial willingness to discuss that group. I also interviewed, informally chatted with, or had short interactions with approximately 20 additional people, 15 associated with XMC and/or *Xena*, and 5 associated with OMM<sup>5</sup>. These short conversations informed my research and are represented in the data and analysis, but it is through the core informants' statements (along with audience and industry viewpoints expressed or located online) that the perspectives of the various actors/stakeholders are represented. Although the informants speak for themselves, their voices are used when they articulate perspectives that best represent the data collected for this project. Or if, as will be noted, the core informant presents data or a perspective contrary to primary findings or unique to the object of study. The core informants ranged from casual group members to group administrators/leaders/volunteers for audience groups and from media actor to TV producers/show runners for industries. Interviews were semi-structured and primarily conducted either in person, by phone, or by Skype. Two participants requested to respond solely in writing to emailed interview questions, and this is how I received their answers. Some participants were interviewed more than once. Interviews allowed group members to speak about their perspectives on media industries and content, and the tactics they believe work best to influence them.

A primary way this study works to represent industrial views, policies, and discourse is through semi-structured interviews with industry personnel as discussed above, and especially, through the examination of publicly available industry interviews, publications, online posts, and other public discourse. Such data can produce valuable

---

<sup>5</sup> The higher number of additional XMC encounters is due to the increased access I had to members and fans at "real world" *Xena* events.

results. Ostrander (1993) argued that difficulty in gaining access to elites and establishing rapport with them is exaggerated, demonstrating that it is possible to garner important data from observing and interviewing people in positions of power. Online documents with public statements made by those in the industries also provide valuable data. Sender (2004) described such data and its potential for analysis thus:

Documents require different analytic considerations from spoken data: they are neither more nor less valid than material collected in face-to-face interviews, for example, but perform different functions and are subject to different constraints than spoken data. Hammersly and Atkinson assert that documents are “not necessarily to be read at face value, as accurate representations of social reality, but can suggest themes, images, or metaphors.” (p.250)

The results from the interviews and public statements and documents were analyzed in order to identify themes within industrial discourses surrounding the XMC and OMM cases.

### ***Analysis.***

All of the data collected for each audience group was analyzed to identify dominant themes in audience motivations, constructions of industries, logics and preferred tactics. The industrial data collected was analyzed to identify dominant themes in industrial responses to the existence of XMC and OMM, and perspectives on the efficacy and impact of their tactics. This dissertation is a comparative case study, and the analysis is concerned with comparing the two groups’ goals, perspectives, and tactics in order to answer the five research questions.

### **Research Participants**



In the tables below (Tables 1, 2 and 3) I list the “Core Informants” included in my dissertation and their roles/positions with or in relation to their groups. Throughout, I refer to some of the participants by their real (i.e., legal) names at their request (see “N/A”/“not applicable” in the tables) or by a pseudonym of my choice. As outlined in my Institutional Review Board protocol, and as described to participants prior to interviews, “professionals” could request to be identified by name in the research, although I reserved the final decision on whether to use their real name or a pseudonym, and audience members would be identified by pseudonyms I selected.<sup>6</sup>

Table 1: “Core Informants:” Xena Movie Campaign (XMC) and *Xena* fans

<b>Real Name</b>	<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Role/Position</b>
Ariel Wetzel	N/A	XMC Admin
N/A	Eddie	XMC Admin
N/A	Laura	XMC Volunteer
N/A	Jordan	XMC Member
N/A	Robin	Long-time <i>Xena</i> Fan

Table 2: “Core Informants:” *Xena*-Associated Industry

<b>Real Name</b>	<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Role/Position</b>
N/A	James	Writer/Producer – Original Series

---

<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that although they are associated with the audience groups, Monica Cole, Tina Griffin, and Ariel Wetzel all self-identified as professionals in relation to their involvement with the audience groups and elected to be identified by their legal names.

Adrienne Wilkinson	N/A	Actor – Original Series
Javier Grillo-Marxuach	N/A	Writer and Executive Producer – Unproduced Reboot

Table 3: “Core Informants:” One Million Moms (OMM)

<b>Real Name</b>	<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Role/Position</b>
N/A	Victoria	OMM Member
Tina Griffin	N/A	OMM Member, Blogger/Influencer
N/A	Susan	OMM Member
Monica Cole	N/A	Director, One Million Moms
N/A	Linda	OMM member

## **Dissertation Chapter Overview**

### Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter has offered an introduction to the research and the “problem” of audience/industry interactions. I conceive of this problem, here and throughout, as a lack of understanding about how audiences construct media industries. I offer an update and analytic reversal of Ien Ang’s (1991) work on how television institutions “desperately seek audiences” (p. ix) to understand how two audience groups - the Xena Movie Campaign (XMC) and One Million Moms (OMM) – “desperately” seek media producers and industries, primarily using the internet. The chapter provided a justification for the research and introduced some of its key analytical objects: media, audiences, industries, fans, activists, tactics, identity, and queer theory. It also discussed the research method: a

flexible, ethnographically-inspired qualitative comparative case study that included online and offline participant observations and interviews, coupled with online discourse, document and artifact analysis. Finally, it described the case studies and provided the research questions.

## Chapter 2: Identity and Organizing as Audiences: XMC and OMM in Historical Context

In this chapter, I provide historical accounts of both the XMC and OMM audience groups to contextualize their actions and expectations regarding media representation, interacting with media industries, and media activism. For both cases, I detail the complex background and history of people, groups and events that came before and set the tone for the creation and implementation of the groups as they are understood (and in this dissertation, studied) today. As I explain in this chapter, both XMC and OMM emerged from established histories of using new technologies to influence media industries, and these legacies inform their current tactics. Finally, I describe how the groups came to exist in their current states, and argue that members of both tend to identify as “reluctant activists.”

## Chapter 3: Imagined: The Industry is Exclusive, Insular and Motivated by Profit

This chapter is the first of three to analyze how audience groups imagine media industries, and to explore the tactics they employ based on those imaginaries. Members of both XMC and OMM imagine media industries as insular and motivated by profit. In particular, the groups perceive that media industries almost always prioritize “the bottom line.” In addition, because they deal in such large sums of money, the groups imagine the

industries as exclusive and elite, and thus, difficult to access. The groups deploy a number of tactics to overcome this distance and be recognized, primarily under the two tactical themes: (1) “power recognizes power,” and (2) “learn the game.” I argue that this imaginary in many ways restricts bottom-up activism and reinforces barriers to audience influence. It leads to the conception that in order to have any influence in the production of media content, audiences must play by the industries’ rules and demonstrate their socio-economic value. At the same time however, this barrier can feel so insurmountable to some audiences that they counter through a withdrawal from mainstream industrial practices completely, and adopt a more threatening approach, as in Montgomery’s (1989) work on special interest groups. I argue for more audience-based studies of industries to complicate mythologies of corporate power reinforced by industries and scholars (Andrejevic, 2004, 2008; Turow, 2011, Fuchs, 2014) that privilege industrial perspectives.

#### Chapter 4: Imagined: The Industry is Wrong

This chapter is the second to analyze how audience groups imagine media industries. It explores how, for very different reasons, both XMC and OMM imagine the media industries to be “wrong”. Both groups are concerned with: (1) the values conveyed in the content media industries produce, (2) the validity of the audience research and demographic logics underpinning the industries, and (3) that the industries are seemingly antagonistic toward them, their identities, and/or the audiences their groups represent. XMC and OMM’s imaginings of the “wrongness” of the industries differ because of the groups’ identities – XMC as a group that advocates for greater inclusion of strong

women, older women, and LGBTQ identities in media content, and OMM as a group that denounces hostility towards Christian-conservative and “traditional” family audiences in media content. I highlight that both groups’ imaginings of industrial structures as almost always directly oppositional to their own identities and politics also reveals the constructed nature of their own positionality. These imaginaries are exposed as only the outermost layers of overlapping (re)constructions of audiences and industries, as each imagines the other and repositions accordingly. These results lend support to Ariyanto, Hornsey, and Gallois’s (2007) study demonstrating audiences perceive media content based on assumptions about industrial allegiances and bias. Both groups’ methods to counter the ways the industries are “wrong” fit within the tactical theme: “educate the industries and society.” These educational tactics include publicizing their identity/activist causes, educating the industries about what the groups perceive to be incorrect industrial understandings of audience demographics and market value, and demonstrating such value by rallying their allies to support group-endorsed content.

#### Chapter 5: Imagined: The Industry is Risk-Averse

In this chapter I explore the third and final shared audience imaginary: The industry is *risk-averse*. This belief is expressed by members of both XMC and OMM and is linked to the findings from Chapters 3 and 4; that, because media industries operate on logics of profitability and under faulty understandings of audiences and profit, they very rarely deviate from the status quo. Group members note the potential for loss of profit, controversy, reputational harm, and reduced job security as driving media industries’ fears of taking risks. XMC and OMM clearly differ in their understandings of the

identities and politics that might fuel industrial fears, but both imagine that industries will err on the side of “mass appeal”. In this chapter, I explore how both groups use tactics to either alleviate the perception of risk associated with their demands, or to emphasize it. XMC and OMM address their imaginary of risk-averse industries through the following tactical themes: (1) negotiate delicately, (2) speak with our dollars, and (3) court controversy. The findings presented in this chapter (and in the others) counter reductive claims about the limitations of audiences’ industrial knowledge, which are often espoused in scholarly work that privileges political-economic perspectives. Especially, the results counter work by Andrejevic (2008), by demonstrating that careful audience considerations of industrial structures and practices don’t negate an oppositional stance toward the industries.

#### Chapter 6: From Community to Ridicule: Industrial Responses to XMC and OMM

In this chapter, I move away from detailing how audiences imagine media industries to explore two main “industrial responses” to XMC and OMM. By “industrial responses,” I refer to how media industries (broadly, and those who work within them) think about and respond to XMC and OMM members’ attempts to influence them and their content. The first response involves industrial statements and actions that do *not* acknowledge the groups but may constitute a reaction to group practices, and the second response includes the industrial statements and actions that *are* directed towards (or name/acknowledge) the groups or their associated audiences and allies. I discuss various responses in this chapter but broadly note that, while members of media industries often acknowledge the growing power of XMC and other fan campaigns, they seem to engage

much less overtly or positively with OMM. Although the industries' responses are varied, for XMC they fall under three response themes: (1) "Industrial Awareness," which attempts to ascertain how aware the industries are of the group and its goals, (2) "Building Community: Creatives' Identification with Fans" which examines the trend of industrial workers who do creative work identifying most with XMC and other fans, and (3), "Artistic Authority and Creative Control" which demonstrates the boundaries to audience influence erected by members of the industries who claim artistic authority and ownership over media texts. For OMM, feedback tends to come in the form of two thematic responses "Ridicule and Confront," in which members of industries publicly "stand up" to OMM and/or ridicule them and their cause, and "Private Overtures and 'Secret' Allies," in which industry insiders quietly communicate their respect or support of the group. As I do throughout this dissertation, I argue that deploying an "imagined industry" analytic to an industry-based study allows for a nuanced analysis that recognizes the complex interplays between media industries and audiences.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

In the concluding chapter of this dissertation, I reflect on one of the first interviews I conducted for this research. I recount a story told to me by James of conflicting audience feedback he received while *Xena* was still on the air. I discuss how and why that story led me to develop the "imagined industry" framework that is meant to account for the complex digitally mediated interactions between media audiences and industries. I present implications for studies of active audiences that are suggested by this dissertation's results. Most crucially, I argue the operationalization of the imagined

industry framework here demonstrates a need for approaches to audience research that abandon tired savvy/dupe dichotomies and “perspective” allegiances. Instead, I encourage advocates of various subfields/approaches – political economists, active/participatory audiences, media industries, technology/internet studies, identity and representation, and media activism - to treat one another’s work with intellectual generosity. Doing so, and allowing these diverse interpretations to productively speak with one another, can allow for useful insights for researchers of audiences, industries, policy, identity, technology, and wider society. I address two questions with which much of the current literature is often preoccupied, but that predominate analytic structures tend to flatten: “The Question of Efficacy,” and “The Question of Tactics.” This final section builds on the empirical infrastructure I’ve built thus far to tease out some remaining points of focus from the research questions and apply the “imagined industry’s” imperative for nuance



## Chapter 2 - Identity and Organizing as Audiences: XMC and OMM in Historical Context

This chapter provides historical accounts of both One Million Moms and Xena Movie Campaign (XMC) to contextualize their actions and expectations regarding media representation, interacting with media industries, and media activism. The chapter works to answer Research Question (1) “How and why do some audience groups form and organize online?” for XMC and OMM, but also informs the other research questions through an illustration of what the answers might have looked like for the earlier incarnations of each group (Donald Wildmon and the early AFA for One Million Moms, and the original *Xena* fandom for the Xena Movie Campaign). For both cases, there is a complex background and history of people, groups and events that came before and have set the tone for the creation and implementation of the groups as they are understood (and in this dissertation, studied) today. In particular, both groups have an established history of using new technologies to influence media industries that informs their current tactics.

As noted in Chapter 1, *Xena: Warrior Princess* is noteworthy as an early online fandom that managed to have an unusually close relationship with the shows’ producers, writers and cast, actually influencing the content that ended up on-screen (Gwenllian-Jones, 2000; Hamming, 2001; Hanmer, 2014). Examining *Xena*’s early fandom will allow us to place XMC’s contemporary tactics and expectations in historical context. Similarly, the history of the One Million Moms, its parent organization the American Family Association, and campaigns and interest groups like it illustrates the evolving conceptualization of what constitute Christian-conservative media activism and tactics. In

addition, reading the *Xena* case with a focus on “queer hacks” provides a comparative contextualization of OMM’s understandings of their own identities and identity tactics. Finally, the chapter ends with a short discussion of the two groups as they exist today, and notes that despite their histories of activism and influence, members of both often identify as accidental and reluctant activists, united by shared identities and worldviews but ultimately skeptical of the groups’ overall efficacy and ambivalent about their own participation. This chapter also begins the dissertation’s ongoing illustration of the ways the internet has served as a place for community and action for particular audiences over time, and how audiences and industries, and the very definitions and experiences of identity and marginality, have changed along with the internet.

## **Finding your Community ... and your Cause**

### **XMC & Finding Your Community**

It was 1995, and one evening “Robin” happened to catch an episode of a new little fantasy show called *Xena: Warrior Princess*. The series, featuring the adventures of a tough woman warrior and her bard companion, immediately grabbed Robin’s attention. She made sure to watch it the following week, and then the week after. She was soon hooked. Robin is an “out” lesbian, but when *Xena* debuted in 1995, she was still pretty deep “in the closet.” There was something about *Xena* that drew her in, and whatever it was, it felt good. And refreshing. And... *kind of queer?* She explained to me: “There was sort of this vibe between Xena and ... Gabrielle...but also a strong female protagonist, something that didn’t exist (then). And here you had a female character that was not

defining her existence by a man!” More and more, she felt like she just *had* to talk to someone about this show, *and* that vibe between Xena and Gabrielle. Robin had one friend at work she’d confided in about her sexuality. Robin would tell her all about *Xena* whenever they worked the same shift. Eventually, the friend suggested she look for other *Xena* fans to talk with: on the internet.

Robin hadn’t ever considered going online to find other people who liked *Xena*. In fact, she hadn’t really considered going online at all:

At the time... they’d send out the little disks that you could install AOL (America Online) and give it a try. “Your free 30 day trial!” They were sending these out everywhere. And I had a computer. I was a gamer, I played *Tomb Raider*... I had a fairly decent computer. And I had a modem. So I was like, “Oh ok, I’ll give it a shot.” And so I installed AOL and went out there...trying to find any communities that were really discussing *Xena*.

Robin found communities. A lot of communities. There were *Xena* fans to be found all over AOL, and a lot of them were also lesbians, and had also picked up on Xena and Gabrielle’s “vibe.” Robin soon became wrapped up in these communities and made a lot of friends. She told me that in hindsight, she realized:

...part of the reason my friend suggested that I go on the Internet and try and find people, was because not only did she know I could find other people who were interested in *Xena*, but she knew I could find other people who were gay. And that the anonymity of the internet provided some level of protection, you know? You didn’t have to worry about people who you interacted with on a daily basis knowing you were gay.

Indeed, many LGBTQ viewers valued using a new technology they felt would ensure anonymity and safety in an era in which being outed in “real life” could prove dangerous. AOL provided some of the first online spaces where *Xena* fans congregated anonymously<sup>7</sup>. General *Xena* communities soon spawned numerous subcategories including groups focused on lesbian subtext. However, largely unregulated sites like AOL or the official *Xena* discussion boards also often led to LGBTQ fans feeling bullied and overrun by fans or trolls insisting *Xena* wasn’t gay. For some, building safe community seemed impossible.

Fans writing and consuming “alt” fan fiction especially experienced this isolation. Alt assumed a romantic/sexual relationship between *Xena* and Gabrielle. Many fan fiction site moderators did not accept alt, so some writers and readers began their own group called Saddlehorn (named after *Xena*’s dildo-shaped saddle horn). The group, formed in 1996 or 1997, was a super-secretive, invite-only, women’s-only listserv meant to secure a safe space for members. (“There’s a part of me that’s like, I’m not sure I should be talking about it now,” Robin, who is a former member, told me.) Concurrently, similar online spaces were being embraced by LGBTQ people at record numbers. Gross (2001) quoted the Associated Press as reporting in 1996:

---

<sup>7</sup> *Xena* writer and producer “James” called AOL the “predominate” place for *Xena* fans to come together online at the time. He elaborated, “but you know (also) IRC chat rooms, also *Xena* chat rooms ... We also did one of the first truly interactive (TV) websites. ... We did the whole “*Xena* Scrolls” thing.” “The *Xena* Scrolls” was a *Xena* episode set in the “future” (during World War II) in which scientists discover Gabrielle’s scrolls that detail *Xena*’s adventures. James explained: “We set up part of the Universal website, where you could read the emails between the scientists, talking about the scrolls. And every week, those emails would be specific to whatever episode was coming out. So that was one of the first times that you would get to interact. ...Now it’s really archaic. But at the moment it was like... nobody had done that.” Indeed, the “*Xena* Scrolls” concept and characters began *on the website*, making it the first intellectual property to move *from* the internet *to* television (Martinez, 2018; *The Xena Scrolls*, 2018).

It's the unspoken secret of the online world that gay men and lesbians are among the most avid, loyal and plentiful commercial users of the internet. On any given evening, one-third of all the member-created chat rooms on America Online are devoted to gay topics. (p. 228)

Penley and Ross (1991) stated with the rise of technoculture, "activism...is no longer a case of putting bodies on the line" (p. xv). With the reduced bodily stakes of disrupting heteronorms, the internet teemed not only with queered media consumption, but also with overwhelming amounts of fan (re)production overall: "the thousands of discussion groups, web sites, and mailing lists populating the Web are only eclipsed in presence by pornography..." (Gray et al., 2007, p. 7).

Not only was the internet changing the possibilities for forming LGBTQ communities, it was transforming the very meaning of "community." And, the internet's impacts on community were also changing fandom. In 1993, Rheingold proposed that virtual communities held unheard-of socio-political potential, but worried about media conglomerates seeking to control new technological media. Ross (2008) argued that television's personal and communal aspects invite forms of "tele-participation" that were made even more feasible with the introduction of computer and internet technologies. Baym's (1993) pioneering work on an online Usenet newsgroup for soap opera fans demonstrated that such "networks can serve as the site for complex, interwoven and personalized communities" (p. 45). Robin explained that the internet provided new affordances for fandom:

The earlier fandoms, you had people that came together at the conventions, and they would publish fan zines and they'd mail things...They didn't really have the same tool that the internet provided the Xenaverse, which was kind of an amazing thing as far as the timing of it...The internet was starting to grow into the World Wide Web. You had a lot of people starting to have more access.

Indeed, home internet use soared during *Xena*'s peak years from 18% in 1997 to 50.4% in 2001 (File, 2013). *Xena* actress Adrienne Wilkinson told me: "It was just sort of this organic thing, where *Xena* fans and the internet were a match made in heaven, you know, it was just this perfect blend."

### **OMM & Finding your Community**

Much as *Xena* fans created online communities around media and identity up to 15 years before the *Xena* Movie Campaign came into being, the One Million Moms descended from Donald Wildmon's early efforts at organizing media activist groups that could cohere around specific technologies, identities, and causes. Gauntlett and Hill (1999) argued that "television can mean a variety of things to different people: it can be a source of pleasure, providing companionship...and it can also be a source of anxiety, or guilt, creating tension in the domestic space" (p. 110). The One Million Moms is often understood as a product of the latter: domestic tension. One evening in 1976, Donald Wildmon<sup>8</sup> a pastor in Southhaven, Mississippi, was home with his wife and children during their Christmas break, when the children asked if the family could watch television together. Wildman said yes, and according to his 1989 autobiography, this is how the scene unfolded once his son Tim turned on the television set:

As the TV picture filled the screen, we found ourselves witnessing the romantic overtures of an attractive married couple. Unfortunately it quickly became apparent that they weren't married to each other. When the seductive dialogue stopped and mouth met mouth, it didn't take a genius to figure out what the actor

---

<sup>8</sup> See Brewer and Taylor (2011) for one of the most comprehensive scholarly examinations of Wildmon and his influence.

and actress were about to do. I didn't wait to see what happened. I asked Tim to change the channel. (Wildmon & Nulton, 1989, p. 27)

The next channel, however, was no better, as the family was shocked by “an outburst of offensive expletives.” Finally the family settled on the third channel, a suspenseful mystery show that soon had “hooked” the entire family. But quickly, Wildmon continues:

...the scene changed. Without warning, we suddenly found ourselves watching a scenario similar to those found in grade B Hollywood slasher films. To my horror, one character, brandishing a hammer, was literally beating the life out of a terror-stricken, defenseless victim who has been bound and gagged... This time I told Tim to turn the set off... This graphic brutality had not been a welcome holiday guest in our family room... The three big networks had simultaneously served my impressionable grade-schoolers and junior-highers mind-poisoning junk food. And the implications of that made my stomach churn with righteous indignation. (Wildmon & Nulton, 1989, p. 28)

Wildmon explained that prior to this he had realized the media was creating more and more explicit content, but had decided to “look the other way:”

After all, this is a pluralistic society. The Constitution guarantees freedom of speech, freedom of expression and freedom of choice. Therefore, if people want to produce vulgar movies, publish pornographic magazines or create television programs containing gratuitous violence and exploitative, immoral sex, that's their business. I don't have to go see them, buy them or watch them. As long as this stuff doesn't directly affect me or my family, why be concerned? Of course, all those years, while I conveniently “looked the other way” I never dreamed my family would one day be affected by the very things I was ignoring. And that prompted me to do some serious thinking about the electronic marvel known as television - especially its impact and influence on my family, my church congregation and American society in general. (Wildmon & Nulton, 199, p. 29)

This realization is often marked as the beginning of Wildmon's public life and leadership.

Immediately following this incident, he challenged his small congregation to turn off their televisions for a week. By 1977, he had left his ministry to begin the National Federation for Decency (NFD), which would, ten years later, become the American Family Association, the eventual creator and “parent ministry” of the One Million Moms.

And so Donald Wildmon had found his cause, and found it at a time when other Christian-Conservative voices and organizations were forming and looking to make alliances. Scholars (Gitlin, 1983; Montgomery, 1989; Ownby, 2002; Brewer & Taylor, 2011) have long noted this auspicious timing, particularly the concurrence of Wildmon's activism with the rise of Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority, which was founded in 1979. The introduction of new technologies also provided the means for Wildmon, Falwell, and likeminded individuals across the United States to find one another, organize, and perhaps most importantly, swell their numbers. Montgomery (1989) explained that in the early 1980s: "Using sophisticated, computerized mass-mailing techniques, the Moral Majority claimed its mailings reached 480,000 people, including 72,000 members of the clergy" (p. 156). Similarly, Brewer and Taylor (2011) noted the irony of Wildmon's opposition to the media considering how adeptly he harnessed it, and described how Wildmon, "recognized the power of broadcasting, attempted to syndicate his own daily program to Christian radio stations, and in the mid-1980s, began purchasing radio stations and creating a radio network, American Family Radio" (p. 7). The authors also detailed three factors that helped Wildmon "expand and develop a broadcasting network" over the following decades: (1) the loosening of FCC restrictions on the purchase of radio translators that allowed him to drastically expand his radio market in the 1990s, without the need for physical radio stations or professional equipment and staff, (2) the 2000 decision by the FCC to allow Christian broadcasters to purchase frequencies formerly reserved for educational programming, and (3) the huge spike in the popularity of the radio medium for Christians from the late 1990s through 2010 and later (Brewer and Taylor, 2011). Mass communication had thus been identified as the enemy by Wildmon



and other Christian culture-critics, but also as the tool to connect Christian activists and create hybrid virtual communities across airwaves and congregations.

These communities, as we will continue to see, shared identity markers that called for a reluctant activism that centered on duty-bound Christian values of evangelizing, sacrifice, and perhaps most centrally, what some scholars (Berlant, 1997; Edelman 2004) would call ‘the fetishization of the child’ (Edelman, p. 29). Ownby (2002) traced Wildmon’s biography further back than that fateful night in front of the television with his family, noting that:

From reading Wildmon’s Christian advice books from the late 1960s and early 1970s, one would not likely imagine he would turn out to be an activist with what he calls a “confrontational ministry.” In fact, he even offered one essay in 1973 urging people not to criticize or to assume too much self-righteousness. “When you look at yourself first— really look at yourself—you find it hard to throw a stone at someone else.... I’m afraid that several times our message has been too much condemnation and too little redemption.” (p. 8).

The leap from such introspective Christian humility to aggressive national proselytizing can certainly be attributed to Wildmon’s growing audience via the media, and importantly, the tone being set across the organizations with which he had aligned.

However, Ownby (2002) noted that of the three important definitions of family for those in the twentieth century American south, including the “agricultural family” (an extended group of relatives producing and laboring) and the “church group as family” (people with the shared goal of initiating new “births” into the congregation), the only one with which Wildmon is interested is the “Victorian family.” This is “a Victorian image of the family as a small unit of Christian parents teaching Christian children, united in their separation from a more sinful world outside the home” (p. 4). In his study of Wildmon and the AFA’s persistent use of war and battle terminology and metaphors to describe their activism, Olsen (2001) quoted Wildmon’s framing of the stakes of the battle being “the

end of civilization as we know it,” “the future of our generation and all generations to come,” and warning, “This could be our last best hope... Please take a stand so our children can have a decent society in which to live” (p. 17).

Queer theorist Lee Edelman (1998), who highlighted Wildmon in his work that seeks to dismantle political futurity, argued that political rhetoric like “We’re fighting for the children. Whose side are you on?” is “...intended precisely to assert that this issue has only one side...” (p. 18). Edelman continues, “...the universalized fantasy subtending the image of the child coercively shapes the structures within which the ‘political’ itself can be thought” (p. 19). Such discursive maneuvers by Wildmon and his associates, Olsen (2001) argued, situate the “Culture War” as having potentially physical casualties if good Christians don’t fulfill their duties. Through the cult of the child, ethnocentric appeals against media elites, and dramatic stakes, Olsen describes the message received from Wildmon and the AFA, thus: “Strategically stripped of personal choice, followers would be sinful and foolish not to take their rightful place in God’s anti-media army” (p. 12). Even Wildmon frames the choice to “fight” as uncomfortable and a sacrifice, describing his years in the culture wars as “painful” in a way that he should be thankful for as a Christian. Protesting and boycotting, often associated by southern whites with the Civil Rights movement and bad manners, reportedly does not come naturally to Wildmon or many of his followers (Ownby, 2002). Despite this discomfort, the affordances for community, communication, organization and amplification provided by analog and digital technologies, combined with disgust at the uses of these same technologies by the “immoral,” led the AFA and its contemporaries to take up arms together in an ongoing culture war.

## **Setting a Precedent: A Tactical Lineage**

### **XMC and Setting a Precedent: A Tactical Lineage**

As described earlier, the *Xena* moment occupied some of the core years of the widespread proliferation of internet communities. This era facilitated new modes of communication between audiences and industries. Indeed, by the mid-1990s scholars were increasingly theorizing the internet as a social technology, with Sproull and Faraj (1997) finding it notable that users do not look only for information online, but also “affiliation, support, and affirmation,” leading to online interactions that “result in startlingly intimate revelations...” (p. 38). In the case of *Xena*, the internet suddenly afforded fans and industries sustained and unexpectedly intimate contact. According to boyd (2011): “networked technologies reorganize how information flows and how people interact with information and each other” (p. 41). In addition, major innovations in technology disrupt the social norms of everyday life (Cowan, 1985; Douglas, 1987; Marvin, 1988). Specifically, Marvin (1988) argued that the introduction of new technologies leads to the alteration of established social boundaries, momentarily increasing contact and familiarity among hierarchically distanced groups. Although new technologies are promoted as equalizers within society, the economically disadvantaged, women, and ethnic/racial minorities are often excluded and ridiculed for their technological “ignorance” (Marvin, 1988). While amateurs were historically excluded from professional technological spaces (Douglas, 1987), these divides were overcome if the tinkerers were elite (Marvin, 1988). Thus, new technologies often initially offer

promises of equality, but can also quickly end up reinforcing extant hegemonic power structures (Cowan, 1985).

A photo published online that was taken around 1995 demonstrates the ways the internet fostered unexpected connections between fans and industry where before there had been none. The photo features *Xena* actress Renee O'Connor at a cast and crew event looking in apparent wonder at a *Xena* AOL chat room on a small computer monitor. This was evidently the first time she and most other show personnel became aware of online fandom. What once passed for fanatic mobs in the industrial imagination (Jenkins, 2013) were suddenly, through the internet, distinguishable as individuals. Fans were able to render themselves visible and even begin to hack their stereotypes in the media industries by using the internet's affordances for networking, communication, and community. *Xena* personnel frequently described in interviews the revelatory moments that fans' "real life" identities were discovered. Writer and producer James emphasized the difference between *Xena* fans and those of other franchises: "I like the passion that they have, the love they have, I like the fact they're not the geeky people who dress up in outfits and have no brains except for comic books and genre heroes." James also ascribed merit based on professional identities, once describing a time he, a *Xena* actor, and fans visited the White House. As the *Xena* personnel settled into the long line to enter, one of the fans walked up, laughingly asked what they were doing, and led them to another gate, flashing her National Security Agency badge:

And this little group of five Xenites...were assigned a Secret Service agent who took us on a private tour...I was like, "Wow, we have a *Xena* fan who's a spook. This is awesome!" These people are just incredibly amazing.

*Xena* personnel enjoyed this new interaction with such elite and exciting fans.

Although one could expect the marginalized status of LGBTQ fans might have diminished their respectability in the eyes of *Xena* personnel, it appears that often this added to their appeal. My interviews with James and public statements by production point to liberal viewpoints, especially regarding LGBTQ identities. Liz Friedman, an executive producer of *Xena* and out lesbian, in an interview with *The Advocate* framed her sexuality as a non-issue on set (Stockwell, 1996). The staff's politics also contributed to their quick decision to (at least partially) support the subtexters' cause. James explained:

... There was a bit of surprise, but actually a little bit of delight... When we discovered that we were actually providing this to a disenfranchised group that was struggling to find some identification with heroes. We said, "you know what? We're not going to spoil that."

Such motivations may sound paternalistic but did result in the queering of traditional mainstream/LGBTQ power relations in an era in which lesbian media representation was rare and largely existed to titillate, ignite controversy (Gross, 2001), and deny queer politics (Sender, 2004). Thus, the idea of the internet as a culturally innovative, safe community-forming, and politically promising technology became strongly woven into the social fabric of not only the larger LGBTQ community, but the *Xena* fandom itself. Further, *Xena* fans understood the internet as a tool for direct communication to content producers, one that could facilitate substantial influence on what appeared on their TV screens.

Without initially planning to represent LGBTQ people or non-normative narratives whatsoever, *Xena* producers inadvertently found themselves consistently queering mainstream TV screens at the behest of some of society's most marginalized groups. And despite the lofty motivations cited by James and other showrunners, the

resulting narrative was not a top-down “gift” to marginalized viewers. Intentional and tactical fan-work created *Xena* as it eventually became known: queer camp. Once fans knew TPTB were watching their online activities, they used those connections to change the very text of the show. Subtexters’ and other factions’ online battles were not impotent and inconsequential debates. These sub-groups at least partly worked to exploit their growing (sometimes interpersonal, sometimes anonymous as producers lurked) relationships with showrunners to fulfill their desires on-screen. At a convention, fan “RenXen” explained to me: “at some point, we knew that the producers and the writers were listening and...they (the fans) would express themselves.” Robin contended that *Xena* fans knew exactly what they were doing in their interactions with TPTB, claiming they were aware “of the potentiality of the access that was given to them...Fans are savvy, fans have strategies. They have positions that they stake out and advocate for; there were definitely agendas.”

Participants cited various tactics used to push producers to incorporate such agendas. Online chats, message board discussions, letters, messages, and emails were all primary methods used to petition showrunners for changes. Some also cited Whoosh as a respected fan website used to influence *Xena* personnel. Whoosh took a particularly analytic approach to the series, regularly publishing articles like “Anachronism be D\*mned: A XWP Historiography Part V: Biblical References in *Xena: Warrior Princess*” and “Joxer from a Disability Perspective.” Contributors included academics, lawyers, film critics, and other fans interested in creating a semi-scholarly *Xena* resource. If you were serious about arguing a position, having a thoughtful piece published on Whoosh was the way to get the producers’ attention, as they were known to frequent the

site. A similar fan strategy involved airing concerns to Sharon Delaney, the fan club president. Delaney had regular access to the showrunners and stars and was much loved by fans for her quiet and persistent support of subtext. Robin called Delaney an “advocate” for subtexters and one of the “inroads” used to influence *Xena* personnel.

Fans cannily used these and other tactics to “break in” to production offices and mess with the heteronormative “code” created in the writers’ rooms and other production spaces of mainstream television production. These offices were considered “very private” by James. He explained that fans couldn’t necessarily be trusted “with the room,” indicating that the physical storyboard within the writers’ room, filled with the creatives’ narrative ideas, was considered the item most closely guarded from fans. Yet the closeness perpetuated by the spread of the internet left the production offices vulnerable to infiltration, albeit virtual. Fans were savvy with computer and internet tools and deliberately used them to advocate for their positions as production personnel were just discovering they could access thousands of opinions on themselves and their work in seconds. Online interactions with audiences were not yet the domain of marketing and public relations (PR) departments. There was no standardized process for dealing with the internet phenomenon, so fans and producers alike improvised, using the technology to interact with those on the other side of the screen without the mediators that are often required today. The results of these interactions for *Xena* fans were frequently considered victories as the physically distant board seemed to display increasing evidence of their own influence.

### **OMM & Setting a Precedent: A Tactical Lineage**

Unlike the early *Xena* fans who, feeling welcomed in by producers, devised tactics based on the reduced social distance facilitated by the internet, Wildmon and the early AFA's tactics developed based on how *excluded* they felt from production. In his autobiography, Wildmon discussed how he was pleasantly surprised to gain so much publicity by writing press releases for his early small boycotts, and how he was even more thrilled to start hearing from the television networks themselves. However, while all of the network representatives with whom he spoke appeared to listen intently, Wildmon explained that he soon realized he was receiving boilerplate responses. Typically the representatives would tell him network executives were also concerned parents and would make sure not to cross the line. However, Wildmon did not perceive any actual change to industrial practices in response to his group's concerns:

When I started the NFD I thought that if you appealed to a person's moral base rationally and reasonably and explained the progressive nature of something that is abhorrent, then that person would respond. But during my Introduction to Television course in the school of hard knocks, I found out that didn't work. As far as the people at the networks were concerned, they *were* moral. They were paying lip service to me and being nice-but they weren't paying attention to what I had to say. (Wildmon & Nulton, 1989, p. 40)

Consequently, Wildmon decided he must "find some common language in which they knew exactly what I meant and I knew exactly what they meant..." (Wildmon & Nulton, 1989, p. 40).

To learn this common language, Wildmon began researching how the media industries operated. He began by looking into the FCC requirements for programming and subscribed to TV industry trade publications. Wildmon claimed this was how he discovered just how much money was at stake for the networks and those who worked for them, and relatedly, how precarious labor was in the industry. Thus, he decided that rather than pleasing consumers, the industry was only focused on profit, or as Wildmon



called the language of network executives: “M...O...N...E...Y!” (Wildmon & Nulton, 1989, p. 41). Engrossed in learning more about the world from which he felt shut out, Wildmon decided to accrue evidence of the networks’ wrongdoing, and conducting this “research” became one of AFA’s core tactics. He recruited church allies across the country to gather evidence of offensive content to ensure he could cite “reliable research data” (Wildmon & Nulton, 1989, p. 43). Twenty-one individuals volunteered to conduct what social scientists might call a content analysis. Instead of scientific coding protocols however, Wildmon himself trained his volunteers on how to categorize television content like sexually suggestive comments and whether sex took place inside or outside of marriage. Brewer and Taylor (2011) noted this “pseudo-scientific approach to content analysis offered Wildmon the examples of indecency he needed to mobilize a constituency, yet lacked the rigor and standardization of value-free research... But people responded, and the organization grew” (p. 3).

Wildmon and other Christian-conservative activist leaders used the “data” from their research (often including “secret” or inside information they claimed they received from industry insiders) to execute full-scale and overwhelming campaigns against projects and companies they opposed. In 1988, the AFA launched a campaign against the release of the film *The Last Temptation of Christ*; it was the largest onslaught the group had ever planned. Olsen (2001) called Wildmon’s “war” against the film, “multifaceted, taking advantage of numerous protest strategies and techniques” (p. 7). Wildmon described a number of the tactics deployed:

First, we made 250 photocopies of the script and mailed them to influential Christian leaders... While our copy machine flashed almost nonstop, we recorded a three-minute *Last Temptation*-related radio spot that soon was airing on 800 Christian radio stations nationwide... We also hurried to produce a 30-minute

television program attacking the movie. It aired on more than 50 Christian television stations and cable networks. We urged people to protest by writing and calling MCA/Universal. Our AFA phone number also appeared so people could call and request a special petition asking local theater owners, out of respect for Christians in their community, not to show the film...I wrote 170,000 Christian pastors and asked them to promote the protest effort in their churches. I also sent out three million letters to Christian lay people. (Wildmon & Nulton, 1989, p. 200)

Many of these tactics proved so successful in Wildmon's mind that the AFA continued using them in many future campaigns.

The strategy of overwhelming the media industries with mass communication paired well with another new tactic Wildmon increasingly embraced. Despite claiming that he initially found protesting unchristian and impolite, Wildmon "learned that insulting language drew attention. In 1979...he called ABC 'the prostitute network.' And later called R.J. Reynolds the 'number one Porno Pushing Advertiser'" (Ownby, 2002, p. 25). Wildmon's willingness to aggressively insult "media elites" while maintaining a single-minded focus on culture (unlike others Christian-conservative leaders who turned to politics) made him (and by association, the AFA) a behind-the-scenes influencer to the political Right and a "pivotal force" in the culture war (Brewer & Taylor, 2011).

## **Seeing "Results" and Defining Success**

### **XMC & Seeing "Results" and Defining Success**

The more *Xena* fans perceived from on-screen changes that they'd been successful in influencing production on the show, the more they considered *themselves* a "pivotal force." These early fan assessments of success (and associated industry claims) also point to the ways the future *Xena* Movie Campaign would think of their tactics as effective and how they would define success. Though the original *Xena* fandom has been

identified as particularly participatory (Gross, 2001; Gwenllian-Jones, 2000; Hamming, 2001; Ross, 2008), scholars remain divided on the extent of its queer impact on the series. A textual analysis of the series could produce numerous “queered” moments, from playing with gender to progressive examinations of domestic duties to homoerotic massages. Drawing a line from fans to producers for any example, however, would prove difficult. Thus, to demonstrate the shift in producers’ narrative intent and the resultant queering of the mainstream series, I will detail three major events that fans, scholars, and some involved in the production of *Xena* often cite as evidence of the original fandom’s influence: (1) the disappearance of “men of the week” and introduction of the “soulmate” narrative, (2) the hiring of Missy Good, and (3) production’s public acknowledgement of LGBTQ identities and sexual fluidity in a risky era.

Early in *Xena*, the producers embraced a formulaic structure in which the protagonists regularly encountered romantically viable men. This reversal of the “girl of the week” trope was somewhat subversive as often the men urged Xena or Gabrielle to settle down, and the women instead continued their adventures. However, the love interests largely served to affirm the women’s heterosexual availability and desexualize their close relationship. LGBTQ viewers resisted these love interests strongly, understanding their ability to squash queer potentials in the larger *Xena* narrative. As production became aware of the fans’ position, the male suitors gradually disappeared. James agrees this was a direct response to online fans’ queer desires: “The more they grabbed ahold, the more we kind of gave them...I think that from the perspective of any disenfranchised society, what we were doing is giving them the comfort of acceptance.”

Robin characterized the move as showrunners saying, “We’re not going to keep throwing a guy at her as if that’s going to normalize who she is.”

Following this narrative reversal, it was revealed in the *Xena* storyline that the protagonists would continually reincarnate, and their spiritual paths would always be joined. Episodes showed Xena and Gabrielle reincarnated as both men and women, with various platonic and romantic-sexual connections. After these realizations, the duo frequently spoke of their love for one another and openly used the term “soulmate.” Most subtexters embraced this storyline and believed their communication to the show’s personnel (especially the actors, writers and producers) had led production to create this narrative. One fan stated online that this marked a clear turning point in the series: “When they made that jump from being ‘best friends’ to ‘soulmates’ that’s when things ceased being just a possible subtextual love affair...” (Shields, 2000).

Perhaps nothing told subtexters they were impacting the very text of the show more than the producers’ decision to hire well-known alt fan fiction writer Melissa (Missy) Good. James described Executive Producer Robert Tapert’s announcement that he wanted to hire a fan scriptwriter thus: “Now you have to understand that our office, we’re very, very fan-friendly, but we were also very, very private. And we were worried about fans getting in and trying to get information...So this was big.” Writer and producer Steven Sears knew Good from online interactions and recommended her to Tapert, who immediately hired her to pen an episode. Pleased with her work, producers soon hired her to write a second episode. Because the showrunners had selected a well-known alt writer, many subtexters felt recognized as literal co-producers. This outcome

demonstrated to many that getting to know producers online could be a very effective way to influence the show's narrative.

The narrative changes also demonstrated to fans that the producers were willing to publicly acknowledge LGBTQ fans' desires in an era when queer media representation was rare. To many fans, this showed the intimacy and trust that had been created between the producers and fans. Still, at the time, the producers *were* sometimes criticized for not explicitly outing Xena, or for what is now popularly known as "queerbaiting"<sup>9</sup>. Fathallah (2015) provides a useful definition of queerbaiting:

Queerbaiting may be defined as a strategy by which writers and networks attempt to gain the attention of queer viewers via hints, jokes, gestures, and symbolism suggesting a queer relationship between two characters, and then emphatically denying and laughing off the possibility. Denial and mockery reinstate a heteronormative narrative that poses no danger of offending mainstream viewers at the expense of queer eyes. (p. 491)

Although at the time the term queerbaiting had not yet been coined, many subtexters wanted more than an increase in sly winks and vague references to gender-ambiguous reincarnated love. Some directly criticized the writers for teasing lesbian fans simply for profit<sup>10</sup>. Still, because of the changes in the show's narrative and production's public admissions of being aware of their heavily lesbian fanbase, many fans praised them considering such overt action in the era's oppressive media environment. When presented with the argument that production teased LGBTQ fans, everyone I interviewed defended the series, citing its era. Hayley, a fan who recently discovered the show on Netflix,

---

<sup>9</sup> Ng (2017) places *Xena* before the queerbaiting era, citing the show's "subtextuality" as breaking the norm of media producers not acknowledging queer readings and because many fans "accepted that subtext was as far as *Xena* the show could go" (para. 3.2).

<sup>10</sup> James described receiving these complaints often when the show aired.

stated, “I think they’re very progressive...that they were willing to do this back then.”

Similarly, Robin responded:

I get it...But...we’re talking about the late 90s... You had Ellen, but you were only starting to build the groundswell that has subsequently turned into what we have now. I think they did give us what we wanted in a lot of ways: ...they were kissing, they were touching, they were saying they loved each other, they were soulmates... It’s kind of like, there wasn’t really any other show willing to go even that far.

The original subtexters were confident their online power caused these dramatic narrative changes. *Xena* fan “Ashley” explained, “The lesbian community started picking up this show...saying this is ours, they’re writing for us...And they paid attention to what fans were saying on the internet.”

The early *Xena* fandom recognized the political stakes of the representational changes they were working toward (Hanmer, 2013). Production personnel were also keenly aware of the restrictions under which they were working. James described a historical moment with limits for LGBTQ representation and industry concern in the face of new technologies. James explained that before the first episode even aired, the studio had rejected a scene in a potential opening sequence because the man Xena was kissing had long hair, and from the angle of the shot, it might appear she was kissing a woman. *Xena* creator and executive producer Robert Tapert has also commented publicly on the studio’s concern:

Before we started shooting *Xena*, we shot the material that we were going to use to create the opening title sequences with. The studio was so concerned that it would be perceived as a lesbian show that they would not allow us to have Xena and Gabrielle in the same frame of the opening titles. (Trendacosta, 2016)

These comments demonstrate that studio executives preemptively worked to mark the series as heteronormative long before the lesbian fan base emerged, thus substantiating claims that the moves to queer the show’s material were indeed quite risky. James also

remembered the studio forbidding creatives from visiting online fan message boards because of a writer on another series soliciting story ideas and putting the studio in a legal bind. “Of course, I promptly ignored it,” James said of the rule, which he never saw enforced. Tapert also acknowledged skirting studio policies, publicly stating about interactions with the *Xena* community: “It thrust me into a world that I didn’t know existed” (Tobias7, 2007). James and other producers emphasized the show’s queered narratives as a political act performed in support of the marginalized fans’ desires.

The fans I interviewed consistently contended that the increasingly overt lesbian dynamics of the series were the result of sincere efforts to please fans and were not ulterior motives driven by marketing or financial profit. Sender (2004) described the lesbian market as a demographic that is “neither fish nor fowl:” not as easy to locate as either heterosexual females or gay men, and earning lower incomes as couples than both heterosexual and gay male couples. When marketers did capitalize on the “lesbian chic” aesthetic in the 1990s through the early 2000s, it was meant less to target lesbians than entice heterosexual males (Sender, 2004). James denied that *Xena* ever played with the characters’ sexuality for titillation, claiming, “it wasn’t really chic at the time.” Robin characterized the (primarily male) showrunners as clueless when it came to purposefully appealing to lesbians, stating that the babe-in-leather series was initially expected to appeal to the same audience as its predecessor, *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys*:

They had no idea, they didn’t have any comprehension as to how popular the show would become. I don’t think they understood what it was about the show that really attracted the lesbians in the first place...they didn’t know what to do with it.

The *Xena* showrunners’ bewilderment is reflective of the era’s confusion surrounding the lesbian market. Still, producers managed to appeal to their surprise audience in quiet but

increasingly subversive ways. After all, prior to *Xena*, the norm for TV series featuring close female relationships was winking acknowledgment of lesbian rumors followed by firm “contain or deflect” strategies to cement the heterosexuality of the regular cast (Doty, 1993). *Xena* notably did not follow this precedent, and also avoided the fumbling of those trying to sell to a lesbian market.

These well-documented representational milestones for a mainstream TV series are central to the *Xena* fandom’s sense of its own legacy. It is a fandom that at a particular moment in time was able to utilize new technologies to make connections (to each other and to media industries) that prior might have seemed impossible. The magnitude of the impact made early on could also certainly contribute to the fandom having high expectations for a say in the representation of identity in their media. Other norms for this fandom are friendship-like closeness with producers<sup>11</sup> along with easy access to them and (producer-acknowledged) feelings of ownership over the franchise. All of this suggests the *Xena* fandom likely has a very different definition of “success” than many audience groups.

Despite the undeniable impact made on the original show’s production, there is also a historical context that suggests *Xena* fans can be flexible with their expectations and may shift their goals depending on what is communicated from the industry or wider culture, and that they might partially define success as a negotiated outcome in which their demands will never be wholly met. Perhaps the most obvious critique of *Xena*’s

---

<sup>11</sup> Fans and those who worked on the original series note that these close relationships persist today. As example, see Lucy Lawless’ (2014) article in the New Zealand Herald titled “When the star becomes fan of a fan.” In it, the actress paid tribute to the life of a *Xena* fan turned friend, and detailed how Lawless stayed by the woman’s side in her final days.



subtext is that it never became maintext. While *Xena* remained on-air, despite myriad winks, kisses, and gropes, large fan factions clamoring for a “proper” coming out never received it (Silverman, 2001). The passion with which many held out for a coming out can be witnessed on any *Xena* fan site archive. As detailed above, today many fans accept the limits of subtext in the era the show aired. Further, most of the fans I interviewed who previously demanded a coming out when *Xena* was on the air now expressed happiness with the final relationship narrative. When I asked one fan at the final official *Xena* convention why she was no longer upset about the lack of an official coming out on the original series, she responded, “I don’t know, I guess I’ve grown up a little.” Other fans responded similarly. These statements may indicate a political distance in which the respondents lack the imperative for equality felt by their former selves. “Growing up” might also denote evolving and more complex understandings of sexuality and the potentials of unfixed representations. Indeed, in my interviews, bisexuality and sexual fluidity were often mentioned in relation to the show’s protagonists, as well as appreciation for a franchise that didn’t sell characters based on sexuality. Many fans of *Xena* are current fans of series that feature openly LGBTQ characters, but are nostalgic for a time when viewers were left the freedom to decode on-screen nuances without an accompanying LGBTQ marketing campaign. Thus, *Xena* fans seem to have both a history of having to essentially be happy with what they’re “given” by industry, but also the hindsight to recognize that their desires as well as the political meanings of media texts may change over time.

### **OMM & Seeing “Results” and Defining Success**

Although undoubtedly influential in Christian-conservative circles, and quite visible on a national scale due to their attention-grabbing campaigns, the AFA's actual impact on media industries is impossible to measure. Still most would agree that there *has* been impact, with Brewer and Taylor (2011) noting: "Wildmon's boycotts...have no doubt impacted what the public as well as the television and movie executives have thought about. One wonders what would be acceptable today in the media had Wildmon not fought the changes in television and film" (p. 10). Wildmon's history provides numerous case studies in industrial responses (or lack thereof) to various tactics. And the responses seem as varied as the tactics. Still, some of these cases can illustrate differences of scale in Wildmon's demands and in industrial response as well as the variations in the AFA, industrial, and media interpretations of the group's influence. Especially, they demonstrate how the early group constructed the definition of "results" with its early successes and how these had to be adjusted depending on media coverage and the reactions from the media industries targeted. Wildmon's notions of successful activism were embedded into AFA philosophy early, and their evolution can be traced through two cases in particular, Proctor & Gamble's response to Wildmon's Coalition for Better Television in 1981 and the AFA's campaign against *Mighty Mouse* in 1988.

In 1981, Wildmon's National Federation for Decency very publicly combined forces with Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority and a number of other Christian-conservative right-wing groups to form the Coalition for Better Television (CBTV). Wildmon claimed the coalition included 401 groups total, but when CBS News followed up with a sample survey of organizations and allies identified by Wildmon as members, around 30 percent denied membership (Gitlin, 1983). Probably modeled on Wildmon's earlier "content

analysis” of television shows, the group planned to use what they claimed were thousands of trained monitors to identify obscenity on prime time. They would then, the group threatened, single out a sponsor from those who advertised most during the “worst” content and organize a national boycott of that sponsor. The TV networks publicly railed against CBTV’s threats, claiming they were attempting nothing short of censorship. However, behind the scenes, companies that realized they might be targeted with a boycott were nervous. Montgomery (1989) noted that although there was a history of advocacy groups threatening boycotts in the past, the CBTV represented the first group with sophisticated enough tactics and a large enough reach to truly pose an existential threat to sponsors.

Wildmon wrote in his autobiography that he had prior to this campaign become friends with Barry Smith, a Proctor & Gamble (P&G) public relations executive when he and P&G CEO William Dobson had approached Wildmon and actually listened to his views, proving, “they were serious about being a responsible prime-time television advertiser” (Wildmon & Nulton, 1989, P. 97). Perhaps it is not surprising then, that P&G was the first to publicly “buckle” under the CBTV’s threats. Butler made a speech to the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences two weeks before Wildmon was supposed to announce the boycott. In the speech, he declared that P&G had withdrawn sponsorship from a number of programs “for reasons of taste” and that although he didn’t agree with the CBTV’s method:

We think the Coalition is expressing some very important and broadly held views about gratuitous sex, violence, and profanity. I assure you that we are listening very carefully to what they say, and I urge you to do the same.” (Finan, 1989)

According to Gitlin (1983) there was shock throughout the media industries that someone had publicly acknowledged Wildmon in this way. While most in the industries were

aware that some companies were secretly meeting with the AFA to negotiate, it had remained standard practice not to engage publicly lest the sponsors or media executives legitimate the group's concerns. "One top Madison Avenue executive said privately that Butler had single-handedly kept Wildmon's crusade alive" (Gitlin, 1983, p. 259). Indeed, the crusade had needed it, as independent polls indicated there was not much public or in-group support for a boycott (Montgomery, 1989, p. 168). The seeming capitulation thus worked out for Wildmon and Falwell, who soon announced the industries were clearly paying attention to their concerns and working on the problem and thus, a boycott wouldn't be necessary.<sup>12</sup>

According to Montgomery (1989), P&G's move "marked a critical point in the confrontation between the television industry and the coalition. If there had been doubts before, it was now evident that advertisers were willing to give in to pressure." Turow (1984) explained that P&G's response may have also been a strategic deflection to appease the CBTV while protecting its other sponsorships:

Word in the trade press was that Proctor and Gamble executives had been nervous over reports that the Coalition was going to list it among the companies that sponsor unacceptable prime-time programs. They were even more worried that the Coalition might later move to attack Proctor & Gamble's ownership of six sultry daytime soap operas, a huge and important investment for the manufacturer. "P & G were afraid the soaps would be a problem down the line," said a network television executive. "By focusing (the Coalition's) attention on prime time, I guess they figured they'd gotten them off their backs" (Coates and Marich, 1981). (p. 157)

Indeed, despite Butler's speech, P&G's sponsorship changes were minor, only accounting for about 3% of their prime time total (Gitlin, 1983).

---

<sup>12</sup> Not long after, Wildmon, still unsatisfied with prime-time content, prepared to announce the boycott was back on. Falwell and the Moral Majority opted out and left the Coalition, saying the networks had been making a "good faith effort" (Montgomery, 1989, p. 166).

Whatever P&G's strategies and actual follow-through, for Wildmon their public acknowledgement proved instructive in how to claim success. In his autobiography, Wildmon called Butler's statement, "the speech that shook Hollywood," saying he was "elated" about the response (Wildmon & Nulton, 1989, p. 99). Wildmon had realized sponsors could be forced to respond through threats alone, without the need to commit to the financial and logistical realities of an actual wide-scale boycott. And he seemed to increasingly believe, like the media industries themselves, that simply getting a response helped his cause gain stature and legitimacy in wider society. According to Finan (1989), the Moral Majority's later decision to distance itself from Wildmon coupled with his targeting missteps,<sup>13</sup> caused Wildmon to eventually lose a lot of the support he'd previously gained. By the 1990s, AFA would rarely again see such extensive public acknowledgement by the media industries of the legitimacy of their concerns—especially as Wildmon focused his fight against LGBTQ content, which the industries were increasingly embracing while working closely with LGBTQ advocacy groups (Turow, 1984; Gitlin, 1983). Thus, it proved a strange coincidence that the P&G "win" so closely coincided with Wildmon's subsequent dip in fame. The case shows that success for AFA was always complicated, and that Wildmon likely saw that any influence exerted was so slight or immeasurable that it wouldn't prove beneficial to get bogged down in facts or statistics.

---

<sup>13</sup> These included his growing focus on "poor" representations of Christians and ministers. Gitlin (1983), Montgomery (1989) and Finan (1989) cite one of Wildmon's most damaging mistakes as his 1982 attack on the TV film *Sister, Sister* written by Maya Angelou. Many members of the public, press and industries (as well as Black activist groups) pushed back, defending the importance of the project, which went on to win two NAACP Image Awards.

Wildmon identified the large-scale campaign against *The Last Temptation of Christ* as central to his evolution as an activist with sophisticated tactics and nationwide influence. Of course, outcry against the film came from a variety of groups, individuals and leaders across the nation (Olsen, 2001), so although the film was not a financial success<sup>14</sup> it is unclear what role Wildmon actually played in the film's box office. However, there was another AFA-led charge that also occurred in 1988, and its results could directly be traced back to Wildmon's complaints. While it seems natural that Wildmon would rail against the release of a mainstream film that depicted Jesus having sex and marrying, it is less clear why he would interrupt his work on such a sizeable campaign to protest a three-and-a-half second scene in the children's TV cartoon series *Mighty Mouse*. According to reports, a family in Kentucky reached out to the AFA after growing concerned over a scene in which Mighty Mouse sniffs a flower and becomes very happy; the family believed the scene depicted Mighty Mouse using cocaine (Wolff, 1988). AFA took up the cause, likely especially because the show's creator Ralph Bakshi had also had a part in the production of an X-rated animated feature (Wolff, 1988; Finan, 1989). The AFA press release stated that in the scene Mighty Mouse "...quickly draws a handful of powder from under his cloak and inhales it through his nostrils...to show that cocaine helps one overcome feeling 'down'" (Allen, 1988). Wildmon and the AFA insisted the scene be pulled and Bakshi fired.

Bakshi denied the allegations and insisted on the innocence of the scene: "Mighty Mouse was happy after smelling the flowers because it helped him remember the little

---

<sup>14</sup> The film did do quite well with critics, earning many award nominations. I have not located any response to these accolades from Wildmon, though likely he would not be surprised that Hollywood would celebrate such a film.

girl who sold it to him fondly” (Wolff, 1988). The network publicly supported him, with George Dessard, CBS Vice President for Program Practices, explaining the scene even more meticulously: “He pulls out a pink mass of crushed stems, tomatoes and flowers, which he holds out as if to show them. We see the aroma reach his nose in typical cartoon fashion” (Allen, 1988). The media seemed to find the whole controversy amusing (and presumably a lot less contentious than the AFA’s religious objections to *The Last Temptation of Christ*), with Henry Allen (1988) opening an article in *The Washington Post* with the questions, “Is the war on drugs utterly lost? Does Mighty Mouse even have nostrils?” The article’s tone makes clear what Allen thinks of the allegations and Wildmon himself:

Cut to the Rev. Wildmon: “Nowhere in the program does it say what it is. We called in a Mississippi state narcotics agent. He said there is no legal substance you sniff through your nose.”

Air? Perfume?

“There is a substance that disappears when he sniffs it.”

Snuff?

“Snuff you put on your lip,” said Wildmon.

What about the old-fashioned English kind?

“If it’s snuff they should say it’s snuff,” Wildmon said.

But it isn’t snuff, it’s flowers and tomatoes, said Dessard, adding that “CBS categorically denies that Mighty Mouse or any other character was ‘shown sniffing cocaine.’”

“It’s cocaine,” said Wildmon, who says that his organization studies the media and “monitors sex and violence. We keep track of it in the computer.”

“It’s ridiculous,” said CBS spokesman Ed Devlin.

A photograph provided by Wildmon shows that Mighty Mouse indeed has nostrils, but if what is entering them is cocaine, CBS may be hiring some new

artists soon, and Mississippi could have an opening for a narcotics agent. (Allen, 1988)

Despite what appeared to be a lack of outrage in the general public, Bakshi decided to pull the scene, insisting it was innocent but that Wildmon had now created a reading that would be difficult to dispel: "...their accusations become part of the air we breathe. That's why I cut the scene. I can't have children wondering if Mighty Mouse is using cocaine" (Wolff, 1988).

Wildmon did not seem to note the ridicule he received in the press or the apparent bewilderment and sadness with which the creator cut the scene. Instead, he declared about Bakshi's public statements: "This is a de facto admission that indeed Mighty Mouse was snorting cocaine... We have been vindicated" (Finan, 1989). Thus, Wildmon got the end result he'd sought, and continued to set a precedent for the AFA's very definition of "results." Rather than acknowledge or engage with nuanced messages from the industry regarding content, the AFA typically called any controversy created as a result of their campaigns a victory. Further, the case demonstrates the group's growing tendency to claim virtually any industrial responses or actions as admissions of guilt or contrition, even if the actual statements made by the producers were much different. This contentment with almost any outcome of the group's activism makes sense in the context of the Christian-activist identity as understood by Wildmon and his associates. In his autobiography, Wildmon described how other Christians often told him he couldn't win against the media. In response, Wildman explained that "winning" isn't the goal: "...such thinking goes against the very essence of the gospel message. I've always operated on the belief that God doesn't call us to be successful. He only calls us to be faithful" (Wildmon & Nulton, 1989, p. 208). If action is the only requirement for Wildmon and the AFA,



then in some ways, it matters to them very little what industries do in response. Even capitulation in some areas will inevitably be overshadowed by what is seen as the larger downward spiral of American culture and the related Christian imperative to act. Or, as Olsen (2001) argued, it allows the AFA to focus only on the impetus for the mobilization of good Christians. As he puts it:

By emphasizing ultimate defeat (to the exclusion of ultimate victory) or ultimate victory (to the exclusion of fears of defeat), the AFA can provide individuals with a rationalization for noninvolvement...For the AFA, the tension between defeat and victory is a tenuous one - an overemphasis on either fear or hope can deflate the power of the dialectic; a balance between them provides a catalyst for action.  
(Olsen, 2001, p. 18)

Thus as part of its strategy to keep its members actively engaged with the organization, the AFA onus for victory was placed on the activist and not media industries, with the most value placed on member action at the cost of ridicule or wider understandings of failure.

## **XMC and OMM Now: Reluctant Activists**

### **XMC Reluctant Activists**

What many members of both the Xena Movie Campaign and One Million Moms seem to have in common is that their participation with the groups began because of a particular feeling toward media content (disgust and concern from OMM, and love and concern from XMC), and eventually led to activist involvement in a way they might not have planned or anticipated. This accidental activism does carry on the legacy of the

original groups, who also organized for these reasons, usually with no (or only modest) goals explicitly in mind at the beginning. Indeed, while members of both XMC and OMM usually acknowledge the groups and their campaigns as activist, members don't typically identify as activist themselves, and especially not as media activists. Their personal politics and activist inclinations (if any) are typically explained as encompassing the larger world of social relations outside of "the media." However, for both, there is a clear belief that the media does reflect and (re)create culture that can either amplify or distort their preferred worldview. Due to this, and usually as a secondary concern, many of the group members became reluctant activists.

Interviews with members of the XMC tend to reveal outlooks that are similarly traceable to the original *Xena* fandom. Indeed, it was likely the past successes of *Xena* fans in influencing the series while it was on-air that led to the XMC's expectations that fans might continue to have influence with the property and its creators even after the series' end. Although XMC admin Ariel Wetzel didn't come into the fandom until 2010, she noted the precedent for *Xena* audience-industry interaction certainly played a part in the creation of the Xena Movie Campaign: "I think it is a bit unique how accessible the cast and crew was to us," noting she'd met, "fans who were there originally - some of them have been to the set, some of them have stayed at Lucy and Rob's house, some of them have been referenced in the show..." Interestingly, the original fans of the show that clamored for increased lesbian subtext and queered storylines on the 90's era series didn't typically frame their work toward their goals as activist. In fact, such fan labor toward property-specific queer goals has a long history in fandom (Jenkins, 2013) and continues today (McNutt, 2018). Although such work could easily be considered activist, fans

typically approach their work to queer the content as derivative of their own personal identities and love for the show/characters, rather than some larger activist goal regarding queer representation in the media.

XMC began its mission in much this way, a group that loved a series, what they thought of as its “message,” and its cast. The only stated goal of the original campaign was the creation of a new *Xena* movie or TV series that would feature the original actresses. Admins and members of the group also insist that the majority of XMC members and *Xena* fans in general would expect a queer show, but at the very least, one in which Xena and Gabrielle are not portrayed as exclusively heterosexual. This queer “demand,” however, is not mentioned in any of XMC’s more official mission statements. The group does identify as extremely LGBTQ friendly however, and the social media sites heavily feature chatter about queer causes, queer members, and the queer nature of the original series. Although the queer identity of the group seems uncontroversial in many ways, particularly in the years XMC has existed (compared to the internet during the original series), the group largely avoided queer representation as an official demand.

The simplicity of the original demand (a new product with original stars, but no “political” demands) may have felt uncomplicated and uncontroversial to the group. Or, the nostalgic preoccupation with the show’s queerness in contemporary popular culture may have made the group’s creators feel a demand for such representation was unneeded, as *of course*, a remake or reboot would capture the original show’s queer feel. In this, the group may have been correct. When the announcement was made that Javier Grillo-Marxuach would write the reboot, he quickly confirmed the show would not have a queer subtext like the original, but instead explore the protagonists’ romantic relationship

openly. Thus, it indeed seemed that queer representation was not the most controversial demand the group could make. Instead, controversy erupted when the group learned the series would not feature, or even include, the original actresses.

With a host of TV and film franchises from the 1990s recently being revived for nostalgic audiences (Keveney 2017), *Xena* had re-emerged in the popular imagination. Media industries' unwillingness to cast the original actresses in a possible reboot communicated to fans that the aging actresses were no longer valuable, and thus, neither were *they* as a potential market for content. XMC began highlighting the entertainment industry's tendency to exclude older actresses. They created and shared hashtags, memes and other digital content about the *Xena* case. One article XMC shared on its Facebook page, titled "Casting sexism: Unlike actors, actresses have an expiration date," discussed *Xena* and the wider problem of discrimination against older actresses in Hollywood. It framed *Xena* fans as additional victims of sexist casting, noting that unlike fans of recently revived male-led franchises like *The Terminator* and *Indiana Jones*, *Xena* fans would not experience their favorite characters "as they originally knew them" (Coday 2015). XMC urged its followers to share the article with the hashtag #LLROCNofTooOld.

So the XMC, originally organized simply to revive a show they loved, found themselves beginning a sort of hashtag activism. For many in the group, this was familiar territory... in their lives away from *Xena*. Activism and LGBTQ and women's causes are important to many *Xena* fans I interviewed, both inside and outside of their experiences with media. But most didn't become involved with XMC for activist reasons, and while they recognize the new activist slant to their demands, don't necessarily see their work

for XMC as particularly important or impactful politically. For instance, Wetzel contrasted her idea of XMC media activism to what she perceived as the fervor of fan activism carried out by “Clexa” fans protesting the death of a lesbian character on the CW series *The 100*<sup>15</sup>:

...As an activist, I don’t feel that media representation is a life or death matter...for me, someone who participated in Occupy and marched in support of Black Lives Matter, I feel that people being murdered by police because of their skin color is a life or death matter. Media representation is related to these issues, but for me, I think someone being killed by the police is objectively worse than a character dying on a TV show.

“Jordan,” a newer *Xena* fan and casual member of XMC, holds similar concerns about the limitations of entertainment-based activism:

Obviously big social movements have happened as a result of social media...that’s historically proven. It happened in Egypt and elsewhere, and the revolutions, and Black Lives Matter, and Native Lives Matter, and things like that. And it’s really important ... but can that go to entertainment? Like, where does that belong?

Data from my interviews, along with a lot of member chatter on the XMC Facebook page, indicate that many members are doubtful a new *Xena* project will be made that stars the original actresses. Interviewees sometimes became hushed and said in a regretful tone that they *personally* held more realistic expectations than the wider group about the media industries and the casting of older actresses. Instead, they said they hoped for some other politically promising outcome from the group’s work. For some, this meant a project with limited involvement from Lawless and O’Connor in which the actresses perhaps appear in an episode or two to hand off their character roles to new, younger

---

<sup>15</sup> See McNutt (2018) for an in-depth look at the *The 100* controversy, which will be revisited in the following chapters as Grillo-Marxuach, NBC’s pick for the *Xena* reboot showrunner, wrote the controversial *The 100* episode widely accused of perpetuating the “Bury Your Gays” trope.

actresses. Others anticipated or hoped that a new *Xena* might become innovative for intersectional representation in a way the original was for representations of women and LGBTQ identities. Some fans were aware that many Black women had particularly found the original series appealing and identified strongly with the (white) Xena character. In 2016, Lucy Lawless publicly endorsed the idea of a Black woman being cast as the new Xena, stating about Xena and Gabrielle: “they need to make them an interracial couple” (Salandra, 2016). Some of my interviewees suggested that a Black bisexual Xena would represent a huge representational “win.” Although not exactly the goal the group had originally worked toward, it would perhaps ultimately end up being *more* subversive and politically significant. Indeed, this willingness to negotiate and to anticipate progressive political futures beyond their immediate goals seems a trait inherited from the early *Xena* fandom.

### **OMM Reluctant Activists**

The Xena Movie Campaign emerged from the larger population of *Xena* fans that took part in the queer influence exerted in the 1990s on the original series. The XMC, of course, is not comprised of all of those original members, and has a lot of new fans, some who only discovered the series very recently. The One Million Moms, Director Monica Cole told me, was created by Donald Wildmon to focus more on media and entertainment because the AFA “had to expand and focus on more issues - more legislative issues, more pro-life issues - that have come about over the last four decades.” The OMM likely has many members who were part of the original AFA, but also includes members who discovered the group outside of the larger AFA organization. However, even for

members of both groups who were not originally involved in the older groups this chapter has chronicled, those histories matter. The past missions, tactics, and outcomes associated with the original populations have been passed down to the newer groups, either through organizational narratives and mythologies, or more implicitly through the languages, symbols and practices at play in the current groups' cultures.

Membership in OMM is usually described by members as something they sought out after becoming concerned about media content. These moments are often described as the eye-opening realizations of what their children were seeing on-screen. Tina Griffin, who writes and does speaking tours as the "Counter Culture Mom" and is affiliated with the One Million Moms, told me parents are shocked when she reveals the media content their children consume:

There are so many parents when I speak that don't have a clue of the content involved in the video games that their own kids play, that they bought at a store and didn't look at the rating system, and didn't sit down with their kids to know what's on the video games. That part we really have to work on is the video games, I believe it's even worse than some of the TV - all of it's bad if it's not Godly content, clean content - but if you're actually playing the game, and you are the gamer moving the character to behead another woman or force her head in a toilet bowl and drown her, or burn a woman's body and leave her in a ditch... And ...there is oral sex in the *Grand Theft Auto* video game series, all of them, and it's 3-D!

This astonishment and disgust with particular media content, whether a video game or TV show, often led the viewers to look online for more suitable content, parental guides to content, or outlets for their frustration. For my interviewee "Susan," a grandmother, one such moment was the realization that it no longer felt safe to leave her grandchildren alone with what she assumed would be a kid-friendly cooking show (Netflix's *Nailed It*) while she prepared dinner, because of what she perceived as its use of inappropriate language.

Despite her support of One Million Moms, including commenting on the Facebook page, participating in boycotts, and purchasing DVDs from AFA, when I asked if the goals of OMM were activist goals for her, she responded, “I wouldn’t call it a goal. I mean, I kind of don’t feel like there’s a lot of hope...” later continuing, “I really don’t pay attention to things, I kind of just live my little life.” Other members I spoke to similarly downplayed their own activism, and sometimes mentioned other women they envisioned as being stronger activists. For instance, “Victoria” often brought up outspoken conservative activists like Elizabeth, the “Activist Mommy,” a vlogger whose website states she, “...daily triggers the left by confronting the lies of abortion, feminism, Islam, and the homosexual agenda with wit and snark...” (Activist Mommy, 2018).

Victoria explained the difference between her and the Activist Mommy:

She’s a very nice lady. And the thing is, God has made us each individually, totally different than each other. And I am just not a bold... I’m trying to learn to be bolder, but I’m not that big bold bear mama that goes up there and is gonna get in your face. And that just happens to be her personality.

Like Victoria, many casual members of OMM feel their participation with the group is a small way of doing their part in an activist cause that supports their larger roles and responsibilities as Christians and (grand)parents. The narratives provided by Victoria and Susan resemble the origin story of the AFA as told by Wildmon. A humble God-fearing person reluctantly learning to be bold and fight media industries for the sake of the children is essentially the first chapters of his autobiography (Wildmon & Nulton, 1989). Susan’s belief that the war is ultimately hopeless also echoes Wildmon’s Christian-based philosophy that his action is all that is required by God, not results. Thus we see that such Christian “reluctant activism” continues from the group’s origins to the present.



## Conclusion

The examples recounted above begin to reveal the ways both audience groups' current perspectives on media, identity and activism are influenced by their histories. The *Xena* case especially allows us to understand what could analytically be labeled an audience's "queer hack." This chapter detailed some of the limits of the work by fans to queer *Xena*, namely the lack of a full acknowledgment of the protagonists' queer identities on-screen. Still, it has also pointed to the queered narratives and industrial acknowledgments of LGBTQ audiences that demonstrate the extent of the influences of online fan work. Their influence demonstrates why it is important not to dismiss the potentials of queer audience tactics. As suggested by some *Xena* fans: that a mainstream female character was able to exist, for years, without being pinned down to a distinct gender role or sexuality, might have been more subversive than any outing ever could be. That a show like *Xena* consistently aired queered narratives that went unpublicized and largely unnoticed in the 1990s mainstream seems to be the most subversive outcome of technological LGBTQ fan work. Though many of these fluid moments were not the original intent of lesbian fans who demanded a coming out, they reside in the playful space of queer theory and the realization of the technological hack that explores "the limits of what is possible" (Stallman, 2014, p. 8).

To appreciate the depth of the possibilities realized in the *Xena* era is to understand how many of them might be considered impossible today. The novelty of the primary method of the *Xena* fan hack, online industry-fan interaction, often feels as if it has significantly worn off. Such impromptu, unsupervised exchanges are now often avoided by media industries in favor of more official and controlled interactions. In

addition, the early industrial excitement about online access to audience opinions seems to have waned. *Game of Thrones* producers publicly stated they ignore fan communities' online requests for narrative tweaks (Caron, 2014) and in 2012, *Glee* creator Ryan Murphy was accused of trolling lesbian fans' online spaces (Hogan, 2012). This chapter documented a historical case in which the potentials for queer influence on mainstream mass media seemed to be increasing, but more recent examples may suggest their decline. The arc suggests that the queer hack, while always vulnerable to enforced societal "fixes," is also susceptible to the technological exclusion traditionally and repeatedly imposed on marginalized groups, especially following major innovations (Marvin, 1988). The complexities of queering *Xena* in the 1990s continue to represent an important early model for future possibilities for the disruption of heteronormative industries within the malleable spaces opened up by technological innovation. And of course, this early *Xena* case informs the dissertation's analysis of the later (queer) tactics performed by XMC.

What becomes apparent in the data provided in the later part of this chapter is the complicated and reluctant relationship of members of both XMC and OMM to their larger groups' ultimate goals. Members of OMM are supremely committed to Christian-conservative stances on the limits to acceptable media content. So too, those involved with XMC believe strongly in queer representation, feminism, and the need for strong media representation of older women. Despite the truth of these allegiances to their shared ideologies, members of the groups often appear to feel a disconnect between the import and value of the group itself and the efficacy and political import of their personal participation. In the following chapters, other inheritances from the AFA and the original

*Xena* fandom will become apparent, particularly in the analyses of their tactics and ongoing interactions with media industries. Reagin and Rubenstein (2011) argued: “It is at the point where individual enthusiasts become organized groups capable of participating in historical change that historians...should begin to pay some attention...” (para. 3.2). Media historian Lisa Gitelman (2006) argued that “...looking into the novelty years, transitional states, and identity crises of different media stands to tell us much, both about the course of media history and about the broad conditions by which media and communication have been shaped” (p. 1). This chapter’s detailing of the organizational, communal, and media legacies of both groups is presented in line with these calls for historical accountings of organized groups and their interactions with media, and has provided context for the chapters ahead.

### **Chapter 3 - Imagined: The Industry is Exclusive, Insular and Motivated by Profit**

Much of the dissertation's work on demonstrating the utility of an imagined industry framework will be completed in this chapter, Chapter 4, and Chapter 5. Together, the chapters work to explore RQ's 2-4 through results from the groups and industries' online discussions and activities, numerous interviews, and press coverage. Each chapter begins by describing one of three primary imaginaries that both OMM and XMC share about media industries: (1) the industry is exclusive, insular and motivated by profit, (2) the industry is wrong, and (3) the industry is risk-averse. The imaginaries presented in each chapter work to answer RQ2: "How do these audience members and groups construct or imagine media industries, industry practices, and opportunities/limitations for influencing media industries?" Each chapter then uses these tactics to answer RQ3 for each imaginary: "What tactics (especially digital) do these audience groups deploy to impact or influence media industries and why?" The data and analysis presented in these chapters will also begin to provide answers for RQ4: "How are these tactics informed or impacted by identity? What does this tell us about the goals and limits of queer theory, especially in relation to the digital?"

I want to begin by briefly revisiting some of the core concepts introduced in Chapter 1's discussion of the imagined industry framework. Taylor's (2004) description of an "imaginary" is deployed usefully in describing the interactions between industries and audiences in that it describes how people imagine "they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations" (p. 23). The

audiences' imaginaries here speak to their tactics. De Certeau (1984) argued that people use tactics to navigate power structures. De Certeau also described reading as cultivating a "desire to write" (p. 176). By this he meant that people are always potential rewriters or poachers of the content, rules, and other materials/ideas provided by those in power. Finally, almost all of the tactics described in this chapter are facilitated by digital means. For example, relationships and tools are cultivated and used by both groups online, and their imaginaries and tactics are often located in a sense of the digital or a hybrid online/offline geography. Identity and the digital combine for these groups to inform and support their activities in a digital era in which the possibilities for audience-industry interaction can seem unprecedented (Jenkins, 2006a; Johnson, 2007; Baym, 2012; 2018).

These concepts allow us to begin to trace and make sense of the interactions and relationships between audiences and industries. This chapter details how both groups imagine media industries as exclusive, insular and motivated by profit. We will begin with the focus on profit, as audiences see the exclusivity and insularity as results of industrial wealth. Indeed, a core factor that is seen to bolster the divide between the industries and the members of XMC and OMM is money; both groups hold a belief that the entertainment media industries trade on profit, like most industries. However, the media is seen as dealing in huge amounts of cash, and the privileging of profit over all else is imagined as a trait of "the industry" collectively—particularly for studio executives and those at the top of industrial hierarchies. "Jordan," an XMC member, expressed little faith in the industries: "I'm really cynical about big business...I'm not a capitalist." And although most in the OMM would likely not identify as anti-capitalist at all, the group's "About Us" page declares: "Money is the name of the game for those

who exploit, and they are exploiting our children for their financial gain.” The entertainment media industries seem to be viewed as even more profit-driven and morally bankrupt than other industries by both groups, particularly because of the perceived entanglement between their profitability and larger political or cultural “problems.”

When I asked Tina Griffin, the “Counterculture Mom,” why media industries make the kind of content she objects to, she tied their representations to a variety of profit-making ventures:

I think... a lot of dollars are to be made. I told kids, “who would make money if you guys decided to wait to have sex until you’re married?” You could hear a pin drop. Nobody! Nobody would make money if you decided to wait to have sex, if you decided to not drink as a minor, even though those alcohol ads... and these music videos are promoting alcohol to underage drinkers. Who would make money? Nobody. They would be losing money. So, there’s a lot of money to be made by selling sex, drugs, and alcohol, cutting, suicide, and pregnancy to all of our kids. Kids get pregnant, what happens? Planned Parenthood makes another, how many billion dollars a year? More babies are murdered. They sell pornography to a ten-year-old, and they push the porn in the video games. Why? Because if a ten-year-old/eleven-year-old sees pornography while they’re playing games - which, many of them are showing porn today – who’ll make money? The porn industry. They’ve got ‘em hooked as a ten- or eleven-year-old - they’ve got a customer for life. So, the reason they’re pushing it is because they can make a ton of cash at it.

Although less far-ranging than Tina’s explanation of the connective tissue between culture and content, members of XMC often point to the industries’ political practices (such as lack of representation of older women or intersectional identities) as based on a fear of losing money. Thus, both groups identify profit as the number one motivator for the media industries, and assume that at least most of the time, their decisions will be made with an eye toward profit.

Because the industries are assumed to deal in large sums of money, and no doubt because of the high-profile nature of working in entertainment, many members of the groups imagine that those in the industries practice a sort of exclusivity; not just anyone

can join. Because of their perceived insular and exclusive nature, the media industries hold a “black box” quality for the audience groups. There is a very strong sense that those who work in the industries form an exclusive, tight-knit group of insiders, and that audiences, particularly those represented by XMC and OMM, would not naturally be invited into their community. The exclusivity and insularity are seen as the obstacles to overcome for both groups. In order to communicate with the industries, the groups must first gain *access*. The tactics they deploy are meant to overcome this distance and be recognized. These actions typically fall under one or both of the two tactical themes: (1) “power recognizes power,” and (2) “learn the game.”

#### **Tactic: Power Recognizes Power**

XMC and OMM operate under the assumption that because those in media industries are insular and powerful, they are more likely to engage with other insiders, or at least other powerful entities, than directly with the audience groups themselves. This belief has fueled a number of tactics designed explicitly to mitigate this barrier to influence. From building alliances with other powerful audiences or interest groups, to attempts to swell the groups’ numbers and amplify their demands (so the industries have no choice but to notice them), XMC and OMM have developed a number of tactics to increase their own power in the face of industries they view as almost overwhelmingly powerful.

#### **XMC & Power Recognizes Power**

Members of XMC have considered, tried, abandoned, and persisted with a variety of strategies designed to get the attention of “the industry.” They recognize that there is power in numbers, in large-scale visibility, and in making associations with powerful companies that are familiar to the people and companies they wish to reach. Thus, many of their core tactics were developed to meet these goals. The XMC imagines their main audience as primarily NBCUniversal, and as a secondary target, other large media companies who might show interest in reviving the *Xena* property. For example, the group has done some work to attempt to persuade Netflix (where the original series was available from 2013 through 2016) to take on a remake. They imagine that if other media companies take notice of XMC or *Xena* more generally, through their power and interest in the property, NBCUniversal might re-focus on this older property they may have all but forgotten. Laura explained:

Even when it’s aimed at Netflix, it’s still really ultimately aimed at Universal. Because there’s a chance we could convince Netflix to make a six-episode season. But they would have to get the rights from Universal. But they already have a relationship because Netflix shows the series, so there’s a good chance there. But we wouldn’t mind at all if in talking to Netflix and getting Netflix to even consider the idea: they would have to talk to Universal and maybe Universal would say, “hmm maybe we should make a *Xena* movie.” So, even when it’s aimed at Netflix, it’s still really aimed at Universal. But, we’ll be happy to score a hit on Netflix.

With this scenario, Laura displays an understanding of the complexities of franchise ownership and the low likelihood that NBCUniversal would sell the franchise. At the same time, she demonstrates one of XMC’s core beliefs, which is that NBCUniversal is much more likely to take notice of another powerful media company’s interest in the *Xena* property compared to an invested audience group’s interest in it.

A tactic that seems to have been one of the most successful for XMC was their involvement in promoting *Xena* in online tournaments. Various companies and websites



hold March Madness bracket-style tournaments pitting fans and fandoms against each other to vote for the most popular media characters and propel their favorites to the winning titles. Eddie and Laura both described the copious amount of work XMC put into ensuring the *Xena* fandom was well-represented in these types of contests. During the voting periods, usually lasting days at a time, the XMC admins and volunteers would stay up late, or often work around the clock, monitoring the contests, voting, and encouraging *Xena* fans to vote through various forms of social media. Eddie explained:

Those tournaments were hitting a lot of American audiences, so there would be a lot of activity on other characters during our day here in the U.S. ... so we would stay up at night to continue voting... and also to plug it on the Campaign so we would hit the Xenites on the other side of the world. Because we're not a U.S. community, we're a worldwide community... And so we wanted to make sure we were getting their votes in these tournaments so ... we would stay up and we would post and we would actually put up a Google hangout and we'd put the link on our page and we would say, "Chat with us! We're staying up all night to see the tournament through."

XMC's dedication and work, along with that of the wider *Xena* fan base and other *Xena* fan organizations, proved successful time and again. *Xena* won both the 2014 and 2015 HitFix Heroes vs. Villains March Mayhem tournaments. *Xena* also won the 2013 Half Price Books Tournament of Heroes in 2013 and Gabrielle won their Tournament of Sidekicks the following year. Many counted it as quite the victory that characters from a cult series long off the air could win against heavy hitters like Han Solo, Katniss Everdeen, Harry Potter, Walter White, and Batman - and especially, their powerful fandoms. XMC counted each tournament (that garnered millions of votes overall) as important successes in bringing the *Xena* fandom the mass exposure they felt was needed in order to attract the media industries' attention.

Exposure to mass audiences is clearly key for the XMC. However, though mass audiences are an important goal, the group also works to strategically connect to

audiences they think will especially be seen as valuable by NBCUniversal and others in the industries. Through these associations, they hope to overcome their outsider status in relation to the insular industries. One way of doing this is to target other fandoms so that *Xena* can become part of the more mainstream and widespread fan culture that the industries increasingly watch closely. With this in mind, the group works to bring in fans from other fandoms, especially those that are considered large and powerful, like the *Dr. Who* fandom. They also work to be friendly to other powerful (and profitable) fandoms. For example, on the *Star Wars* holiday “May the 4th be with you,” XMC creates and encourages the creation of *Xena* fan art featuring *Xena* characters holding light sabers. Eddie cited this as the *Xena* fandom showing “support” for the *Star Wars* fandom, but acknowledged it was also a way to attempt to grab some of the attention given to *Star Wars* that day. Certainly, there are few audience or fan segments larger or more powerful than *Star Wars* enthusiasts. XMC cannily seeks to create and preserve links with such markets that have to perform much less work to garner industrial attention.

### **OMM & Power Recognizes Power**

Rather than appeal to powerful groups within mainstream media and audiences to pressure their targets (as XMC does with Netflix and large fandoms, for example), OMM works at creating and maintaining strategic alliances with other large and powerful groups, especially Christian-conservative organizations, interfaith religious alliances, and leaders and groups focused on parents concerned with media content. Monica Cole explained to me that these alliances strengthen the campaigns carried out by the One Million Moms:

There are other groups, whether they're Christian groups or just family groups, we work together because there is strength in numbers... We're just looking for the result, just trying to make the media a cleaner environment for families. There's so many groups that we have partnered with, like the National Center on Sexual Exploitation<sup>16</sup>, Parents' Television Council<sup>17</sup>, the Counterculture Mom... The American Decency Association<sup>18</sup>... there are just so many... We know that working together, we're just helping the cause, and we're all on the same team.

Indeed, as described in the previous chapter, the OMM's parent ministry, the AFA, has a long history of practicing this tactic, having built alliances across Christian-conservative organizations since the 1970s.

In the digital age, such inter-group connections seem even easier to make and sustain, even for casual members of the group. Members repeatedly told me about multiple allied organizations and influencers<sup>19</sup> they followed or supported in addition to the OMM, but that they envisioned as deeply connected to the OMM's cause. For instance, Victoria tried to trace back how she'd heard about the One Million Moms, and decided it was likely because of her association with the Mom's March for America, explaining about that group: "The ladies that sit up in California with the pink hats<sup>20</sup> that went to D.C.? This is the total opposite of them." Victoria stated that the only social networking site she uses is Facebook, and that although she's quite wary of Facebook and social media altogether:

---

<sup>16</sup> The National Center on Sexual Exploitation, or Morality in Media, Inc., is an interfaith nonprofit, anti-pornography group. Its president is a registered federal lobbyist.

<sup>17</sup> The Parents Television Council is an advocacy group against "indecent" media. The group was founded by a Conservative Catholic activist and it shares many of the same goals and tactics as OMM.

<sup>18</sup> The American Decency Association is a Christian non-profit organization against "indecent" media and pornography. Its leadership, at times, has overlapped with the AFA's.

<sup>19</sup> These influencers are often Christian-conservative bloggers like "Counter Culture Mom" and "Activist Mommy."

<sup>20</sup> Victoria is referencing the 2017 Women's March on Washington, a women's rights movement and march that included thousands of marchers wearing pink Pussyhats™ designed by California knitter Kat Coyle.

I think it's a good interaction when it comes to getting information out there, you know, the sharing. If you read an article it's usually shared so that all of your friends can see that same article, and the information can be provided in that manner. That I feel is quicker than the news broadcasting, watching TV, it's faster than doing that... I believe it's more detrimental to the family than it is good... So, I don't know, it's kind of give or take. It's good for getting information out there.

So for Victoria and other OMM members with whom I spoke, these easy-to-access interconnected online communities provide a sort of power to members, who may feel outnumbered on the wider internet or in the "real world," and certainly feel excluded and left behind by mainstream media industries. If they cannot grasp power within the culture created by those industries, they imagine they will demand a seat at the table by demonstrating their power through numbers and alliances with political heavyweights.

**Tactic: Learn the Game**

Because the industries seem so difficult to penetrate for audiences, both OMM and XMC consider a logical first step to be researching how the industries operate. In essence, they feel a need to learn the industries' standard operating procedures in order to reduce the barriers to access they imagine prohibit them from reaching their goals. They also consistently investigate *who* does *what* in the industries, and especially work to identify the decision-makers so they know whom to target with their demands. In addition, the groups value understanding how the industries "think." Indeed it is this tactic of researching the industries that seems to have led to many of the groups' imaginings of industries as described in this dissertation. The knowledge acquired is not only important for learning how to reach out and to develop other tactics, the groups often use it to match their own actions to industrial norms and expectations. This professionalization of the audience groups is meant to add to their credibility in the eyes

of the industries and make them take notice through the audiences being able to essentially, “speak the same language.”

### **XMC & Learn the Game**

XMC openly struggles with knowing how to reach the decision-makers in media industries. They’ve encountered barriers in designing their strategies because of how difficult it can be to decode the complexities of the studios. Laura explained the group’s difficulties finding the correct people to target at NBCUniversal:

It is really hard to tell who it is specifically that we need to reach, who would be the decision-maker... We have done a lot of digging; we’ve found different people to target. Sometimes people change positions, so you can’t target that person anymore because they’re not in that position. Sometimes you go, “you know what, maybe this position isn’t really the decision-maker, maybe it’s somebody over here. Maybe it’s the people who were behind the making of the series to start with, the people that are listed on the DVD cases.” We’ve gone through a lot of different people and I don’t know that we’ll ever know the individual to direct things to. But, if we get near enough, if we get somebody who matters there to notice, they can take it to the person who would make the decision.

The mystery surrounding decision-making at NBCUniversal adds to XMC’s feeling of being “outsiders” to those within the industries.

Not only does the power divide make seeking out initial connections complex, it reminds XMC of the true distance between themselves and the industries’ decision-makers. A way the group works to alleviate that distance is through learning and practicing industry-quality marketing and branding, hoping that their high-quality work will demonstrate the group’s, and the larger *Xena* fandom’s, relevance to the industries. For the industries, “engagement is what works; reaction is what works,” Eddie explained. Thus, media buzzwords like “engagement” and “virality” became goals for the group. XMC admins and volunteers are held to high standards of marketing and branding.

Having a professional background in marketing, public relations, and digital content creation is highly valued by the group. When I mentioned to Laura that she seemed pretty savvy in her attempts to reach people in media industries, she laughingly replied, “Yeah, you’d think I work in communication. Oh, I do!” In fact, she initially joined the group in response to a recruitment post from XMC looking for people with her skills. Her particular skillset includes graphic art and design, writing and editing, publication layout, website work, and, “number crunching... Like today, I had to take all of our Twitter stats and comb through it and find the big numbers and the low numbers and the ‘why did this happen’ numbers, and stuff like that.” Perhaps mirroring the entertainment industries’ struggles at measurement in the digital age (Bermejo, 2009; Napoli, 2011; Baym, 2013), XMC also keeps a close eye on their data and audiences. In particular, they track which of their targeting strategies are working and which are not. They understand clearly that, to large companies, as Laura says: “numbers matter.”

In the interest of gaining these numbers, Laura and other volunteers are put to work overseeing XMC’s social media presence (each member that works on the group’s Facebook page has a professional graphic design background), but also designing and churning out memes, GIFs, and other *Xena* content. This high-quality content is designed to excite *Xena* fans as well as larger online fandom communities and compel them to share and produce more user-generated *Xena* content. Part of the impetus for the group’s encouragement of fan-created content is their understanding of the power of virality in a marketing sense. Eddie explained that although the group has strict quality standards for its “official” content, they often push fans to make their own user-generated content:

We would post on our Facebook, “Hey, if you have a Tumblr, post more *Xena* stuff, make more memes, make more GIFs.” ... We want the fans to get creative

and generate the fan-made material that show how popular they (Xena and Gabrielle) are. Because getting a viral meme or GIF is how you get exposure.

Exposure and branding (for themselves as a campaign, the *Xena* property, and *Xena* fans in general) are primary concerns for XMC, whose members see that they have to compete with major media companies and other properties for fan and industry attention.

XMC believes that because the industries are profit-driven, one of the group's primary goals has to be proving the profitability in making a new *Xena* project. XMC realizes, sometimes to their chagrin<sup>21</sup>, that the most valuable audience for the media industries is the youth demographic. Because the media industries notoriously prize youth and equate young audiences with profit (Ewen, 2001), the group works hard to cultivate a young fan base for a new potential *Xena* project, especially as the original fan base ages. One strategy Eddie described was reaching out on the social media platforms most used by the industries' preferred age demographic:

We decided to make a Tumblr in order to hit teenage and college-age students because a lot of them are searching things online, on their Tumblrs, young LGBT folks trying to find a connection...It's also a place for fandoms... We're trying to increase *Xena*'s presence there.

Thus, because of the group's perceived distance from the media industries, XMC works to amplify those characteristics they imagine will appear most valuable to the industry members they wish to reach. Identifying industrial decision makers, producing professional quality content, and displaying an ability to leverage demographics industrially imagined to be the most profitable, all serve as XMC tactics to gain access to distant and profit-driven industries.

---

<sup>21</sup> XMC's concern about the industries' demographic focus and larger audience research practices will be further detailed in Chapters 4 and 5.

### **OMM & Learn the Game**

As evidenced in Chapter 2, researching media industries and finding a “common language,” are practically built into the tactical toolbox of OMM. Don Wildmon began his activism in just this way, and thus it seems to follow that the One Million Moms would carry on what they see as Wildmon’s successful legacy. In many ways, a core service OMM provides to its members is this background work on the industries. For one, members feel that they can trust OMM to identify the “worst” content being produced and distributed in media. OMM member “Linda” noted: “The group stays up to date on the latest shows, movies, etc. that need a watchful eye to review them...” Group member “Susan” brought up the NBC series *Good Girls* as a show of which she was unaware but that she learned about from the OMM Facebook page. Although she had never seen the show, she took the OMM’s suggested action against it. When I asked why she trusted OMM to make these decisions about which content to boycott, she responded:

It usually has to be really bad before they’re going to do a boycott. And they kind of pick one thing at a time, and they pick the worst thing they can find out there, so if you’ve got their attention... I mean, it’s not borderline, it’s really bad... They look for the most offensive thing they can find, and that’s what they boycott.

In reality, it seems that OMM actually relies heavily on its members to identify content of concern. OMM Director Monica Cole told me that she does keep several possible targets “on the radar:”

... but if I’m receiving a huge volume of emails being sent in, concerned about a particular program or commercial, in other words, complaints... We don’t necessarily keep a tally, as far as numerical. I mean, we have, but at the same time, it’s really easy just to take a mental tally if you’re receiving just a huge influx of just one topic. Then we know that the majority is on board, and we’ll have a more successful campaign with more backing behind us.



In this way, Monica Cole and OMM have leveraged digital tools to allow for an even more efficient way of identifying offensive content. In the past, for his AFA campaigns, Wildmon would train individuals across the country to code content on primetime television, and at times would act in response to mailed letters sent by a concerned Christian family or organizational ally. Today, OMM has an easy-to-find clickable “Submit Trash” link on the front page of their website. “Let us know when you find trash in the media. If you see questionable material in the media let us know,” it reads above the link. Clicking the link directs the user to a short and easy web form.

Not only does OMM do (or at least crowdsource) the work of identifying offensive content, it conducts the research to make responding to the industries as easy as possible for its members. Since the workings of media industries, and particularly advertising and sponsorship practices, can seem so mysterious to audiences busily going about their everyday lives, OMM does the work of identifying advertisers and sponsors of content. It also finds email addresses and phone numbers to contact for each campaign it takes on. OMM provides a number of different options for members who want to participate in a campaign, and often the various options are provided with an eye toward technical abilities. Monica Cole explained:

... We do have supporters that do have a preference. Because we have supporters of different ages, some are not as tech savvy as others, and (we provide) a link to their (the targeted company’s) website, the company’s “Contact Me” form, and also their Facebook link, because most companies have a Facebook page.

OMM also does the work to monitor the industrial responses to members’ actions so that the group can change tactics accordingly. For example, Cole told me: “...with the petitions, we have found out that some companies will block emails or close that email address.” When OMM realizes a company had done this, they quickly implement

communication through a new channel, publicize that the company refuses to hear feedback, or modify their tactics in some other way. Thus, OMM leadership is able to swiftly maneuver in response to industrial strategies, reducing the confusion that might be felt by the casual member. Although individual members might feel disconnected from the seats of power in the media industries, many feel they can trust OMM to do the work of breaking through industrial barriers.

### **Implications of Imaginary and Tactics**

As demonstrated above, both groups imagine a large distance between themselves and the media industries. They believe those in the industries make up an insular and exclusive community only motivated by profit. For both groups, and indeed probably for most audiences, this imaginary may be the result of prolonged exposure to representations of the industrial culture that are continually (re)produced by the industries themselves. Caldwell (2008) argued the entertainment industries' hold a narcissistic preoccupation with self-examination in their products, noting, "...industry self-analysis and self-representation now serve as primary on-screen entertainment forms across a vast multimedia landscape" (p. 1). In other words, the perception that those who work in the media industries are rich, absorbed in their own culture to the exclusion of everyday realities, and motivated by greed seems commonsensical because that is how they tend to self-depict on television, in film, and in music<sup>22</sup>.

---

<sup>22</sup> Important industrial analyses by Deuz (2007), Caldwell (2008), Mayer (2011), and Baym (2018) complicate such oversimplified understandings of the labor and cultures of these large and diverse industries.

Because both XMC and OMM imagine that such insulated and elite industries will do anything to protect “the bottom line,” both use tactics they believe will provide them enough financial or societal power to attract their attention, and hopefully, gain legitimacy in their eyes. The perceived (and in many ways actually encountered) haziness around the proper channels for making overtures to content producers or even how to decode the positions and mechanisms of power in the industries, demonstrably lead to audience-developed tactics that require extensive time and labor and veer toward increased adherence to industrial logics. For XMC, we see that their perceptions of industrial insularity and profit-seeking led the audience group to adopt industrial values and fit their desires and methods for obtaining change within the industries’ normative practices. Indeed, their experiences and tactics in this regard lend support to work that argues media industries endeavor to put audiences to work for them, exploiting their labor and training them in the industries’ preferred productive practices (Deuze, 2007; Andrejevic, 2008; Johnson, 2013; Patterson, 2018).

Thus, the audience’s imaginary in this regard in many ways restricts bottom-up activism and reinforces barriers to influence. It leads to the conception that in order to have any influence in the production of media content, audiences must play by the industries’ rules, and most importantly demonstrate their socio-economic value to even gain enough access to have their voices heard in the first place. At the same time however, this barrier can feel so insurmountable to some audiences that they counter through a withdrawal from mainstream industrial practices completely. This is much more like the tactics embraced by OMM, whose members have entrusted their activism to group leaders they imagine have the socio-political and economic clout to aggressively

demand results. This tactic falls in line with Montgomery's (1989) claim that special interest and pressure groups were an answer to the perceived mystery of the media industries: "...no matter how powerful and remote network television may seem, it has its own vulnerabilities. Television has always been a federally regulated medium" (p. 9). Indeed, if audiences perceive the industries as too distant and difficult to navigate within their own structures, audiences like the members of OMM decide on a more threatening approach.

Overall, while the tactics support much research on past and current industrial practices of power and exploitation, they also reveal some drawbacks for the industries. Demonstrating that the industries aren't completely omniscient or effective when it comes to ensuring their own superiority and success, we see that in some ways their practices and the resulting audience perceptions of distance do them a disservice. Indeed, with XMC, the industries have succeeded at putting a relatively benign and "friendly" audience group to work. However, XMC's continued alienation from the seats of power, and exclusion from industrial conversations about this text with which they are so invested, has led to an increasingly threatening activism. Allowing for more transparency in the workings of industries and effective mechanisms for audience-industry communication might save the industries from debacles like the CW's *The 100* controversy<sup>23</sup>. In addition, truly "allowing in"<sup>24</sup> invested audience input and concern might actually prove better for the bottom line. Similarly, leaving some audiences like

---

<sup>23</sup> See also the 2018 *Roseanne* reboot controversy and subsequent cancellation (Davis & Peiser, 2018).

<sup>24</sup> Johnson (2007) demonstrated that in an era of increased industrial attempts to foster audience participation in production, "The audience is invited in, but pressured to play by house rules..." (p. 77). By "allowing in," I suggest a more equitable exchange in which audiences are not only symbolically "invited in" to industrial territories for prescribed participation, but rather allowed to participate on their own terms.

OMM members with the perception that their only recourse is to align with political power players that threaten industrial autonomy puts industries at risk of large-scale attacks. Further, it threatens industries and society by granting a legitimacy (in that the complainants would be accurate in their accusations of alienation) to what might be otherwise illegitimate demands for representation, speech or censorship. Indeed, this shared feeling of marginalization and alienation from media industries for both XMC and OMM, while perhaps appealing to industries in some understanding of political absence<sup>25</sup> or neutrality, actually exposes what are very real political choices in which political causes for *and* against oppressive heteronormativity are engaged (or not) similarly by industries. Such concerns will be revisited later in the dissertation, particularly as they begin to reveal the haziness surrounding concepts like “normativity” and “marginalization.”

Scholars who posit that industries are all-knowing and ever-effective at strategically maximizing profit and calculating audience oppression (Andrejevic, 2004, 2008; Turow, 2011, Fuchs, 2014) have long privileged an industrial point of view. Specifically, they privilege the scholars’ imagined industrial (or theoretical, read political-economic) point of view because they ignore the perspectives of the very audiences wrestling with these barriers *and* the more common refrain from industry members that the inner workings of media are opaque even for insiders (Gitlin, 1983; Deuze, 2007). As Livingstone (2015) reminded us: “To recognize local processes of meaning making is not to deny the political-economic power of major media

---

<sup>25</sup> See Sender (2004) for a thorough study of marketers’ tendency to claim corporate decisions in relation to LGBTQ “markets” are a matter of “business, not politics,” thus attempting to excuse themselves from having to engage with the more difficult issues of LGBTQ rights.

conglomerates (p. 442). And indeed, as Johnson argued when discussing media franchising, attributing industrial actions only to “corporate monoliths” without the “experiences of those cultural producers” working within the industries, ensures those workings “remain mythologized rather than theorized.” The descriptions of the imagined insular, profit-driven industries, along with audiences’ subsequent tactics presented here complicate such mythologies.

## **Chapter 4 - Imagined: The Industry is Wrong**

The previous chapter described the audience groups' imaginings of media industries as exclusive, insular and motivated by profit. It then detailed the tactics the groups designed and employed in response to that imaginary. Finally it provided discussion and analysis of the implications of the chapter findings. This chapter will do the same for an imaginary that is large in its scope and underlies most of the interactions between the audience groups and the industries: "the industry is wrong."

For very different reasons, both XMC and OMM imagine that the media industries are "wrong" in a number of ways. In particular, both groups have concerns about the values conveyed in the content the industries produce and the validity of the audience research and demographic logics under which the industries operate. Further, both groups imagine that largely, the media industries are antagonistic toward them, their identities, and/or those audiences their groups' represent. XMC and OMM's imaginings of the "wrongness" of the industries usually differ in obvious ways. OMM believes the media industries are hostile to Christian-conservative and "traditional" family audiences and fail to provide "clean" and "respectful" content that positively represents and serves those identities. XMC believes the media industries do not create enough progressive content, and are particularly lacking in representation of strong women, older women, and LGBTQ identities. Further, many members of the group feel the industries don't value older, female, and queer audiences. Both XMC and OMM feel that the media industries do not create enough "quality" content that instills values and provides good role models, and members of both often mention a desire for media content that does not

degrade women. Because the groups attribute the root causes of this imaginary in so many divergent ways, each group's imaginary will be discussed separately and in detail below. Both groups' methods to counter the ways the industries are wrong fit within the tactical theme: "educate the industries and society." XMC and OMM's tactics to educate will be described after the elucidation of both groups' imaginaries. The chapter will end with a discussion of implications.

### **XMC Imaginary (The Industry is Wrong)**

A large part of the work that XMC performs rests on their concern that, left to their own devices, members of the media industries tasked with producing a new *Xena* project would ruin what fans consider the most important parts of the franchise. They believe the industries tend to focus on entertainment for young, heterosexual men, and this belief lies at the heart of much of their fears about what could happen if *Xena* is remade without fan influence. Indeed, the idea that the industries seek to *include* young, heterosexual men -definitely not the core constituency of *Xena* fans- smacks of the exclusivity indicated in the first imaginary. In addition, the content of XMC's ideal *Xena* project would indeed likely be antithetical to a traditional action project aimed at young heterosexual men. XMC realizes that a campy action-adventure *Xena* project featuring two queer women over 40 seems like a hard sell to mainstream media industries. Still, the group believes that the industries' traditional modes of doing business are outdated and incorrectly predict profitability. Further, members of XMC often express disappointment in the quality of the current content available in entertainment media, and frame the messages of *Xena* as a remedy to those shortcomings.



Particularly of concern for XMC are the industries' traditional audience research practices, which the group sees as a feedback loop that leads to the creation of the same types of content for the same constructed audiences. XMC volunteer Laura complained about the industries:

All the research that they do - which of course, is based on the movies that *they* produce, which are geared toward 18-24 year old men - this is what they're gauging everything on. When they look at *that* research they say, "we should be making movies for men ages 18-24." They don't want old chicks. That's why a 37-year-old actress is told she's too old to play the love interest of a 55-year-old actor. That's the way Hollywood is. Every once in a while now, they're trying to get themselves somewhere near the 20th century... DC and Marvel thankfully are helping with that...(but) they're still trying to titillate the 18- to 24-year-old males. At least the occasional movie now will pass the Bechdel test.

Eddie described the entertainment industry as currently "a strange place" in regard to the representation of women: "You have your old school ideals that older women can't be sexy and can't do action roles. While simultaneously people are still calling for it." He cited several recent cases of older women having success in action roles, including Sigourney Weaver's reprisal of her role in *Alien*, Gillian Anderson in the new *The X-Files* and even *Xena* star Lucy Lawless's action role in the revival series *Ash vs. Evil Dead*. Eddie described this trend as confusing for those working in media industries: "So on one hand they're saying, 'Oh it (a woman-led action project) won't do well,' but on the other hand, they're like, 'Oh, maybe it would...'"

XMC imagines that not only do they know the market for a *Xena* project, they also believe they understand the markets that studios and networks covet, and contrarily which markets the industries *should* value. Despite that XMC feels the industries prioritize particular demographics, like the 18-24 year-old-men cited by Laura above, they tend to strongly disagree that these are the most important or profitable markets. As noted earlier, the group works to recruit younger fans to entice the industries with a *Xena*

audience they feel is valued. Still, many members of the group doubt that the youth demographic is actually the most profitable, or that industries know what content will truly be embraced by young and wider audiences alike. Laura expressed concern about the value the industries place on young audiences when I asked what the worst outcome could be for XMC:

The worst thing wouldn't be nothing happening... The worst thing would be if they do this reboot and they change it up to make it more attractive to the teenagers and young adults of today, because I am pretty sure they don't really know what the teens and young adults of today want.

Thus, many of those involved in XMC disagree with the target markets they feel they must attract in order to wield influence. This is at least partially due to a larger disagreement with industrial understandings of profitability.

The sexuality of the characters also represents a challenge considering the industries' typical target demographics. Most *Xena* fans expect that if nothing else, the reimagined protagonists would have to demonstrate a similar sexual fluidity as in the original series. Part of *Xena*'s importance and potential in today's media environment, Eddie explained, is its "strong queer representation." While some would prefer an out lesbian Xena, Eddie states "I like that their sexuality came off as fluid; I think it's important to not erase bisexuals from the media." Whether the new Xena is ultimately shown as lesbian or bisexual, it is clear that if she is made to be clearly and solely heterosexual, many of the core fan group will perceive the new project as a failure. This type of failure is largely imagined as one by industries that are powered by people with identities unlike those represented by XMC. Members fear those in power in the industries will continue to marginalize minority voices and stifle politically progressive

representations and narratives in service to the status quo. Jordan lamented this power imbalance in the industries:

I also have ... a lot of friends who are filmmakers, interestingly enough. And the only ones that really went anywhere were white men. Which is just true. Like the statistics: there are how many women filmmakers? Like none. And then women of color who are filmmakers? Like (even less)... and it's so shitty because those are the most important voices that need to be heard. I don't watch a lot of television because, I'm like, "Ew! ...I can't relate to it."

Most XMC members feel strongly that if a new *Xena* project did not pay tribute to the original through strong representations of women, LGBTQ identities and other types of diversity, they and most other *Xena* fans would neither watch nor support the reboot. Indeed, it is this imagining of media industries as antagonistic toward, or at the very least willing to exclude or marginalize, the identities represented by XMC that lies at the heart of many members' involvement in the group.

Further, and related to the demand for queer representation, most fans agree that while many think of *Xena* as an action series, it was in reality, first and foremost, a relationship story. Part of the XMC's larger goal is getting what they feel to be *Xena*'s very important relationship narratives (emphasizing sacrifice, forgiveness, and redemption) out into the contemporary mainstream. The original *Xena* narratives continue to be both a selling point, and an area of anxiety for fans. Many in XMC expressed concern about the quality of current entertainment and believed strongly that a well-done reboot could re-capture the quality programming of the original as well as do something positive for the audiences it might capture today. In April 2017, a fan posted on the XMC Facebook page that *Xena* was: "Definitely a program that was an inspiration for doing good and evaluating the cost of doing good. The show taught us the meaning of the greater good." Eddie explained his motivation for working toward a reboot thus:

I want to support a new project because ... I think that the kind of world we live in needs those kinds of role models: people fighting for the greater good, fighting to be better than they were. I think that's very important.

Indeed, the original *Xena*'s focus on "The Greater Good"<sup>26</sup>, the name of an episode and a recurring theme throughout the series' run, is often cited as the type of high-quality, value-imbued content currently missing in mainstream entertainment media. Laura differentiated *Xena* from other popular series by explaining its ability to "reach" people in a way that typical genre shows do not, particularly because of its individualized character narratives as opposed to ensemble casts:

*Xena* did a lot about the individual...and a whole heck of a lot about redeeming the individual. We're desperately in need of...a very well made show that keeps to the values that *Xena* had. We already know that will reach some people, because the original show did. The original show also kept some people from committing suicide. There's value there. I love *Big Bang Theory*, but I don't think it kept anyone from committing suicide. They perform different functions.

Thus, XMC's very personal beliefs in the value of the series and their opinions about the lack of such values in the current entertainment industries motivate them to continue working toward their goals. These beliefs are compounded by their estimations that media industries are wrong in the ways they predict the economic value of constructed audience markets. Finally, the group's disbelief in an industrial willingness to provide progressive representation of marginalized identities solidifies their overall evaluation of the industries as *wrong*.

### **OMM Imaginary (The Industry is Wrong)**

---

<sup>26</sup> *Xena* fans have also long referred to their fandom's considerable charitable work, contributions, and causes as work for "the greater good" (Fanlore, 2017).

Members of OMM in many ways have similar concerns to XMC about the state of mainstream entertainment media. They believe there is a lack of quality, value-laden content that could positively impact audience members. These values are of course varied, but there is some overlap with XMC. For instance, OMM shares some of XMC's concerns about media representation of women. Monica Cole noted that one of the group's longest running campaigns was against Hardy's/Carl's Jr. commercials<sup>27</sup> in which OMM, "were asking them to just focus on selling their food and the quality of their food and not using women as sex objects, because it was degrading to women." Of course, there are many glaring value differences in OMM's demands compared to the XMC's. While XMC fights for representation, particularly of (and for) women and LGBTQ individuals, OMM takes issue with the idea that these groups need any increase or improvement in representation at all, especially on any grounds that they are marginalized groups. In fact, invoking gender, sexuality, and often anything they might perceive as an identity signifier is seen as what is wrong with mainstream entertainment media in the first place. Despite many members of OMM telling me about their concerns regarding the representation of women in media, the moment the concerns might be cast as identity politics, the women would soon distance themselves. For example, Victoria told me the reason primarily women are involved in their movement is that:

A lot of times anymore, because of the feminist movement now, they're not listening to the men. So, it's going to take women to get other women to listen to what's the truth and what the values are needing to be. Because if the men try to tell you, then they're (feminists) just gonna tune off. They don't want to listen because, "they're trying to hold you down," "they're trying to hold us back,"

---

<sup>27</sup> See Bhattarai (2017) for more about the company's 12-year history of airing controversial ads featuring scantily clad women.

when that's not accurate. The women are the ones that are holding themselves down.

Similarly, Linda felt the media focuses on identity like "...the genders, race, sex, etcetera," to the industries' (and society's) detriment: "The 'art' of it all has been lost in translation, political correctness and liberal ideologies that are anti-God and not family-friendly."

The allusions to wider politics when critiquing media representation were frequently made by OMM members in interviews, and continue to figure prominently in online posts to the group's Facebook page. In particular, the lack of values in media representation was repeatedly tied to what OMM members viewed as the increasing (and increasingly positive) media representations of lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer characters and relationships, as well as transgender identities. Quality content, to most OMM members, seems to be content that Christian-conservatives don't read as politically motivated. When I asked Victoria if gay or transgender content was included in what she called "evil content," she responded:

That is a very, very strong subject that every single time I'm watching a movie or if I do turn on the TV, it's like they have to throw in something when it comes to the same-sex (relationships). You know, there's got to be something. It's either a kiss, or it's a sexual part, or it's somebody coming out. They're always throwing stuff out there, and it's rather sickening. It's irritating. And they say we're hating on them. It's not that we're hating them. We're hating the activity because we love the people. We just wish they would understand our side of it, too. ...like they would say things (are) thrown in their face, well we don't want it thrown in *our* face. We don't want it either.

Indeed, OMM members point to this type of representation as a clear indication of what types of audiences media industries favor, and which they're hostile toward.

In OMM members' assessment, media industries cater to audiences that are left-leaning politically, and additionally believe the media intentionally ostracize Christianity

and Christian-conservative audiences. For instance, most OMM members seem to be highly suspicious of Disney, and often bring up what they see as efforts by the company to reduce or distort Christian themes. For example, OMM shared a post with concerns about Oprah Winfrey intentionally reducing Christian messages in the 2018 *A Wrinkle in Time* film adaptation. The group also worries about Disney increasing LGBTQ representation in their content, with members especially upset about an openly gay character in the 2017 live-action *Beauty and the Beast* film and rumors that a *Frozen* sequel might feature a lesbian princess. OMM members describe Disney as a media company that was once beloved for quality, family-friendly content that has more recently revealed itself hostile to the group's identities and desires. One member commented on a 2018 OMM Facebook post about *A Wrinkle in Time*: "Disney's heyday is over. Their leftist anti-God agenda doesn't belong in entertainment and the public doesn't want it..." Another responded to a 2018 OMM post about Disney World ending its annual Christian music festival: "I haven't supported Disney in a LONG time. Run by Leftists and catering to LGBTQ. This used to be a place for kids to have fun. Now it's all about pushing a political agenda."

Further connected to these beliefs about media industries holding the wrong values, members of OMM often profess to believe that the industries incorrectly expect that such "secular" content will be more profitable than conservative content. I asked OMM member Susan, who as discussed in Chapter 2, was upset about the cooking show *Nailed It*, what she would ask producers to change about the series. She immediately said she'd ask them to eliminate profanity on the show. I asked if she thought the show would be just as successful without profanity, and she answered, "I think it would be *more*

successful.” She explained that currently parents are afraid to leave their kids alone with the TV, “But if it were a good wholesome show and it were always wholesome, then parents could allow their child to watch it and walk away.<sup>28</sup>” While Susan and other members often argue in this way that cleaner content would be more profitable, these beliefs seem to contradict numerous statements that media content is “worldly” because *those* representations are profitable. Indeed, earlier in that same interview, Susan said about the entertainment industries, “I mean they know where the money’s at, and they sell what people are buying.” These contradictory statements reflect a deeper trend within OMM in which members seem to veer between claiming to be minority audiences that are marginalized by (and in) media, while also asserting numerical strength, majority tastes, and great consumer buying power. This paradox illustrates the ways OMM imagines media industries are both marginalizing them as minorities, *and* underestimating their numbers. Overall the group’s understanding of the industries as valueless, oppositional to their identities and politics, and incorrect in their estimations of profitability, demonstrate OMM’s clear distaste for the mainstream media industries. This distaste and certainty that the media are *wrong* was evident in nearly every interview and online exchange represented in this dissertation’s data.

### **Tactic: Educate the industries and society**

---

<sup>28</sup> It is important to note that Susan acknowledged there will always be profanity and mature content on television, but that she would prefer it be confined to prime time, late night, or Pay-Per-View. Since *Nailed It* is only available to Netflix subscribers who can elect to watch (or not) anytime, it seems her objection to the language used in the series is tied more to the genre. She framed the cooking show as a category of entertainment that audiences would generally expect to be family-friendly.



OMM and XMC both enact tactics to educate media industries and larger society about the ways media industries and content are “wrong.” Further, both work to communicate the moral and/or social value of the “quality” content for which the groups advocate. For XMC, that means educating society and media industries about the specific values and social noteworthiness of the *Xena* brand through publicity. It also means that XMC works to educate its followers and media industries about sexism, ageism and problematic LGBTQ representation in media content and industries. For OMM, it means “proving” the harmfulness of most media content and arguing for the benefits of the types of content they champion. Further, it means demonstrating media industries’ marginalization of Christian-conservative content and audiences. Finally, both groups work to demonstrate the economic value of the audience demographics for the types of media content that would meet their group’s goals for representation.

### **XMC & Educate the Industries & Society**

Part of XMC’s core strategy is to publicize the *Xena* brand. This is not only a numbers game, as it is with some of their other tactics. The group believes that in order for media industries and new/wider audiences to understand *Xena*’s narrative and social value, they must first become aware of it. The group’s members look to boost the brand by drawing new audiences to the series as well as by cementing the show’s place in feminist/LGBTQ history. Some fans document the original popularity and impact of *Xena* through their comments on the XMC Facebook page, such as one member’s 2017 comment:

...I’d like to know just how many people commenting on this we’re (sic) around watching *Xena* from 1995 to 2001. That may be why a lot of folks have no real

idea just how groundbreaking *Xena: Warrior Princess* was and how many little girls WERE walking around in *Xena* outfits screaming, “Ayiyiyiyiyi!!!”<sup>29</sup>

Likewise, XMC finds and shares articles that pay tribute to the series and its social legacy, such as the *Blasting News* article, “How ‘*Xena: Warrior Princess*’ paved the way for modern female TV characters” (Krieg, 2017) and the *Buzzfeed* article, “24 fictional characters who helped people realize they were queer” (McIntosh, 2016), in which *Xena* took the number one spot. Even articles about noteworthy aspects of the series outside of progressive representation are seen to add to the brand’s heft. For example, XMC shared the *Syfy Wire* article, “Firsts: The first musical episode of a Sci-fi TV show isn’t what you think” (Roth, 2018). The article noted that *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer* is often wrongly attributed as being the first science fiction television series to air a musical episode, but that *Xena* had actually done so three years earlier. XMC also promotes any new *Xena* products on the market, particularly various *Xena* comic book series that have been produced at various times since the original series’ end, official and unofficial *Xena* conventions and events, and even the new projects of the cast and crew involved in the original series. Altogether, these actions work to communicate the social and aesthetic value of *Xena* to potential new audiences and to the media industries that they worry may have forgotten these aspects of the *Xena* brand. Eddie emphasized about NBCUniversal’s confusion about its own *Xena* property, “...they need to start thinking a little bit more intelligently... because they’re trying to think of, ‘What will sell?’ ‘What will market?’ It’s like, ‘Guys, *Xena* was successful because of *quality*.’” Overall, these efforts at

---

<sup>29</sup> “Ayiyiyiyi!” refers to *Xena*’s battle cry.

education are meant to ensure the industries and wider audiences cannot ignore or remain ignorant of the value of the *Xena* brand.

As detailed in Chapter 2, the first tactic embraced by XMC in reaction to the announcement that the original actresses wouldn't be cast in the reboot was to widely share and publicize cases of sexism and ageism in media industries in general. Similarly, the group worked to combat sexism and ageism in the ongoing case of *Xena* in particular. Thus, the group seeks to right the industries' wrongs in relation to these issues via "educating" them and wider society about sexism and ageism, as well as the social importance of representation for older women in media industries and content. For instance, XMC shared and responded to one article critiquing an outfit worn by Lawless as inappropriate for her age, telling members: "... You know we think Lucy still looks amazing... so head on over to the article and let them know that you think Lucy still rocks so-called non-'45-year-old' outfits!" The group's use of this tactic constitutes what Nakamura (2015) notes is the online (labor) practice of "calling out," when "...social media users... 'call out' and critique racism and misogyny online" (p. 107). Such calling out is meant to bring attention to, and educate about industrial practices related to older women and hopefully, spur both industries and audiences to demand improvement.

As previously noted, many members of XMC are unhappy with what they perceive as the media industries' obsession with youth, not only in representation but also in industrial market logics and practices around demographics and target audiences. In addition to their tactics to improve representation on-screen for older women, XMC deploys tactics to educate the industries about the market value of older audiences, and the potential profitability of the representation the group champions. In these ways, they

hope to convince industries to change what XMC considers wayward audience research practices through appealing to the industries' prioritizing of profit.

Indeed, XMC generally disagrees with the industries' financial valuation of the youth demographic and thinks that the industries are wrong to create content for young consumers at the expense of older, more established audience demographics. This annoyance is demonstrated by the way Eddie discussed seeing large numbers of younger *Xena* fans at the last convention:

We were really thrilled to see all of the young people. Because even though it is us older folks who can afford movie tickets and cable bills, somehow Universal thinks that early twenties and teenagers are the demographic to hit. "It's like, guys, they're not actually giving you any *money!*"

Thus, we see Eddie's desire to educate industries about the amount of disposable income older audiences possess and what XMC believes is the industries' mistaken pursuit of younger demographics.

Along with feeling the industries are wrong in the ways they assign profitability to youth, members of XMC often insist the industries aren't very good at reaching those demographics anyway. Laura explained:

... I mean I work with 20-25 year-old people and they don't actually watch a whole lot of what's on TV. But they do watch Netflix, Hulu, shows in places like that. They prefer the quirky indie programming to the regurgitated, formulaic stuff people have been watching for the last 30 years.

Related to their assessment that industries don't understand what types of programming young demographics will embrace, XMC pushes the idea that industries would be surprised with the increased profits they'd see upon taking a chance on representing older women. One fan commented on the XMC Facebook about the 2017 film *Wonder Woman*:

I'm of the mindset that a (*Xena*) reboot with a younger cast would bore most people... Audiences went crazy for Robin Wright and Connie Nielsen, two middle aged women who kicked all kinds of ass in the movie (*Wonder Woman*), and it just topped \$400 million in the U.S. I really think fans need to use that argument now as ammunition when asking Universal to consider a revival with the original actresses.

Indeed, the huge success of *Wonder Woman* was discussed on the page frequently as an example of the actual content audiences crave, and more importantly, show up to support with their dollars. XMC admin took *Wonder Woman* as an opportunity to educate their followers on their theories about the profitability of high-quality representations of women, even releasing audio with XMC staff discussing the film's importance and why XMC members should support the film. When someone posted in reply that they wanted to support strong women in film, but that they weren't sure they would go see *Wonder Woman* because of their disappointment that a *Xena* film hadn't been made, an XMC admin posted in reply: "We encourage Xenites to support this film to show reluctant Hollywood executives how much profit they are missing out on by ignoring warrior women like *Xena* and *Wonder Woman*!" In this way, XMC also believes if its members support media representative of their goals, those projects' resultant financial success will provide the education needed to the media industries. From lessons on sexism and ageism to audience demographics and market preferences, a considerable portion of XMC tactics are dedicated to such educational efforts.

### **OMM & Educate the Industries & Society**

Similar to the XMC, OMM and its members talk a lot about the success and profitability of already existing "quality" content. Demonstrating that such content is "good" and has been successful, they feel, has the potential to convince producers and

sponsors to pursue more projects the group would embrace. For example, multiple OMM respondents mentioned Pure Flix during interviews as a great example of a media company providing quality content<sup>30</sup>. Pure Flix is a Christian movie studio and online video-on-demand service, much like Netflix in format. As a film studio, Pure Flix's most widely known films are the *God's Not Dead* series; the first installment surprised the mainstream film industry when it earned over \$64 million on a \$2 million budget (Box Office Mojo, 2018; Markovitz, 2014). On the Pure Flix "About Us" page, the company describes its offerings as "a mix of family-friendly & wholesome entertainment" (Pure Flix, 2018). That same page demonstrates the company's belief, shared with OMM, that such content is in demand: "We believe that given a choice, people want to be able to stream wholesome, family-friendly titles that carry a great message" (Pure Flix, 2018).

Proving that Christian content is both desired and needed by audiences is a core goal for OMM. The group activated their members when the first *God's Not Dead* film was soon to be released. Much like XMC with *Wonder Woman*, OMM called on members in a 2014 Facebook post to support *God's Not Dead* to educate the industries and wider audiences about the film's message and demonstrate the sizable audience for Christian films:

All of us here at One Million Moms are eagerly anticipating the nationwide release of the culture-changing film GOD'S NOT DEAD, in theaters this Friday, March 21. How a film performs opening weekend is critical to the life of the film - and in the case of GOD'S NOT DEAD, critical to the impact this truth-bearing message will have on our culture. We need you to do the following:

---

<sup>30</sup> Although often respondents reported subscribing to and enjoying Pure Flix, not all were completely satisfied with the service's content. Susan, for instance, mentioned that although she subscribes to Pure Flix, the service often shows romantic films in which someone who was previously married finds love, and the Bible says that such a relationship is adultery.

1. Invite your friends and family to see GOD’S NOT DEAD!  
Visit [GodsNotDeadtheMovie.com/Theaters](http://GodsNotDeadtheMovie.com/Theaters) to see where the film is playing in your community and purchase tickets for opening weekend.
2. Lend your voice and social media support to our Thunderclap<sup>31</sup> campaign.
3. PRAY! Pray that this film impacts lives for Christ and encourages people to deepen their faith.

Thank you for supporting One Million Moms and faith-based films such as Pure Flix Entertainment's GOD’S NOT DEAD. We hope you’ll be among the supporters declaring “MY GOD IS NOT DEAD” at your local theater box office this opening weekend, March 21!

Indeed, *God’s Not Dead*’s subsequent box office success thrilled the group, with OMM posting to its Facebook after opening weekend that, “Faith-based films are making a splash at the box office!” This success was always framed as a victory against the industries’ exclusionary and discriminatory practices toward Christians.

As a counter to the imagined antagonism of the media industries to Christian/family audiences, these tactics are meant to highlight the socio-cultural value of OMM’s preferred media content, but also to demonstrate the economic benefit of producing high-quality Christian-conservative content. The 2018 film *I Can Only Imagine* grossed over \$83.9 million on a \$7 million budget (Nash Information Services, 2018). It also became the third-highest grossing music biopic of all time behind 2015’s *Straight Outta Compton* and 2005’s *Walk the Line* (IMDB, 2018). Another surprise Christian hit, the film’s success was described by *The Hollywood Reporter* thus:

...*I Can Only Imagine* dramatically overperformed in opening to \$17.1 million from 1,629 theaters, upstaging the glory that was expected to have belonged to Warner Bros. and MGM’s big-budget *Tomb Raider* reboot, which launched to a muted \$23.6 million. And *I Can Only Imagine* handily beat the \$11.8 million

---

<sup>31</sup> Thunderclap is a “crowdspeaking” platform similar to crowdfunding sites. Instead of pledging money, the site allows users to pledge their “social reach.” According to the site, a Thunderclap campaign, “allows a single message to be mass-shared, flash mob-style, so it rises above the noise of your social networks” (Thunderclap, 2018).

opening of Fox 2000's YA adaptation *Love, Simon* — the first film from a major Hollywood studio featuring a gay teen protagonist — as well as the second weekend of Disney's *A Wrinkle in Time* (\$16.3 million) in a surprise upset. (McClintock, 2018)

Not only was the film's performance significant, the audience demographics were as well. McClintock (2018) noted that 67% of ticket buyers were women and 80% were over age 35. Such proof-of-concept for Christian media seems to bode well for OMM's cause, and its members point to it as undeniable evidence of a changing cultural landscape. Tina Griffin brought up the film after decrying the state of entertainment media and their negative effects on children:

Positive entertainment is *in*. That's what people want. *I Can Only Imagine* has like 55 million dollars they've made at the box office. They're blowing everybody else out of the water. That's only been out in theaters for three weeks. So people want the positive, there's just a lack of it. And if we don't buy what Hollywood supplies, we will put those people under, they will go out of business. So we as parents have the power in our hands to create the culture that we want to be living in.

Not only is publicizing such success meant to educate media industries about the power of OMM's base, it is meant to galvanize members and teach them about their own clout as a neglected but powerful market.

Part of OMM's education for media industries and wider society is proving the lack of values in media content, its harmfulness, and its marginalization of certain narratives, identities and beliefs. Similar to XMC's educational campaigns against ageism, sexism, and LGBTQ invisibility or misrepresentation in media, OMM seeks to demonstrate (1) that many of the products distributed by media industries cause irreparable harm to children, families, and society in general, and (2) the erasure or marginalization of Christian-conservative content and audiences by mainstream media industries. The harm caused by media content was typically demonstrated through their



negative outcomes on children. This is unsurprising considering the group organizes around motherhood as an identity. Protecting children is foremost among OMM members' concerns. As the following statement by Susan demonstrates, children are thought of as vulnerable and in need of defense and guidance: "I mean, you've got to think about when you've got little kids, you've got to protect their little minds." The emphasis on the "little" and vulnerable minds, eyes and ears of children is a consistent theme for OMM. One of OMM's early Facebook posts was a video featuring close-ups of the eyes of (Caucasian) children looking straight into the camera. Their faces are often illuminated, as if by a TV screen, and the children's expressions display shock, fear, shame (as one boy looks down guiltily), and sadness. As the camera flashes from child to child, the voice of a small child can be heard singing a haunting, lullaby-style excerpt from the Christian children's song "Oh Be Careful, Little Eyes."<sup>32</sup> Suddenly, the screen flashes intermittently from the children's eyes to a black screen with text as the music picks up pace and the singing stops. The text reads (in a few words, or only one word flashed in-frame at a time): "The American Family Association wants you to join other moms to help guard little eyes from... garbage, trash, filth, on the air, the internet, the radio, magazines. Join us today. OneMillionMoms.com" The video demonstrates the belief that children are being unexpectedly exposed to dangerous content and teaches that their innocence is at risk. As one member commented on the video, "Once they see it, you can't take it away from their memory."

---

<sup>32</sup> Lyrics sung in the video are: "Oh be careful little eyes, what you see. Oh be careful, little eyes, what you see. For the Father up above, is looking down in love. Oh be careful, little eyes, what you see." (MetroLyrics, 2018)

Indeed, OMM seems particularly concerned about the uncontrolled and spontaneous nature of encountering media content. In essence, members dislike that they or their children may view or hear “offensive” or inappropriate content without warning. Often these moments are framed as uncomfortable and the catalyst for conversations about identities and social issues before parents feel children should have to know about and process them. For example, Monica Cole discussed the group’s objections to a JC Penney ad campaign thus:

...they had Mother’s Day and Father’s Day campaigns and printed ads with same-sex couples, two mothers with their children for Mother’s Day and two dads with their children for Father’s Day. And it’s known that these flyers went to mailboxes. And many children will check the mailbox for their parents because they enjoy it and they think it’s fun. And it brings up questions that parents may not be ready to discuss with their children, discussions that the children themselves may be not old enough to understand, certain questions about sexuality, and premature questions and conversations...

Indeed, such situations are frequent topics of discussion on the OMM Facebook page. On a post by OMM criticizing Scholastic for including books for “two-mommy” families in a children’s reading list, members began discussing other Scholastic-endorsed children’s books they’d been dismayed to learn contained LGBT-themed content. One mom mentioned a book series her daughter loved, saying that suddenly the girl brought one of the books to her mother, shocked by a scene in which a gay middle school boy “comes out.” The mother lamented, “There’s no warning, no mention on the outside cover or anything.” Another mom replied that she’d encountered the same book series, a favorite of her daughter’s:

We’ve talked about it, Biblically, and how we are called to protect our minds, especially when we are young and not able to discern as effectively...and we returned it to the book fair. Our school was FLOORED and pulled all other copies from the sale.

In these ways, OMM members discuss media content as insidious, and their online discussion is a tactic to educate society, and tip off other members of their community, about what is lurking just beneath the surface of what might otherwise be mistaken as innocuous content. It also likely spreads to the industries themselves, as the mothers' online comments and discussions are usually tied to ads, media, and hyperlinks meant to promote the original content. Producers would likely be notified if online chatter indicated mothers' word of mouth was that their content is not actually kid-friendly.

However, this claim of harm to children by OMM doesn't only apply to content explicitly *aimed* at children. For example, OMM's campaign against the NBC series *Good Girls*, which is rated TV-14 and airs Mondays in a 9/10 PM timeslot, charges that the adult-themed drama (in which three struggling mothers turn to crime) will attract young viewers because of "the name of the show along with the age of the child cast members." In line with this, Monica Cole told me that in addition to tracking media content aimed at children and teens,

...we have other topics that come about when you have television programs that may not be marketed to children, but they have children in the cast. That's going to draw a younger audience and draw attention to children wanting to watch those programs.

In this way, for OMM almost any media content is potentially dangerous to children, wherever and whenever it may be available. As well, most members claim that while the protection of children is a priority, the majority of mainstream media content isn't "good" for *anyone*. As Susan explained, "The world in general, none of us ... need garbage. If it's not good for our kids to watch it, we probably shouldn't be watching it either." Seeming to espouse similar beliefs, OMM feels duty-bound to educate all audiences about the "trash" media they oppose.

OMM not only believes media content leads to uncomfortable conversations or morally concerning ideas, they often frame media content as a physical or real-world danger to children, families, and/or Christians<sup>33</sup>. As she travels the country on speaking tours, Tina Griffin warns parents and teens about what she considers to be the life-and-death consequences of mass media. Tina explained to me that she began realizing at age 16 the influence mass media was having on her and her friends:

And, I just started realizing that a lot of it... promoted a message that could literally harm us. Kill us, worst-case scenario. If not become pregnant, (lead to) sexually transmitted disease, drugs, alcohol, suicide, you name it. A lot of our media - not all - but a lot.

While Tina works to educate through her blog and speaking circuits, OMM similarly emphasizes the severity of dangers of media in several of their campaigns. Most recently, OMM and AFA initiated a large joint campaign against the controversial Netflix series *13 Reasons Why*. The series is about a teen girl who commits suicide, and while highly popular and well received by many audiences and critics, it has also drawn criticism and concern from scholars (Ayers, Althouse, Leas, et al., 2017), suicide prevention and mental health experts (Henick, 2017; Howard, 2017), and various audiences. Initial reports indicated that the series may have led to multiple teen suicides and a general increase in suicidal ideation among its teen audiences (Gilbert, 2017). One AFA article titled “How far will the dark go ... this time?” (Davis, 2018) shared by OMM on

---

<sup>33</sup> It is important to note that not all members of OMM are concerned about the same types of content. These differences can be found on members’ Facebook comments and emerged in my interviews. For example, Victoria was highly concerned about violence in media and believed it had led to school shootings and other violent events. Susan, on the other hand, who complained about profanity on *Nailed It*, disagreed when I suggested violence seemed to be a pretty typical concern for OMM members. She stated that while she prefers not seeing violence, “...if you look at even your little Bible stories, (in) ‘David and Goliath,’ there’s violence... So, it’s not as concerning to me... I mean, I don’t like profanity. Violence doesn’t bother me quite as much...”

Facebook, described the group's multifaceted campaign against the series and detailed the deaths that had allegedly already resulted from the series. The article went on to chronicle some past AFA campaigns, beginning in 1980, against media projects the group believed had demonstrably caused murders and suicides. Decrying the industries' lack of response over the years, explaining the phenomenon of "copycat suicides," and ending with statistics on the high rate of teen suicide, the article asked, "So Netflix ... just how far are you willing to let the dark go this time – all in the name of entertainment?" The article illustrates why OMM values educational tactics so highly. They feel industries are so morally irresponsible that they will continue to cause harm if left unchecked and audiences are left uninformed.

Finally, some of OMM's educational tactics include highlighting perceived instances of marginalization and discrimination against Christians from the media industries and wider society. These examples are framed as real-world dangers tied to media content and serve as a way to "prove" the group's claims that the media industries are antagonistic toward their identities and rights, and thus "wrong." Indeed, instances of discrimination against Christians seem to be of utmost concern to the group's members. For instance, Victoria told me that besides Christian moms and grandparents, OMM also "speaks to...businesswomen and the businesses that are supported or not supported. Like, for instance, the bakeries that have been shut down or (others) tried to shut down because of them following their Christian beliefs<sup>34</sup>." She explained that as a professional photographer and Christian, she once had to turn down a request to photograph a same-

---

<sup>34</sup> Victoria was referring to a spate of highly public court battles over bakeries that refused to make wedding cakes for same-sex marriages. In one such case against a Colorado bakery, the court ruled that the bakery had illegally discriminated against the couple seeking services (ACLU of Colorado, 2018).

sex wedding. It turned out, she said, that she was relieved to find she had another event that day. The gay man requesting her services was a family friend and military veteran, and so, she said, “we were stuck in many ways.” Victoria stated that her refusal “wasn’t a fib, we *were* busy, but we were glad... We could have put it (the coinciding event) off; we could’ve done something else. But we refused because we don’t believe in doing that.” Her husband also has a service business, and Victoria said he had also turned down customers based on their Christian beliefs, such as strippers and others “in that realm.” Victoria empathized with business owners whose businesses suffered for what she perceived as conviction in their religious beliefs. Victoria connected these concerns with her desire as a OMM member to “get the word out there as a Christian, as a business person.”

Indeed, many members demonstrate in their posts and replies to the OMM Facebook page that they also connect larger anxieties about their place in society with their activism around media. One member replied to an OMM post about the success of *I Can Only Imagine*:

We loved it, and I’m not surprised at its success. I’m certain there are enough Christians to change things for the better in our country, and we are finally beginning to make a difference. We were complacent way too long, and we came so close to losing nearly every religious freedom we had.

Indeed, a lack of religious freedom and a feeling that other groups, particularly LGBTQ communities, are provided rights and protections that Christian-conservatives aren’t, are themes that run across the OMM Facebook posts and comments. While often focused more on media than wider political concerns (which is typically left to the larger, more generalist AFA), OMM regularly posts articles and crowd-funding campaigns related to perceived injustices wrought on Christians. Much like the bakery cases, one such post

detailed a crowd funding campaign for a Washington florist who was fined and sued for refusing to sell flowers to a same-sex couple. One member replied to the post:

Christian business owners should be able to refuse biz to someone based on their faith just like other biz owners of diff faiths do. It's no diff. We have to stop being so one-sided where the law applies only to certain people.

Another replied with examples of how she felt Christians were denied religious freedoms:

There are ways Christians are forced to do things against their faith like paying in taxes for people to murder their unborn children through abortion... Muslims don't have to serve me bacon because its (sic) against their religion. I don't think they're right but I can easily go elsewhere and not make a big stink of it.

Such examples from the experiences of “everyday” Christians fuel a sense of marginalization repeatedly expressed throughout online OMM discussions and in my interviews with members, and demonstrates how members draw out their experiences with media to their place in wider society.

While OMM occasionally discusses socio-political issues like those above, a major way they highlight discrimination against the Christian religion is through media representation. Two examples from media were TV Land's *Impastor*, about a man posing as a gay pastor and Fox's *Lucifer*, about Satan living on earth in the modern day. Both series were targeted by OMM, with members frequently citing the shows as examples of the industries' willingness to engage in “Christian-bashing.” Focusing the group's actions on these shows allows OMM to educate members about the ways their beliefs are disrespected by the industries and also provides comparative examples of the ways their own identities are represented by media in comparison to other identities like liberals, atheists, and/or LGBTQ individuals and communities. These representations, along with evidence of societal ills caused by media and “proof” of the moral and economic value of quality programming, all cohere to form OMM's curriculum for media industries and

larger society. This curriculum is directly meant to render visible how wrong the media industries are on these issues and instill OMM's "corrections."

### **Implications of Imaginary and Tactics**

The examples above demonstrated the many ways both XMC and OMM imagine the media industries are wrong, and the tactics they enact to educate and correct industrial practices. While both groups' notions of the industries' misunderstandings and offenses differ in many obvious ways, it is notable that at the core they quite resemble each other's concerns.

In 1991, Fahey wrote that:

Status-based interest groups, including women, homosexuals, seniors, the disabled, and racial minorities perceive television as a 'cultural mirror' that has failed to 'reflect their [own] image[s] accurately.' They seek 'fuller and more positive representation' in television, because the medium threatens their rights as citizens when it treats them unfairly, excludes them, or only marginally includes them. (p. 648)

Although XMC is a fan or fan-activist group and likely wouldn't self-identify as an interest group, this description could easily apply to them and their demands for inclusion and representation of marginalized identities. Fahey (1991) contrasted these identity-based interest groups with: "Conservative and religious groups (who) view television as an intrusive threat to morals and Christian values and therefore seek to pressure the industry to prevent the degradation of society that results from the projection of alternative values" (p. 648). OMM fits naturally into this religious group category.

What is striking about these designations however, is that both groups could today quite easily fit into either category. It is each groups' accounting of their "industry is wrong" imaginary that demonstrates the true marginalized identity-based pleas for fair



representation on one hand, and value-laden, society-redeeming demands on the other. For instance, OMM seeks more positive representation in the media for Christians, conservatives, and even women and mothers.<sup>35</sup> Members identify as marginalized citizens that are excluded by the media industries. Conversely, XMC increasingly works to pressure NBCUniversal, and other members of the media industries, to provide feminist and queer value-based programming that opposes what they view as the deleterious effects of sexism, ageism and other representational threats in media. Although not religious, the group also promotes their favored programming that emphasizes moral lessons about “the greater good.”

Of course, it is a misrepresentation to equate the groups’ demands. Members of both would likely strongly resist suggestions that they share many commonalities.<sup>36</sup> And they would be correct that the groups’ foundational values and politics, more often than not, lie at polar opposites. What is useful analytically is the elucidation of the ways the groups’ imagined industries inform the oppositional stances they take against media. In other words, both groups’ imaginings of industrial structures as almost always directly oppositional to their own identities and politics also reveals the constructed nature of

---

<sup>35</sup> Indeed, less-publicized, but often pursued targets of OMM campaigns are media projects that the group feels misrepresent or disrespect motherhood and/or the mother identity. These include NBC’s *Good Girls* and ABC’s *American Housewife*, which the group labeled, “an insult to all mothers and housewives” (AFA, 2018).

<sup>36</sup> Monica Cole and some OMM members did, however, acknowledge they held some similar concerns about the media as liberal groups, particularly regarding representations of women, violence and graphic sexuality. Monica Cole told me: “As far as groups that we don’t have necessarily a common tie...or an ongoing relationship, because we may disagree on some other, you know, opinions - there *is* going to be some common core activism going on that would overlap: the degrading of women, and humans in general. People in general. We don’t want anyone exploited, and there are other groups that may not be conservative or family groups that our causes could overlap somewhat. And we’re not necessarily saying we don’t want to work with them, it just never has come up. And so, I think it’s wonderful that we’re working toward the same goal and the same cause. And I think that, many times, it’s just to stand up for what’s right and what individuals believe in.” Although these conversations sometimes emerged in discussions with OMM, the subject of conservative activist groups was never broached in any detailed way with XMC.

their own positionality. These imaginaries are exposed as only the outermost layers of overlapping (re)constructions of audiences and industries, as each imagines the other and repositions accordingly. Industrial constructions and positioning will be addressed in Chapter 6. However, these audience results lend support to the results of an experimental study of audience perceptions of news media bias by Ariyanto, Hornsey, and Gallois (2007). The study demonstrated that: “Consumers of media do not simply reflect on the content of the message, they peer beyond the words and make assumptions based on whether the media outlet has previous or apparent allegiances of the ingroup or the outgroup” (p. 277). Chapter 7 will further explore both audience groups’ identifications as marginalized by media and draw out the role of the internet and contemporary politics in these results. What is important to note here is the emphasis on “otherness” and exclusion displayed in this chapter’s data. In essence, both groups demonstrate the ways they feel marginalized and oppressed by media industries, and often, larger society. Thus, the groups employ tactics that seek to reveal this unjustness to the masses, in the hopes that they might begin to disrupt what they see as the normative identities and practices of media industries. Such understandings of “normativity” will continue to be important as we think about the cases in relation to queer theoretical notions of normativity and tactics (or “troubling”).

Because both groups’ imaginaries center on industrial failures, neglect, or oppression, it seems logical their answering tactics are meant to address these shortcomings with education. Spreading the word about their own exclusion or marginalization to wider society allows for the publicity and community-building necessary to leverage increased power against (or within) the industries. Further,

although by no means confident the industries are attending to their lessons, both groups attempt to teach the media their viewpoints and desires through public statements, actions, and by speaking the industrial language of profit (or profit-loss) through selective consumerism. Tactics that “spread the word” come naturally to both groups. OMM, of course, consists of many evangelical Christians who are charged by their religion to spread the messages of Jesus Christ. This is an imperative felt by many of my respondents, and the perceived stakes are evidenced by Susan’s answer to my question about how she felt about AFA being classified a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC): “Well I don’t see things the way they (the SPLC) see things, but I mean, basically, you know, to just allow somebody to die and go to hell and not say anything would be more hateful than to disagree, you know...” For OMM members that embrace evangelical teachings and the urgent calls to duty from AFA and OMM, “educating” others about their beliefs has likely become almost routine. Similarly, many XMC members have worked on various activist causes and/or for marketing or publicity companies, and thus disseminating information is a core skill for many. It was also surprising to note the multiple academics involved in the administration of XMC. Indeed, Ariel holds a PhD in English literature and teaches university classes on topics like “popular culture” and “warrior women.” She is often tasked with representing the group at conventions and other fan events. Ariel is thus well versed in education and her identity as a scholar makes her equipped for the many public events she attends to spread XMC concerns about identity, media representation, and the *Xena* legacy.

Finally, some of the results of this imaginary and its tactics demonstrate the continued problematic positions audiences take up to advance their causes to the

industries. The tactics aimed at educating again included audience work to justify the groups' utility for the industries through demonstrating their market value. If market value is maintained as a barrier to entry into "talks" with industries, smaller and less sought-after groups are less likely to gain access or representation. Further, that so many tactics are performed as groups completely oppositional to and marginalized by industries, audiences may allow for the framing of themselves and their cause as extremist, fringe, or simply unrealistic. Further, media industries can then hide their inattention behind "can't make everyone happy" defenses, and continue to appear unfriendly and impenetrable to most audiences. Finally, this chapter's imaginary and tactics begins to expose many of the complexities surrounding the audience groups' politics and positioning around identity, activism, and politics.

## Chapter 5 - Imagined: The Industry is Risk-Averse

So far we've seen that XCM and OMM imagine the media industries trade in huge amounts of money, and operate based on logics of profitability. Further, it was demonstrated that OMM and XMC both estimate most industrial practices as operating under faulty understandings of audiences and profit. That the industries continue operating in these ways, with what both groups perceive as very little deviation from the status quo, is viewed as an outcome of an industrial aversion to risk. Both groups repeatedly describe the media industries, and their corporate sponsors, as risk-averse and terrified of change. In particular, potential for loss of profit, controversy, reputational harm, and reduced job security are all noted as driving media industries' fears of taking risks.

From media content and representation, to audience reception, to audience demographics and marketing, members of both groups identified the industries' aversion to risk as indicative of related industrial practices and behaviors. Although OMM and XMC clearly differ in their understandings of the identities and politics that might fuel industrial fears, both seem to imagine that industries will err in the interest of an industry-defined "mass appeal." For instance, Ariel argued that while representation in media has improved for women, people of color, and those with LGBTQ and other marginalized identities, the industries are afraid to create characters that display more than one of these identities. This may be due to a fear of becoming too niche and missing out on the widest possible audience segments. Ariel explained how this reluctance played out in recent blockbuster films:

Media companies are realizing that a movie like *Black Panther* is profitable, but they have to take out the queer content because they're not comfortable with intersectionality right now... I think we can say the same thing about *Wonder Woman*. We have a movie where the character is canonically queer, but as far as we can tell from the movie, she's heterosexual and a white woman. *Black Panther* is about a straight black man. And I think that Hollywood still wants to do one identity at a time.

Many in XMC observe that representational change is slow in the media industries, and that the industries' hesitance must be based on fear of taking financial risks. Laura explained about the industries: "there are worksheets of data, and the numbers have to be worth it because they put a lot of money into it, so they sure as heck don't want to *lose* any money." Thus, XMC understands that any tactics they enact need to address, or at least recognize, industrial aversion to risk and profit-loss.

While XMC is concerned that media industries perceive diverse representation as risky, OMM feels that positive representations of Christians or what they might consider traditional or moral content is seen as risky by the industries. In an article on the AFA website titled "How Two Homosexual Men Changed America," the AFA Executive Vice President wrote about a speedy culture shift in which LGBTQ identities are becoming increasingly accepted in the United States. The cause, the article argued, was a media propaganda campaign begun in the 1980s with the goal of normalizing LGBTQ identities and issues in the mass media (Vitagliano, 2018). Vitagliano argued in the article that the campaign had been immensely successful and that: "These trends pose a serious challenge to Christians who will increasingly face a culture...that rejects a biblical view of sexuality, marriage, and family." Indeed AFA and OMM believe the media industries do not find LGBTQ content risky at all:

...can we talk about the LGBTQ agenda for just a moment? Their worldview is - everywhere. On Disney channel last year alone there were a record number of LGBTQ "firsts." Just take a look.

- Feb 23, 2017- Disney channel's first gay kiss airs on **Star vs. the Forces of Evil**
- March 17, 2017- LeFou from **Beauty and the Beast** becomes the first real-life openly gay character in a Disney movie
- June 23, 2017- Disney Channel debuts its first "coming out" scene on **The Lodge**
- Oct 27, 2017- Cyrus from **Andi Mack** becomes the first openly gay main character on Disney Channel (White, 2018)

Instead, to the OMM and many other Evangelical Christians, it is positive representations of Christians and Christianity that the industries see as risky. In an interview with *The New York Times*, David A.R. White, the Founder of Pure Flix, explained that while mainstream media industries like making money from Christians, they fear actually featuring them in content: "The major networks like the audience of faith...but when you have to go to the audience and say faith things on television, well, we might be too open" (Rosman, 2017).

Of course, the most relevant aspect of industrial risk-aversion to which both OMM and XMC must be attuned is what it portends for industrial reactions to the groups' own tactics. Both groups at times develop their tactics to either alleviate the perception of risk associated with their demands, or to emphasize it. For instance, while both may work to communicate the profitability of creating their preferred media, they also at times leverage industrial fears by threatening economic consequences or political controversy. XMC and OMM thus address their imaginary of risk-averse industries through the following tactical themes: (1) negotiate delicately, (2) speak with our dollars, and (3) court controversy.

**Tactic: Negotiate Delicately**

Because media industries are seen as risk-averse, both groups approach interactions with the industries as delicate negotiations. OMM and XMC consider their dealings with media industries negotiations because, as both groups envision media industries' goals and values so far from their own, neither group realistically expects to get their way completely. Indeed, both groups are heterogeneous, and contain thousands of members with different opinions about how to best reach their goals. Thus, each time they approach the industries; in many ways the groups are inevitably simply requesting a seat at the negotiating table. The negotiations are delicate because industries are perceived as so skittish. The groups must find a delicate balance in which industries feel meeting their demands reduces risk and ignoring them increases it. Often, the worst imaginable outcome for the groups is having industrial targets walk away from the negotiating table altogether.

### **XMC & Negotiate Delicately**

Because XMC feels they have worked long and hard to make the progress they have in publicizing the *Xena* brand and getting NBCUniversal to even consider a reboot, they also feel like they now have something to lose. Thus, they have increasingly found themselves willing to back away from some of their demands for the core desire of wanting a new *Xena* project. For instance, despite that Lucy Lawless has raised the idea that the new *Xena* should be Black, and although she agrees, Ariel explained that realistically she and other fans would likely have to “settle” for one marker of diversity. Expanding on her earlier discussion of *Black Panther* and *Wonder Woman*, Ariel reiterated that she doesn't expect media industries to take a risk on “too much” diversity:



I think the new *Xena* will be white, if it happens... But I think she *will* be bisexual. I mean, I hope I'm wrong, because I'm in favor of showing diversity in all of the ways that it exists. But I think media creators, at least a big company like NBC or Universal, are probably afraid to take risks, and they're slowly seeing the result of something like ClexaCon<sup>37</sup> and realizing that, "Oh, queer content is profitable!" But if we have Black lesbians on an action show, set in Ancient Greece? That's too niche, and it's not going to speak to everyone.

Ariel believes that for a new *Xena*, audiences will likely get a queer show, but not necessarily a queer, racially diverse show. And because she understands the industrial logic behind such a decision, she feels that such representation is at least somewhat negotiable.

Despite XMC's activist-like stance when it comes to representation and other textual concerns with the *Xena* franchise, the group must perform a delicate balancing act when addressing the industries. Although members of XMC worked long to encourage fans to understand their own power in the age of increased attention to, and popularity of, fandom and fan cultures, they scrambled to reign in fan anger over what became increasingly clear was a direction for the reboot that would not include the original actresses. On January 11, 2016, XMC released a statement on the reboot in which the group's admins acknowledged fan anger and disappointment but warned of what the admins perceived as the dangers of negative reactions by fans. The admins claimed the reboot as a victory for XMC and *Xena* fans overall. They also aired their concern that the power of the fans could have a negative impact on the series if NBCUniversal thought that there was simply no pleasing the original fans. Thus the group advised their

---

<sup>37</sup> ClexaCon is described on its website as "the largest multi-fandom event for LGBTQ women & allies. Celebrating LGBTQ women and characters in TV, film, web series, comics, books and more." (ClexaCon, 2018). The first event was held in 2017 and was organized in response to the death of Lexa on the CW's *The 100* (described earlier in the dissertation), as well as other issues related to LGBTQ media representation.

followers to proceed with caution, soon clarifying which types of comments would be allowed on the page. These included: “--expressing disappointment about the reboot, (and) --expressing your intention not to personally watch the reboot.” Further, XMC listed which comments *wouldn't* be allowed on the page, including, “calls to cancel or boycott the reboot” and “wishing failure upon the reboot.”

XMC began posting increasingly positive content about the reboot, celebrating the career and public comments of the first writer helmed for the new series, promoting the franchise overall (like urging fans to support a forthcoming *Xena* comic book series) and working to sidestep any negativity about the future directions of the franchise. Some of the last sentences of their statement on the reboot revealed the admins' deeper concerns about the impact the fans might have:

We believe that decision-makers at NBC Universal *\*do\** monitor social media, and we want them to know what you think about the reboot, whether you are for or against it. However, we do not want the reboot to be canceled due to fan backlash, and accordingly cannot support any efforts to stop the reboot from happening.

Indeed, through their perception that they had achieved many successes after years of petitioning the industries, XMC and other fans now recognized the possibility that the industries might be paying close attention to the group because of their hard-won publicity. They felt they now had to tread cautiously lest they reveal fandom in-fighting or animosity toward the entertainment industries and new *Xena* projects. They needed to avoid turning executives off of the original fans as an important and valued market for future iterations of the franchise. Eddie described the care the group takes with fans that get angry with public statements made by the industries about the upcoming reboot:

We're trying to steer them away from threatening not to watch it because we think that will just cause Universal to not market it to us. Instead of marketing it to the queer community that is the old fan base, they will create a show for straight men.

So we're like, "No, just keep asking for Lucy and Renee to return. Don't be negative." And they're like, "We need to show them that we're serious." And I'm like, "They don't care!" We're trying to get that across. We don't want to threaten them (NBCUniversal). We want them to see us as profit, not as too hard to please.

In this way, XMC remains in a precarious position. They feel strongly about many aspects of the franchise and want to communicate their desires. Of course, this is the very reason for their existence. At the same time, they worry that pushing the industries too far could backfire, and they'd lose any ownership or impact they've gained from the many years' work they've already invested. Thus, they feel they must be both willing to provide negotiables to the industries and manage their own members' expectations and reactions to soothe those same nervous industries.

### **OMM & Negotiate Delicately**

Certainly, in many ways OMM's tactics are much less delicate than those deployed by XMC. Typically, OMM takes a quite confrontational approach to media industries. Labeling targeted media "trash" and immediately moving to disrupt financial support through campaigns against advertisers are not actions that seem to invite negotiation. While it is true that XMC seems to be more willing to work within the industries' own confines and norms to reach their goals, there are ways that OMM also looks to alleviate industrial fears about complying with the group's demands. Primarily, the group does this through politeness in private communications and "reluctant" boycotting, appeals to neutrality to excuse industries from politics, and very occasionally, a "wait and see" approach to potentially offensive content.

In their most public communications, OMM embraces a confrontational and damning rhetoric, describing the media content they target as "depraved," "trash," and

worse. Privately however, the communication tools that OMM provides its members sound much milder. For instance, in the OMM automated email for members to contact AARP (American Association of Retired Persons) asking them to pull ads from NBC's *Good Girls*, the email subject line reads simply, "Hope this was simply an oversight." The body of the email details the group's complaints about the content of *Good Girls* and goes on to explain:

... While your company is a household name, I do not agree with your financial backing of this program. I certainly hope your company's financial support of this type of television programming with advertising dollars is simply an oversight... As a consumer, I am asking you to please pull your sponsorship immediately. I urge you to place "Good Girls" on your "do not advertise" list. My decision to support AARP depends on it... I look forward to hearing from you regarding my concern. (AFA, 2018)

Although direct, the email lacks the severity of the rhetoric found on the OMM website and Facebook page. Instead, members are encouraged to approach sponsors as concerned and loyal consumers who are looking for a reason *not* to pull their support from the company. Monica Cole explained to me OMM members take such stances as members of the public and as informed consumers: "I mean, the broadcast airways they belong to the public, and so we just ask for that. And, it's not censorship, we're asking the companies to do that because we *want* to support them with our dollars." Thus, we see OMM's "soft" boycott tactic of, at least initially, emphasizing the potential support of sponsors rather than focusing on their ruin. This more delicate approach is designed especially for the risk-averse industries the group targets. It offers the promise of a reasonable and polite negotiation while leveraging industrial fears of profit loss and controversy.

Indeed, besides losing money, it seems that OMM believes the industries' next greatest fear is of controversy. Thus one of their strategies is to provide companies with an "out" when it comes to the political stakes of the group's demands. Rather than asking

media industries or sponsors to align themselves with Christian, conservative or other OMM-specific causes, the group appeals to the responsibility of the companies to remain “neutral.” OMM’s understanding of remaining neutral especially seems to mean the exclusion of products and media representation of and for LGBTQ-identified people and communities. The call to remain neutral is most often used by OMM when the group targets ad campaigns that include LGBTQ content (such as JC Penney featuring lesbian and gay couples in advertising), when companies support LGBTQ causes (such as Home Depot and Kraft participating in Pride events), and when companies’ products are produced and marketed specifically for LGBTQ consumers (as in Zales’s “Love and Pride” wedding band collection).

In a post about the Zales “Love and Pride” collection, OMM stated they’d contacted Zales, “urging the jewelry company to remain neutral in the culture war.” Further, the post explained this “neutrality” logic thus: “if all married couples want to be treated equal, then special wedding bands are not necessary.” Many group members replied to the post agreeing, with one stating: “...EXACTLY my thoughts! If they’re all equal, why do they need ‘special’ wedding bands?” Monica Cole explained to me that sometimes businesses immediately pull their advertising when OMM complains, but that:

Other times we notice that some companies may... they’ll want to hear from the other side. And I understand that, and we ask companies - for example like JC Penny - to remain neutral in the culture war. So sometimes they will just drop their support silently, and that’s all we ask.

Monica’s framing of OMM’s position as one end of two “sides” on an issue like LGBTQ rights/visibility demonstrates the group’s work to emphasize to industries that such identities are still controversial and thus, potentially dangerous for companies to embrace. Further, the group then provides the skittish businesses an escape by offering a tame and

fair-sounding title of “neutrality” for conceding to their demands. Finally, the group assures the risk-averse company they can “silently” comply and thus avoid any controversy that might be caused by publicly acknowledging OMM’s involvement in their decision.

Finally, OMM’s demands often seem extreme considering the contemporary media environment. While some demands, like less explicit sexuality during daytime television, don’t sound too unrealistic, other concerns are less likely to translate to wider audiences of (particularly non-religious) concerned parents and families. This seems especially true when OMM demands that media content be Biblically accurate or appropriate. Such demands seem to insinuate that almost *any* mainstream media content is unacceptable. Once the group has selected a target, it is rare they back down. However, in order to avoid appearing unreasonable or completely unwilling to negotiate, OMM occasionally withdraws from some targets to demonstrate their restraint. One example is the CBS series *Living Biblically*. In a long Facebook post about the show, OMM explained that many members had asked the group’s official stance on it and OMM’s decision was ultimately not to endorse the series, but also not to organize a campaign against it. Instead, the group decided to take a “wait and see” approach, noting that although “the series tackles Biblical passages from a more loose, political perspective:”

Movieguide and other conservative and Christian groups find the show is actually a breath of fresh air in the sitcom arena on TV... 1MM does have concern how this (show) may confuse nonbelievers or new believers, but we will not be taking action at this time. The program is and will remain on our radar though.

When some members posted disagreeing with this course of action, the OMM Facebook account responded:

1MM realizes that not everyone will agree with this decision, and it could change in the future. It was a tough call, but for 1MM to be taken seriously and continue

to make a difference, our organization cannot be the boy that cried wolf. This decision was not taken lightly.

Such decisions seem to be made in recognition that in demanding Christian-oriented content, the group must appear to at least be reasonable in its reception of such content when it *is* produced. Further, it demonstrates an awareness that risk-averse industries are less likely to take seriously or publicly acknowledge a fringe group whose demands seem completely unrealistic and unrepresentative of larger audience desires.

**Tactic: Speak with our Dollars**

As has been demonstrated thus far, both groups use core tactics that play to what they perceive to be the industries' primary concern, profit. The two groups tend to differ in the ways they leverage the industries' fears about profitability. As described in this and other chapters, XMC mostly looks to reassure industries that there is a profitable market for a new *Xena* project. Contrarily, OMM works primarily through boycotts and threatened boycotts, attempting to play to industries' fears of *losing* large audience/market segments. At the same time, both groups occasionally trade in the other's preferred tactics. As discussed in the previous chapter, OMM often rallies support for Christian media projects to demonstrate to the industries that there is profit to be made from such content. And while XMC discourages its members from threatening boycott, some interviewee responses demonstrated that there are limits to what the group would accept before leveraging their power as an important audience group for the *Xena* brand. For instance, many agreed that if *Xena* and Gabrielle were depicted as exclusively heterosexual, they wouldn't support a new project. This lack of support, Eddie argued,

would be very damaging to a new project, threatening its reputation *and* potential for profit:

I think if the core fan base dropped out, you would get a handful of new people. But for the most part, if the core fan base dropped out, that means there's a serious problem with it for representation. And...I don't think *Xena* can be...like it needs the base of the queer community in order to...last long enough to reach the majority.

Here Eddie demonstrates his belief that for the industries to gain the most profitable mainstream market segment, and avoid larger scandals, they would have to please the niche segments most invested in getting the project representationally "right." Thus, both OMM and XMC are selective, and often savvy, about when and how to make the most use of the industries' fears or, when needed, mitigate them.

### **Tactic: Courting Controversy**

Because both OMM and XMC imagine that the industries will ultimately strive to avoid risk, they often look to leverage risks they feel they can best deploy themselves. While guaranteeing industrial loss of profit is a tall order, audiences feel equipped (especially in the digital age) to embarrass large companies or embroil them in controversy. Indeed, it is controversy that both groups primarily tend to threaten through the perceived power and status of their groups' represented identities, their claimed marginalization by industries, and their concentrated attention and investment in the media texts themselves. Because both groups identify as activist, this course of action seems logical. Both groups have serious socio-political concerns about the content produced by the industries, and both look to publicize these concerns to further their goals.



Many of both groups' tactics detailed thus far fall into this "courting controversy" category. For example, XMC's activism to expose the plight of older actresses is also meant to convince NBCUniversal that it would be risky *not* to produce a show with representation of older women. As well, OMM's tactics to publicize "family-oriented" brands and companies' sponsorship of explicit or otherwise controversial content is meant to demonstrate to sponsors that investing in such content isn't worth the risk of alienating their core customer base. Thus, many of the tactics detailed in this dissertation function as threats that emphasize to media industries audiences' potential for deliberately generating controversy. It is important however, to recognize analytically that such strategies are usually designed specifically with imagined industrial skittishness in mind.

### **XMC & Courting Controversy**

One clear example of this is XMC's contingency plan for a *Xena* project created by an industrial entity that might decide to ignore the group's demands. Prior to learning the reboot had been canceled, Eddie told me that if the original actresses weren't involved in the reboot at all, he would not support it and instead would find a way to stream it illegally:

...Just to check it out. But, um, if Lucy and Renee are not a part of it... at that point they'll probably get them to sign contracts, you know, not to bad mouth it. But if they're not part of it, that means they didn't want to be. And that means we're not watching it. Hands down.

In addition, many XMC members noted they'd look to the original *Xena* actors and crew to decide whether the new show appropriately supported the fans, or instead did what Lucy Lawless said publicly would constitute dishonoring the "intention of the show:"

breaking its “covenant with fans” (Paur, 2015). Industries have recently learned through the example of *The 100* Lexa death that fan backlash over representation can create industry-shaking controversy. Added to that is ABC’s recent high-profile lesson in the steep costs of dismissing widespread audience concerns. After audience complaints that the *Roseanne* reboot didn’t honor the intent and politics of the original (Kirkland, 2018), the network declined to shift the content or apologize and instead renewed the reboot that was currently making ratings history. However, this perceived win was followed by ABC’s swift cancellation of the series due to a racist tweet by series star Roseanne Barr (Davis & Peiser, 2018). The failure of the network to address early audience concerns led to wide scale online controversy and days of trending twitter topics related to the network’s decision-making process throughout the development and airing of the series. Another threat related to XMC’s star-related concerns about the reboot has recently emerged in the industrial and public consciousness. Controversy erupted when the original cast of the rebooted *Charmed* criticized the new series for excluding them and not honoring the original fans of the series (Sprague, 2018). From these examples, it seems impossible for industries not to increasingly consider the liabilities tied up in both the character and approval of former stars of rebooted series and ensuring the happiness of their original fandoms. Such examples demonstrate that both media industries and audiences are likely increasingly aware of the power of fan-created controversy in the production of mass media.

### **OMM & Courting Controversy**

That lesson is less novel for OMM, who can trace their lineage through numerous audience-created controversies. Any OMM campaign demonstrates the group's comfort with threatening media industries with controversy. Indeed, their very notoriety in the media means that even if a campaign is small or largely unsuccessful, any company targeted will inevitably face scrutiny, perhaps to a damaging degree. Although OMM is often ridiculed for having nowhere near one million members, the audacity of their name and the humor many find in their demands mean that anyone they publicly target also risks becoming associated with their infamy. While OMM is aware of how they are viewed by many, they court the increased publicity for their brand of controversy that can then be deployed against the targets of their choice. For example, in response to the OMM campaign against the series *The New Normal*, the series producers included satirical characters in an episode that were meant to represent and ridicule OMM. OMM responded to this move by posting the following to their Facebook:

Last week's episode of "The New Normal" referenced One Million Moms. Even though they attempted to poke fun, the show actually made One Million Moms look good. The conservative grandmother chose three girls who are raised in traditional families who share the same beliefs she does to help her cancel her granddaughter's fake wedding. She tells them, "I need the help of every one of you future One Million Moms." By the way, thanks for the free publicity!

Such moves represent strategies of optics in which OMM feels it is accomplishing its goal in threatening controversy simply by embodying it as a social entity. Monica Cole told me about the media industries: "it seems like networks want to ask for forgiveness instead of permission. It's a little easier maybe to ask for forgiveness instead of permission. So, we're finding that out." Indeed, OMM understands most in the mainstream media industries will not approach the group to consult on what kinds of media content to produce (as they might for, say, fan groups). Instead, OMM reserves

(and perhaps relishes) the option of leveraging the industries' fear of risking controversy by maneuvering them into a position in which they must "ask forgiveness."

### **Implications of Imaginary and Tactics**

Much as with the first imaginary, audience estimations of the tactics needed to manage risk-averse industries in many ways emphasize the audiences' lack of power. They certainly expose some audience inclinations to believe they must work within industrial norms to have any influence. XMC's increasing willingness to negotiate with media industries on issues of representation they believe are vital demonstrates just how precarious is their hard-won influence. Further, OMM's need to threaten risk-averse industries with consumer markets that demonstrate huge buying power emphasizes that for them and many other groups, their demonstrated financial worth may never be enough. And worse, it reveals industrial mechanisms fully deploying the demand that audiences need be economically powerful to have a say in the production of the content they consume.

However, this imaginary and its associated tactics also expose industries' weaknesses and illustrate the potential power of consumer activism, especially when industrial discourse minimizes or ignores audience power. Livingstone (2015) highlighted the important link between Stuart Hall's (2003) work on decoding and the need for audience-centered research, and argued:

...in relation to claims about media representations, the study of audience reception has challenged the authority of elite textual analysts to conjure up visions of model or implied, imagined or inscribed readers without thinking to check whether actual readers are obediently falling into line with "audience conjectures" (Stromer-Galley & Schiappa, 1998, p. 27). (p. 441)

Indeed, a number of scholars suggest that fan practices and other active audience movements are inherently rendered impotent by immovable industrial power structures. They ridicule any suggestion that fans, for example, could deploy digital tactics to enact social change in the way of more explicitly political online activist movements. For instance, Fuchs (2014) said about Henry Jenkins' work: "Reading this book, one gets the impression that the world is only inhabited by fans, as if the Arab Spring, WikiLeaks, Anonymous, the Occupy movement and the widespread protests and revolutions in the world during 2011 never happened. One wonders why Henry Jenkins advances a new form of elitism that privileges fans and disregards activists and citizens" (p. 64). Fuchs's conflation of studying one movement with denying the existence of another aside, such claims also minimize the very real existence of fan activists and fan activism literature with important empirical findings (Scardaville, 2005; Earl & Kimport, 2009; Brough & Shresthova). Further, this argument presupposes that Occupy or Anonymous, for example, hold more important social goals than fan groups. I'd argue that the need for media representation of older women and quality LGBTQ narratives constitutes a socio-political imperative, and certainly fulfills the promise of media visibility as described by Gross (2001). Even more complicated, *OMM* would argue their representation demands are as or more important than XMC's. Thus, rather than spend the bulk of our analyses measuring respondents' political legitimacies, scholars of industry/audience interactions should perhaps evaluate the object they claim to study and leave the politics of representation to scholars most equipped for such analyses.

Andrejevic (2008) argued:

The danger, in a savvy era, is that the goal of self-reflexive knowledge is not so much to reshape the media—to imagine how things might be done differently—as it is to take pleasure in identifying with the insiders. The next best thing to having power, on this account, is identifying with those who do rather than naively imagining that power can (or should) be redistributed or realigned. (p. 390)

What the results of this imaginary reveal to us is that careful audience considerations of industrial structures and practices don't negate an oppositional stance toward the industries. Both XMC and OMM indeed endeavor to reshape media. And both display a lack of naiveté or utopian optimism about their industrial influence, along with a determined and persistent engagement that refuses to ironically dismiss the possibilities of achieving their activist goals. The data on XMC and OMM reveal that to learn industrial norms is not necessarily to become their uncritical admirer or to tremble at their power. Instead, this chapter demonstrates the groups' savvy recognition of the fears of skittish industries, and the groups' readiness to exploit those fears for their own purposes. They perform these tactics to varying success, but their imaginings and activities as detailed in this dissertation certainly counter simplistic and reductive claims about the limitations of audience savvy, activism, and industrial knowledge.

This chapter illustrated both groups' willingness to deploy, or threaten to deploy, the political power of their identity-based constituencies in the event of risk-averse media industries failing to meet their demands. When thinking about wider understandings of marginality and political power, the data presented here demonstrate that OMM seems to feel more confident in their ability to cause political controversy, embarrassment, and/or financial consequences for offending members of the industries. XMC seems less

inclined to directly threaten based on their political demands (particularly gender/sexuality/race representational concerns), than to trade on their value as an invested fan audience and potential market. Certainly, this is at least partly a result of the way the groups' missions are oriented, OMM as primarily *against* certain media, and XMC primarily *for* certain media. Still, members of OMM would likely argue that XMC demands for representation are less politically controversial for media industries than their own. Thus, considering their claims of marginality both in media and in the larger political sphere, it is interesting OMM feels confident industries might cave to their political power. At the same time, it is notable that XMC seems to tread carefully around identity-based threats, afraid such political demands might alienate them further from the industries. While we will see in the next chapter empirically how the industries tend to respond to both groups' tactics, these self-constructions of the viability of the groups' political power allow for a different reading of just how minority, marginalized or oppressed the groups actually imagine themselves and their potential for political influence. Contrasting such claims of marginalization with expectations of political acknowledgment and impact might reveal just how anti-normative the groups truly believe their own ideologies are within media and wider culture. The evidence presented in this chapter inform the dissertation's concluding arguments about marginality and the need to tie "anti-normative" tactics to political (bodily) oppression.

## Chapter 6 - From Community to Ridicule: Industrial Responses to XMC and OMM

There are two main categories of “industrial response” to XMC and OMM: (1) industrial behaviors and official actions and statements that do not acknowledge the groups but *may* constitute a reaction to group practices, and (2) actual industrial statements and actions that are directed to, or name or acknowledge, the groups and/or their associated audiences, groups and allies. The second type of response also often reveals industrial perceptions and opinions about the groups. The first type of responses are typically comprised of what the industries actually *do* related to the media/practices the groups work to influence, but the actual group influence is often impossible to confirm. For instance, for the *Xena* brand, even any relatively short, official announcements by NBCUniversal often work to remind XMC and *Xena* fans that there is wider movement and awareness related to the *Xena* brand. XMC could interpret such announcements as, in some way, industrial responses to the publicity generated by their group. For XMC, examples could include a number of industrial actions described throughout the dissertation, such as NBCUniversal’s announcements they were pursuing a reboot and their subsequent statements about the project leading up to, and including, the announcement that the project had been dropped. Often, these were the most obvious industrial responses XMC might be able to judge as resultant of their work, but being brief, “official,” and never directed at them, they also made for some of the most frustrating and confusing industrial communications.

Actually intended communications from the industries are often easier to decode for the groups and provide a clear industrial “other” and message to imagine and



strategize around. For instance, on the OMM Facebook page, one member posted the response she stated she'd received from AARP in regard to her complaint about the organization's sponsorship of NBC's *Good Girls*. Part of the response read: "Let me assure you that we are a non-partisan membership organization and our ad purchases are not based on political motives." The response went on to say that AARP does not contribute to "any fund for political candidates at any level of government." This response led to other OMM members discussing on the Facebook post what they perceived to be the liberal, Democrat-leaning politics of AARP. Thus, AARP's direct response led to members sharpening their perception of AARP as a particular imagined industry, and these imaginings likely led to their later interactions with the company.

XMC and OMM have experienced numerous industrial responses of both types over the years. Many of these will be detailed in this chapter that works to answer RQ5: "How do members of media industries understand these audience groups, their constructions and tactics, and their potential/ability to influence industries?" Although the industries' responses are varied, for XMC they fall under three response themes: (1) "Industrial Awareness," which attempts to ascertain how aware the industries are of the group and its goals, (2) "Building community: Creatives' Identification with Fans" which examines the trend of industrial workers who do creative work identifying most with XMC and other fans, and (3), "Artistic Authority and Creative Control" which demonstrates the boundaries to audience influence erected by members of the industries who claim artistic authority and ownership over media texts. Last, the chapter will discuss these results, particularly in relation to pertinent debates in studies of media

audience/industry interactions and influence as well as the literature on industrial cultures and practices.

### **Industrial Responses to XMC**

Perhaps the most pertinent question when it comes to media industries' responses to XMC is *how* aware they are of the group's existence. Or, if they're aware of the group at all. Further, it is useful to understand industrial perceptions of the accuracy of XMC's imaginings about the industries and specifically, the *Xena* reboot. As described in Chapter 3, XMC often feels isolated and excluded from the industries, and particularly frustrated with the many barriers they've encountered in attempting to identify decision-makers at NBCUniversal. The vast majority of XMC members seem to believe that NBCUniversal is aware of their existence, and perhaps some of their demands. However, they are unsure exactly *who* monitors their online activity, or to what ends. In addition, over the years the group has targeted others in the industries including other TV networks and media companies (like Netflix), as well as actors, producers, writers, and crew from the original *Xena* series and other media. Having fielded some industrial responses, particularly through social media or at fan events, XMC again knows they reach at least some of these targets, but remain unaware of their ultimate impact.

The initial responses to XMC from within the media industries began with recognition from members of the original series. The original *Xena* actress Lucy Lawless especially demonstrated her growing awareness of XMC and other fan efforts at getting a new *Xena* project made. This awareness was probably due to her close relationship with the original *Xena* fandom. It seems likely that online fan murmurs about the desire for a

*Xena* movie, TV revival or reboot would have appeared on her social media feeds, and she certainly would have encountered fan questions about a new *Xena* at conventions and other public events. And indeed, occasionally she would tweet about a potential *Xena* revival or reboot project, or mention it in the press. Lawless made it clear she agreed there should be a return of *Xena*, and increasingly, her pleas for someone to do *something* with the franchise, sounded much like the fans' requests. At the 2015 Comic Con, she emphasized the need for a new *Xena* project:

I've been pitching that show ... because ... there's a swell of interest still. ... I'm always being peppered with questions [about] when the *Xena* movie is coming. Guys, I'm pitching *my ass* off to make it happen, whether it's with me or not. I think it'd be funny to have a reboot like *Ash vs. Evil Dead* — like middle-aged *Xena* in a muumuu with a bad attitude and a smoking habit... I don't know what the hold-up is; it's about who has got the rights... But that's a piss-poor excuse anymore. Find who has got the rights, freakin' pay it. It's better to have 80 percent of something than 100 percent of nothing. Don't waste this opportunity; reinvigorate that franchise! ... It's an insane international character. They're fools not to bring it back. It's funny, it's sexy, it's action. (Goldberg, 2015)

XMC and other fans were pleased the *Xena* star had taken note of their desires. Not long after, on July 20, *The Hollywood Reporter* published an “exclusive” report online indicating that sources had informed them NBCUniversal was searching for a writer for a *Xena* reboot (Goldberg, 2015). It also noted that the show's original executive producers, Rob Tapert (also Lucy Lawless's husband) and Sam Raimi were attached to the project. Fans rejoiced, but became confused when a day later Lawless tweeted, “Sorry, friends! News of a #Xena reboot is just a rumor. I'd love it to happen one day but it's still in the wishful thinking stage” (Rosen, 2015). However, by August 13, NBC Entertainment chairman Bob Greenblatt had made the following public statement: “Yes, we're in the early stages of developing a new take on *Xena* and we're looking for a writer. We want to

do it” (Goldberg, 2015). In addition Greenblatt confirmed that Tapert and Raimi were attached to the project.

Thus would begin a years-long cycle of clashing industrial statements regarding *Xena*. Fans wondered how Lawless, married to the show’s executive producer, could have been left in the dark about a project with which he was clearly involved. During his initial announcement, Greenblatt also made the controversial statement that would spur XMC and other *Xena* fans to rally behind Lawless and lob accusations of sexism and ageism against the industries:

We’d love to have Lucy be a part of it - if we felt that her presence didn't overshadow the direction we take with it. I’m not sure how she could be part of it if she wasn’t playing Xena, and I don’t know if that’s a direction we’ll ever go. (Lovett, 2015)

XMC and others became concerned the aging woman who had occupied the titular role of the iconic character hadn’t even been invited into executives’ (or her own husband’s) conversations about the franchise. As the reboot moved forward, Lawless’ public statements would fluctuate between appearing to be aware and supportive of the reboot, to not being privy to the inner workings of the studio or to executives working on the project.

Those in the industries I spoke with regarding the reboot demonstrated some similar confusion to fans when it came to the relationship between Lawless, Tapert, and NBCUniversal, but also suggested fan interpretations of the situation were likely not accurate. Javier Grillo-Marxuach, who was hired by NBCUniversal to write the *Xena* reboot, mentioned about the concern that Lawless had initially been unaware of the project: “Her husband was the executive producer of the project. I had to convince him to let me do it. I assure you (she’d heard of it). Unless...they have communication issues

beyond any that I can imagine in a marriage.” He followed up by explaining that he wasn’t insinuating at all that Lawless lied in her public statements. Instead, he suggested that Lawless, like everyone in the industries, has multiple constituencies she must keep happy, and was also possibly constrained contractually:

...there are also business considerations where you don’t talk. You know like, when I first started working on this project, it was a top-secret thing. We couldn’t talk about it, you know? So like, you don’t know what’s going on in her business, in her life, and so forth. But, I mean, if your husband is travelling to L.A. for weeks at a time to pitch, you know, I mean ... I mean is it plausible that she didn’t know? I guess, I don’t know. She never called me. I never met her, you know?

What *was* clear from interviews is that those professionally involved with the *Xena* brand *were* familiar with fans’ perceptions of Lawless’ exclusion, but doubted their interpretations of the situation were correct. Adrienne Wilkinson, who played the role of Xena’s daughter “Livia/Eve” for two seasons of the original series, told me:

People seem to want to interpret it as someone is stealing this (the *Xena* role in the reboot) from her (Lawless) and she wants it and it’s not going to happen. And that’s the opposite of what seems to be happening. I mean Lucy has a new series that she’s loving, she’s enjoying her life, she’s married to the producer - who I’m sure that she could have some words with if she really wanted to. So, I just don’t think there’s the “diss,” so to speak, that seems to be chatted about. Which doesn’t mean that that’s not an overarching theme within entertainment. I mean, the idea that women disappear when they get older is absolutely true, whether it’s in an action role or not. But this is a very specific kind of story...

Grillo-Marxuach also stated that to even get a reboot green-lit, the studio required the “strong will of the people” who are “the most connected” to the *Xena* brand. He assured me that: “...Lucy and her husband are perceived as being those people, and I know this from having worked at Universal on this project.” He explained this means Lawless’ opinion absolutely matters to the risk-averse studio: “The more colloquial version of that is: one bad Tweet from Lucy, and we’re sunk!” Thus, industrial statements indicated that to NBCUniversal, Lawless actually holds a lot of power over the *Xena* brand. That

Grillo-Marxuach, the writer who pitched to Tapert and was hired by the studio to pen the reboot, never met Lawless while working on it, was left unexplored in these industrial narratives.

Both Wilkinson and Grillo-Marxuach laughed loudly when I asked if they were aware of the Xena Movie Campaign. Indeed, when I asked Wilkinson if fans had reached out to her with concerns about the reboot, she explained her reaction thus:

I find that question laughable only because it's impossible that that would *not* have happened. You know for the last year and a half, my Twitter feed, I mean for months at a time, my Twitter feed was about 500 tweets to me every day about: "How do you fix this for me?" Just people furious and up in arms and, you know: "Do this for Lucy!"

Similarly, Grillo-Marxuach described receiving an influx of emails and social media messages the moment it was announced he was connected to the project. So, it is clear that XMC and other fans' efforts at making contact with stakeholders have been at least somewhat effective. Further, Grillo-Marxuach explained that XMC had reached out to him, and that *he* had reached out to them,<sup>38</sup> feeling a responsibility to reassure the fandom he wouldn't mishandle the property. (His concerns will be discussed further later in the chapter). So, both interacted with XMC online and met with XMC members in real life at fan events. Indeed, when I asked anyone involved in the original or future *Xena* projects to identify XMC's goals, they very accurately identified the group's primary goals of the creation of a new *Xena* film or TV movie/series that remedies the original series' death of Xena, and that stars the original actresses. Further, they would explain they felt the group desired a project with strong LGBTQ representation and representation of aging women.

---

<sup>38</sup> It is unclear who first initiated contact.

While it seems clear that individuals (particularly actors, producers, writers and other “creative” crew associated with the original and rebooted series) targeted by XMC successfully received their messages, it is more difficult to ascertain exactly how aware NBCUniversal executives were of their desires. Grillo-Marxuach insisted that the network executives keep some type of tabs on fans. He didn’t necessarily believe the decision for a reboot was a direct result of fan activity, but instead described a balancing act played by industries facing pre-existing fan bases:

...the executives at NBC and at the studio who wanted the reboot were keenly aware of the fans, of their zeal, and of how on top they are of it. And they (the executives) never said to me, “well, they’re the reason we’re doing it.” But they were certainly always aware of how big the fandom is... And I think that, when you as a studio are aware of a fandom like that, your hope is that you can do something that can bring new viewers in, but you (also) want to keep the fans happy.

Indeed, Grillo-Marxuach explained that “any savvy creator, and savvy network executive” must be aware of fans and their desires, “...especially now in the age of social media and ten years into these online communities being so powerful. We’re talking 10, 15 years of this in history...” His confidence in this regard, especially considering his long history working in television<sup>39</sup> and his time working for NBCUniversal on the *Xena* reboot, supports the idea that although network executives didn’t engage directly with XMC, they were likely aware of the group and their demands.

### **Building community: Creatives’ identification with fans**

---

<sup>39</sup> Some of Grillo-Marxuach’s past credits include: Supervising Producer for ABC’s *Lost*, Co-Executive Producer for CBS’s *Medium*, Co-Executive Producer for SyFy’s *Helix*, Writer and Co-Executive Producer for The CW’s *The 100*, and a number of other producing and writing credits for television. He has penned a number of pilot episodes and has also created and written comics for Marvel and Dynamite Entertainment.

As evidenced in the previous section, members of the industries working on the creative side of production are most likely to explicitly respond to XMC overtures. In fact, those involved in the previous *Xena* series, along with Grillo-Marxuiach, talk about a “community” comprised of themselves and the *Xena* fandom. Renee O’Connor, the actress who portrayed Gabrielle in the original series, stated in a 2017 interview that touched on the reboot: “I just feel so incredibly grateful that I was a part of it (the *Xena* series and fandom). This community kept developing and becoming stronger and stronger” (Nolasco, 2017). In 2016, I interviewed Wilkinson at the Xenite Retreat, a fan-organized and fan-focused annual event held in Angeles National Forest in California. At the all-inclusive 4-day retreats, guests share cabins and participate in numerous *Xena*-themed and non-themed retreat activities like hikes, ropes courses, poolside mixers and parties, a softball tournament, and more. Unlike most fan events, the Xenite Retreat doesn’t separate “talent” from fans and most events are not talent-focused<sup>40</sup>. Instead, actors and other professionals involved with the brand can attend and participate as they wish along with fans. Having watched Wilkinson sit down to dinner with some retreat attendees in the communal dining area, I asked if it was typical for her to “hang out with fans.” She replied:

Uh, sure, yeah. I guess some people get freaked out by that... I love people, the *Xena* fans in particular are really lovely, they never have seemed to cross boundaries ...it’s certainly never uncomfortable. It’s always a really lovely homecoming. It’s a bit of a family reunion. So, I’m totally thrilled to get to spend time with them and to give back a little bit...

---

<sup>40</sup> For instance, there are no autograph lines or photo opportunity packages that are the norm for “official” fan conventions.



Thus, we see the closeness these members of media industries feel with their audience. Perhaps due to this familial or community closeness, the creatives often claim to identify with XMC's and other fans' politics and concerns about the *Xena* brand, media industries' corporate practices, and any future *Xena* projects. At the same time, they describe the ways they try to prop up the audiences' causes, but also the barriers they at times encounter in these endeavors and their overall lack of power in the face of industrial higher-ups.

The *Xena* audience/industry intimacy seems to have fostered a sense of identification with, and some sense of responsibility to, the *Xena* fan base. Grillo-Marxuiach often calls himself a long-time fan of the original series, but he didn't truly become part of the contemporary *Xena* fan community until he signed on to the new project. Suddenly thrust into the *Xena* fandom, identifying as a fan himself, and having previously fostered relationships with fans of his other work, he explained that he immediately felt a responsibility to reach out to *Xena* fans. This was especially true because of his involvement with the *The 100* controversy. He explained to me:

With *Xena*, you have to understand that I was, in many ways, at the center of this very, very, very difficult controversy about the character who died on *The 100*, who was a warrior queen, who rode around on a horse and fought with swords. Okay? ...And I was keenly aware that we had caused a really awful grievance to an at-risk community. And...I was very keenly aware that the optics of having been the guy who wrote this episode of *The 100*, suddenly being put in charge of rebooting a character who is a warrior queen, who was coded as ... bisexual who rides on in a horse and fights people with a sword, right? ...I felt a responsibility to answer personally to *Xena* fans that we were not going to repeat the mistakes of the past. And that, even though I had been involved with something very bad with *The 100*, ... it didn't reflect some sort of homophobia, a desire to perpetuate the dead lesbian trope, all of those things, you know? So, I came into *Xena* with a huge amount of baggage that was specifically germane to the fan community that loved *Xena*.

While there was some resistance to Grillo-Marxuiach's involvement in the reboot (from some members of XMC and some from the wider fandom<sup>41</sup>), his openness to fans and swift assurance the queer nature of the show wouldn't be erased ingratiated him to the community quickly. XMC swiftly endorsed his hiring and worked to rally other fans to support his *Xena* reboot.

Creatives do acknowledge sharing some of the same concerns expressed by XMC. As evidenced by many of Lucy Lawless's public statements and others made by those associated with the production of the original series, it is as important to these creative as it is to the fans to maintain the integrity of the *Xena* brand. And thus, creatives can imagine many of the same obstacles to that integrity as fans. Steven Sears, writer and executive producer for the original *Xena* series, stated the following in a 2008 interview regarding what might happen if *Xena* became a feature film:

As far as the marketing mind is concerned and the studios, if a movie came out they would play with it, they would toy with it, they would try to appeal to the male heterosexual audience, because in their minds that's who's attracted to these kinds of films, these action films... The horrible thing that might be done is that they would then say, let's go completely commercial with this thing. They would have the characters kiss, have the characters imply that they had a sexual encounter, and then have them realize, well, that was just an experiment. Now let's go back to men. That's the worst possible thing that could happen. But it's also one of the most possible things that marketing could do. (Bringing Out, 2008)

Sears's concerns obviously match closely with XMC's and indeed for the creatives, the imagined industry often looks much like it does for XMC, except that the problematic tendencies are imagined as being performed primarily by network and studio brass.

---

<sup>41</sup> While Grillo-Marxuach represented the *Xena* fandom as exceedingly friendly and welcoming, he did acknowledge receiving some antagonistic/threatening communication from fans regarding the reboot, the worst of which was directed to his wife's social media accounts.

The expectation that industrial power-holders would be the most likely to interfere in a *Xena* project that respected the integrity of the original and honored what Lawless called the show's "covenant" with fans, certainly seems to stem from the creatives' experiences working in television. Grillo-Marxuach explained that he found himself in some trouble with NBCUniversal executives early on because of his determination to reassure concerned *Xena* fans. Having sold the reboot to NBCUniversal as "a romance between two women - that was baked in the DNA of what I wanted to do from jump street," Grillo-Marxuach decided to make that information public online: "in slightly more coy language." He posted the information on his Tumblr page in what he called his first attempt at making sure *Xena* fans felt safe with him and with: "...the idea that even though they might not be getting the Lucy Lawless/Renee O'Connor revival movie, that they didn't have some raging homophobe in the middle of it who was going to...screw them over, you know?" After posting this online, Grillo-Marxuach left the country for a conference. He described the sudden and unexpected international response to what he had imagined was just a little Tumblr post:

I'm in Montreal two days later, and the *Hollywood Reporter* has this article that's like, "Xena is gay! She's a lesbian! There's gonna be lesbian Xena!" And I'm like, "Oh shit," you know? ...Then, next thing you know, all of the blog-o-sphere, quasi-news sites start syndicating the story. *Vanity Fair* syndicates the story, then the *Guardian* in London puts up the story. And the headline isn't, "Hey, I'm going to do a nuanced exploration of these characters' sexuality in the context of their big adventure story." The headline is: "Lesbian Xena is Gay!"

This distillation of his intent for the reboot had done the job of reassuring XMC and many other *Xena* fans, but not everyone was quite as thrilled: "So, that was an uncomfortable call with the studio and the network."

Grillo-Marxuach explained that network control can limit what creatives can provide to fans and other invested audiences with which they might identify. He

explained the network's take on his Tumblr post was: "Shut the fuck up, already." NBCUniversal had purchased Grillo-Marxuach's pitch of a queer story, but hadn't even seen a script yet. Their perspective, he explained, was that, "a lot can happen, and we don't really want to make any declarations of artistic intent." Grillo-Marxuach added that in this case, he understood the network's point, but that he was also in the difficult position of having to answer to the fans:

It wasn't even the sexuality of it, but it *is* a hot button issue. And I think that the network felt, rightfully, they felt like I was leading with that. And I'm like, "I'm not leading with it, but you have to understand I'm in the middle of a real shit storm about Lexa<sup>42</sup>."

As noted in chapter 2, executive producer Rob Tapert related that during the development of the original *Xena*, network executives were concerned the show might be perceived as "lesbian" and tightly controlled the editing of the opening sequence so there would be no doubt *Xena* was heterosexual. Ultimately, Tapert and other creatives involved in the original series managed to subvert the network's enforced heteronormativity through subtextual nods to fans' queer desires. In this, we see that the complexity of industrial responses to audiences seems to persist from that era to the contemporary moment. Creatives continue to feel pulled to learning audience desires, creating community with some of them, and even allying with audience beliefs and causes. And while media representation of LGBTQ content has changed significantly enough that now the network would purchase a queer *Xena* script, there seems to remain enough anxiety at the top of institutional hierarchies related to such content that creative (and some associated audiences') intent gets lost. Grillo-Marxuach explained that in the media industries:

---

<sup>42</sup> The lesbian character Grillo-Marxuach controversially "killed off" in *The 100*.

The gatekeepers are many. And ultimately nobody wants to accept the truth that those of us who write and produce and create and act are artisans and we are trying to make something good, and, you know, all of that, but ultimately the financial bottom line is what drives every decision made in Hollywood... We're not making widgets and we're not factory workers, but ultimately, things happen or don't happen because the money is perceived as being present on the back end, you know?

Thus, creatives hoping to push media content in the direction desired by some of their most invested audiences often consider themselves stymied by the economic priorities of risk-averse industries more accustomed to preserving the status quo.

### **Artistic Authority and Creative Control**

The historical similarities in the media industries during the original *Xena* run and the contemporary development of the reboot do not end with the affective/political bonds between creatives and fans. We can also identify parallels in creative' industrial claims of ownership and artistic authority that work to enforce limits to audience influence on content. For example, while the advent of the early internet allowed those who worked on the original *Xena* to empathize with their audience in ways previously unimagined, longstanding professional boundaries were still difficult to dismantle. As detailed in Chapter 2, Missy Good, a *Xena* alt fan fiction writer, was hired by showrunners to write episodes for the original series. In my interviews with James, a producer and writer on the original series, he at times delineated between acceptable and unacceptable fan desires and practices, and described limits to fan knowledge and expertise. For example, when discussing Missy Good, James differentiated her from other fans:

One of the big flaws with fans is, this was something Missy did *not* suffer from...most of them write fan fiction with the attitude of fixing the problems that they see...when in fact there's reasons why we do certain things.

Although widely known in the *Xena* community as extremely fan-friendly, James's statement made it clear he still considers them amateurs. Indeed, such claims to artistic authority and authorial ownership continue to be at play in industrial responses to XMC's demands.

While the production team involved in the original series are very open about their continued closeness with the fan base, there are hints many of them find XMC and other fan endeavors to be naïve or even disrespectful. Creatives sometimes argue that although fans have their own personal investments in the series, only those who created the series know the "truths" of the characters and narratives. For the contemporary reboot, this divide between the original *Xena* creatives and the fans usually reveals itself in discussions of how the original series ended. Indeed, this authorial disagreement has persisted since the original series. In the series finale of *Xena*, Xena battles an entire army of Japanese warriors. The battle is for 40,000 innocent souls Xena inadvertently condemned to slavery as a warlord prior to her redemption as a warrior for good. In order to redeem the souls, it is revealed that she must die, and remain dead<sup>43</sup>. Xena embraces this death and soon ends up riddled with arrows, dropping to her knees, blood pouring from multiple wounds. Finally, she is beheaded. Later in the episode, Gabrielle finds Xena's defiled and naked corpse that has been strung up, headless. She drops to her knees overcome, retches and finally stands and agonizingly screams, "Give me her head!" It

---

<sup>43</sup> Remaining dead is notable because it lends a sense of finality to death that the series never embraced. Xena and Gabrielle died multiple times throughout *Xena*'s six seasons, including in one simultaneous Roman crucifixion. Each time they returned to life through various means including magic, implied resuscitations via an ancient form of CPR, spiritual or god-assisted resurrections, or reincarnation. Although many fans immediately complained Xena's death in the finale meant the franchise couldn't continue, a 2001 article noted Tapert's response: "'This is about the fifth time that Xena has died in the series,' he joked, 'so I'm not worried about the franchise ending'" (Armstrong, 2001).

was a gruesome death for the iconic character, and one that bitterly disappointed many *Xena* fans, especially those who saw so much power in the queer relationship between Gabrielle and Xena. Indeed, many subtexters had long clamored for a series finale in which Xena and Gabrielle finally officially came out or at least were implied to “live happily every after.” Although the finale restated the duo’s status as soulmates, and positioned Gabrielle as taking on the mantle of “Warrior Princess,” Xena’s violent death and Gabrielle’s resultant despair were the complete opposite of what fans had hoped.

The death of Xena was highly controversial, with mainstream media running news stories on the angry and distraught lesbian fan community. Showrunner Rob Tapert repeatedly told the press he had no apologies for the series finale (which fans noted, he’d previously promised would *not* include the death of Xena<sup>44</sup>). Tapert publicly stated that some viewers thought it was “too ignominious to have her dragged around like a slab of beef,” but that the dramatic death demonstrated Gabrielle’s motivation and thus: “Xena dying in the midst of battle worked for me,” (Smith, 2001). Many fans struck back, with one fan writing online: “There is nothing particularly bold about killing off strong women characters or, for that matter... ending a quasi-lesbian relationship with the tragic and untimely death of one of the partners ” (Adams, 2001). This same fan noted that some viewers were already arguing that as the character’s creator, Tapert reserved a right to end *Xena* however he wanted. The fan responded:

The trouble with this notion is that it ignores that authors write in a cultural context and for an audience. When Rob Tapert killed Xena off, he turned his back on his audience. He forgot that sharing one’s creative vision with others is not a right, but a privilege. Sadly, he proved that he could not be trusted with our

---

<sup>44</sup> Tapert’s promise is mentioned in Bianculli (2001) and Adams (2001).

vision. ...Underneath the pseudo-lesbian teases, Tapert revealed that he never really understood what our vision was all about. (Adams, 2001)

Other fans were quoted in the *New York Daily News* as calling the finale “snuff,” “pornography,” and, “...a misogynist final statement about women who seek empowerment and equality...They all end up dead in the end!” (Bianculi, 2001). At the time, queerbaiting and the “Bury Your Gays” and “Lesbian Death” tropes weren’t as widely known or discussed as they are today, particularly in the wake of the controversial death of Lexa on *The 100* in 2016. Still, fan accusations lobbed against the original *Xena* finale certainly mirror those in the more recent *The 100* controversy.

Likely because Grillo-Marxuach was so close to the fallout over Lexa’s death in *The 100*, he seems to easily recognize, and respect, *Xena* fans’ ongoing pain and sense of betrayal. He explained to me about the relationship between XMC and the original show:

...The original *Xena* television series ended on a very down note that, although I know its creators probably expected it to be a kind of a semi-tragic affirmation of the endless struggle, wound up sort of alienating a lot of fans because it was the lesbian death trope, and because it denied the two main characters a future together. ...The *Xena* Movie Campaign seems to be very eager to have sort of a Mulligan on that ending. ...They have a big and influential fan community, and it’s about trying to leverage the power of that fan community, that has kept *Xena* alive really for 20 years, into sort of pressuring Universal into doing what they feel is the right thing by the characters, you know?

While such fan concerns don’t seem to phase Grillo-Marxuach, some of those who worked on the original series<sup>45</sup> still argue the fans have it wrong about the finale. When I mentioned that XMC and a lot of *Xena* fans hope for the reboot to correct the death of *Xena* in the original series, Wilkinson responded:

---

<sup>45</sup> *Xena* star Lucy Lawless is a notable exception to the creatives associated with the original series who continue to defend the death of *Xena*. She has often publicly stated that she realized it was the wrong choice soon after the finale aired. In 2016, she called the death a “huge regret,” explaining: “We didn’t realise really what it meant to people. We thought, ‘Oh, that’s a really strong ending.’ Now I just say to fans, ‘Let’s pretend that never happened’” (Spy News, 2016).



Yeah. Well, “correct” makes me cringe a little bit because... I obviously don’t take any of this personally and everybody has a right to their own opinions... But the fact that the fans were upset by that - which I completely understand - also negates the fact that it’s a creative endeavor and that everybody involved in this takes it very seriously. And it ended the way they wanted it to end. They made these choices because they felt that was right for the characters. They made them for very specific reasons and the fact that some fans may disagree with that is fine, but it’s not particularly respectful.

She went on to explain she’d been to many conventions with *Xena* actors and producers who, “when everybody wants to play nice they will apologize for the way it ended. But when everybody’s talking more honestly they’ll say things like, ‘But that’s exactly what we meant to do.’”

Authorial ownership and artistic authority have recently re-appeared as important issues with which XMC must grapple. After NBCUniversal’s announcement, XMC admins used the Xenite Retreat as an opportunity to regroup and strategize. Despite no longer being officially connected to the franchise, Grillo-Marxuach quietly attended the retreat as well. Multiple attendees told me he swore the fans present to secrecy and did a reading of his *Xena* reboot pilot one night around the campfire, wanting the core fandom to understand his *Xena* project wouldn’t have betrayed their trust. XMC had always kept as a core value that they would advocate for including as many of the original *Xena*’s cast, crew and creatives as possible for any future *Xena* project in a sign of loyalty and respect for the original series. However, after Grillo-Marxuach departed from the reboot, XMC found they’d lost one of their closest allies and paths to industrial information.

As evidenced above, Grillo-Marxuach was a prominent member of the media industries who was both sympathetic to XMC’s cause and vocal about the importance and complexities of LGBTQ media representation. Without him, and outside of the faceless NBCUniversal corporate identity, original showrunner and *Xena* creator Rob

Tapert was the only industry insider remaining they could identify with any power to truly get a *Xena* project produced. As demonstrated by the reactions to the series finale included above, Tapert was not always a fan favorite<sup>46</sup>. In the years since the finale, he occupied a distant, but mostly respected position in the *Xena* community as the creative mind behind the show, and importantly, husband to the much-loved Lucy Lawless. However, during the retreat, XMC admins became increasingly convinced that it was Tapert who had nixed Grillo-Marxuach's vision. And if this was the case, they worried they were once again dealing with the fandom's past barrier of industrial claims to artistic control. After some of Tapert's subsequent public statements were interpreted by the group as confirmation he'd rejected Grillo-Marxuach's project, the admins made the decision to publicly share their concerns on the XMC Facebook page, and begin directing members to address their concerns directly to Tapert. In particular, the group took issue with a statement by Tapert at the 2017 Motor City Comic Con that he couldn't find a new interpretation of the show that could top the original, and also couldn't imagine anyone but Lawless in the titular role of Xena. While the group agreed about prioritizing the casting of Lawless, they worried about the potential for Tapert's tight creative control to hamper any future momentum for the franchise at all. One member commented on an XMC post sharing the video of Tapert's statements at the convention:

This saddens me a lot. I can understand that Xena is in a lot of ways Robs (sic) baby and I understand that he's protective of it and wants it done properly. But I cannot see or understand why he cannot allow Xena to continue with anyone in the main role but his wife. This is stifling a creative vision that had the potential

---

<sup>46</sup> Tapert has also been much less participatory with audiences than other *Xena* cast and crew, attending fan conventions less often and rarely interacting in online audience communities. Grillo-Marxuach even noted during our interview that his style of interaction with fans was the opposite of Tapert's: "Rob Tapert doesn't really want to get online and talk to the fans; that's not what he does..."

to be amazing. Just look at what it means to people, look at the difference it's made to its fan base...

Thus, as XMC looks to the future, they once again find themselves fighting for a say against industrial responses that assert artistic authority and claim creative ownership of their beloved characters.

### **Industrial Responses to OMM**

While members of media industries often acknowledge the growing power of XMC and other fan campaigns (though they may remain doubtful of the actual efficacy of their specific tactics and demands), the industries seem to engage much less overtly or positively with OMM. However, similarly to how writers and other industry insiders might wink conspiratorially at fans, some in the industries do overtly or subtly talk back to OMM campaigns. Further, OMM consistently achieves something with which XMC has repeatedly told me they struggle: gaining press coverage for their campaigns and wide-scale awareness of the group's existence. This is likely because of the controversial nature of OMM and their demands. This controversial nature seems to influence most industrial responses to the group.

The ways the media industries respond to OMM, and think about their demands, are often challenging to identify or quantify. Indeed, while studying XMC I managed to find numerous official responses/actions and located industry members who happily agreed to interviews and spoke openly with me. Researching industrial responses to OMM proved much more difficult. In fact, I received no replies after reaching out to numerous actors, writers and other industry workers associated with media targeted by OMM. In addition, I reached out to a number of companies targeted by the group as

advertisers/sponsors of offensive content or due to their own marketing campaigns. I only received one response. That response was from a former executive at one of the companies targeted by OMM and it led to one very brief “off the record” phone call in which the executive generously confirmed some background information for me once I guaranteed their<sup>47</sup> and their former employer’s anonymity.

It seems that the most common industrial response to a OMM campaign is no response at all. Or, for many members of the group who participate in OMM email blasts to targeted companies, it might be typical to receive a “boilerplate” email response. This is often a message, perhaps written by a company’s PR department and automatically generated for swift or instantaneous response to online feedback, thanking the email-writer for their message with a promise to consider their concerns. Indeed, this seems to be the primary industrial response to audience “complaints.” Members of XMC reported receiving similar responses by email when the group targeted Netflix with complaints about the service dropping *Xena* from their streaming service. Still, OMM does, like XMC, receive *some* industrial attention and direct feedback outside of being ignored or responded to generically. This feedback tends to come in the form of two thematic responses that will be detailed below: “Ridicule and Confront” and “Private Overtures and ‘Secret’ Allies.”

### **Ridicule and Confront**

As noted earlier in the dissertation, OMM rose to national prominence through their critiques of JC Penney’s hiring of out lesbian comedian Ellen DeGeneres as a

---

<sup>47</sup> I’ll be using a gender-neutral pronoun from here on to further obscure this executive’s identity.

company spokesperson. The responses by JC Penney and DeGeneres are a good (and probably the most well-known) example of how those in industries often respond to OMM campaigns if they do opt to publicly respond. Those creatives whose content (or identity, as with DeGeneres) has been targeted by OMM often respond by standing up for their work and confronting OMM's attacks with humor. The humor is usually deployed to ridicule OMM, and is often combined with a more serious reaffirmation of the identity, values and/or politics of the content, company or individual that offended the group. Typically, companies that publicly confront OMM's charges do so in a more restrained way, usually releasing a short statement defending their business and/or the targeted content or sponsorship decision.

Indeed, although JC Penney released a short response confirming they stood by their decision to partner with DeGeneres, the comedian responded more pointedly on her daytime talk show:

I'm happy about (being the spokesperson). JC Penney is happy about it. But there's this group called One Million Moms that is not happy about it. And normally I try not to pay attention to my haters, but this time I'd like to talk about it, because my haters are my motivators. ... They wanted to get me fired and I am proud and happy to say JC Penney stuck by their decision to make me their spokesperson.

After the audience clapped loudly in response, DeGeneres continued by lightly joking about the spokesperson position: "It's great news for me because I need some new crew socks, and I'm really gonna clean up with this discount." DeGeneres also spoke about her own values and contrasted what OMM called "traditional" values with the values she stands for and considers traditional, like "honesty, equality, kindness..."

While DeGeneres's response served to earnestly emphasize her own sense of morality and strongly reinforce her pride in her sexuality, it also repeatedly returned to

pointedly making fun of OMM and its members. At one point, DeGeneres deadpanned that if the group was really worried about spokespeople, they should target the Pillsbury Doughboy: “I mean, he runs around without any pants on, basically begging for people to poke his belly. What kind of message is that?” Toward the end of her monologue on the controversy, DeGeneres honed in on one of OMM’s most ridiculed characteristics: its inaccurate name. “Not that there’s anyone counting,” DeGeneres joked to her audience, “but for a group that calls themselves “The Million Moms,” they only have 40,000 members on their page.” After pausing to let the audience laughs die down, DeGeneres continued: “So, they’re rounding to the nearest million, and I get that.” DeGeneres’s public response was followed by a lot of ecstatic press coverage, with one *Entertainment Weekly* headline proclaiming, “Ellen DeGeneres Slams One Million Moms” (Chestang, 2012). In addition, LGBTQ activism also emerged from the controversy. GLAAD (Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) began a hashtag campaign #StandUpForEllen to support DeGeneres, “thank J.C. Penney for its support...,” and to bring attention to anti-LGBTQ employment discrimination, with the organization noting that, “in 29 states a person can be fired simply because they’re gay” (Adam, 2012).

Makers of media content targeted by OMM also often look to ridicule the group as response to their complaints. For instance, when OMM protested NBC’s airing of the (openly gay) Ryan Murphy-produced TV series *The Normal Heart*, characters in the series soon began poking fun at the organization. An *Entertainment Weekly* article described the on-screen response:

Jane...is rallying the conservative troops (a.k.a some middle schoolers whose parents have Romney bumper stickers on their car) to protest a fake wedding between Jane’s granddaughter Shania and another classmate. She calls the girls “Future One Million Moms” as the girls repeat right-wing talking points such as

“Marriage is between Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve,” and “Gay marriage is currently legal in six states. My mom says that’s six too many.” (Strecker, 2012)

Similarly, when OMM collected over 13,000 petition signatures to convince Fox to cancel the series *Lucifer*, based on Neil Gaiman’s comic book *Sandman*, Gaiman posted this response to his Tumblr page:

Ah. It seems like only yesterday (but it was 1991) that the ‘Concerned Mothers of America’ announced that they were boycotting SANDMAN because it contained Lesbian, Gay, Bi and Trans characters. It was Wanda that upset them most: the idea of a Trans Woman in a comic book... They told us they were organising a boycott of SANDMAN, which they would only stop if we wrote to the American Family Association and promised to reform. I wonder if they noticed it didn’t work last time, either...” (Gaimen, 2015)

Together, the responses by DeGeneres, Murphy, and Gaiman worked to demonstrate that these industry insiders weren’t afraid of OMM, that they stood firmly behind the politics the group opposes, and perhaps most significantly, that the members of OMM *deserved* ridicule. This ridicule could easily be seen to send the message that media industry insiders consider the audience members represented by OMM a fringe, hateful minority whose content concerns are illegitimate and unworthy of serious consideration.

### **Private Overtures and “Secret” Allies**

Businesses that advertise and sponsor content OMM finds questionable are much less willing to openly engage with the group than entertainment media creatives who write scripts poking fun at OMM, or celebrities like DeGeneres who publicly oppose the group. Many of the brands targeted are considered family-friendly and thus look to appeal to wide swathes of American customers. Such companies are likely to find it safer to remain quiet or silent if singled out by the group. This makes it difficult to gauge exactly what these industries’ reactions to OMM truly are. For example, OMM often

claims victories in their campaigns when a TV series is cancelled or a particular advertisement stops airing during a boycotted show. Whether these are actual consequences of OMM campaigns however, is impossible to tell. Indeed, even when OMM claims a company has responded, it is difficult to verify. For example, not long after OMM rallied its members to protest the TV Land series *Teachers*, which they argued portrayed teachers as depraved, the OMM Facebook page claimed that Godiva, a brand that aired ads during the series, responded to their complaints:

Update! Godiva's response: "Recently, one of our ads was aired during the TV Land program, 'Teachers,' and we want to address any potential concerns about its timing and placement. When we run our TV advertising, it is typically distributed through a random mix of cable networks and their various programs. Ads are chosen to run during defined blocks of time in order to reach as many people as possible. When our ad appears during a specific show, we are not necessarily making an endorsement of that show. We have reviewed our advertising plan for the future, however, and 'Teachers' is not in the schedule. We want to thank all of our customers who have reached out to us to express their concerns. As a global brand, Godiva appeals to wide audience with diverse attitudes, and we appreciate all feedback." Thank you for helping us fight indecency! No further action is needed!

I could find no other public record of the statement OMM claimed Godiva made. It is unclear whether this was a direct correspondence from Godiva to OMM or one or more of its members, or a more public statement perhaps distributed as a news release. If it was indeed a direct response to OMM, it demonstrates again the low-profile nature of most industrial interactions with OMM.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, I was able to reach one former executive at a business formerly targeted by OMM. When I initially contacted this individual by email about a possible interview, they said they would love to help, but had never heard of a group called One Million Moms. I sent them an apology statement I'd located online that was purportedly made in response to the OMM campaign against their former employer.



OMM's site stated the company had issued the apology during the time the executive was employed there. We arranged a phone call to speak further. It is important to note here that the OMM campaign against the executive's former employer was rather benign for OMM. It was an accusation of explicit content that had nothing to do with OMM's more controversial beliefs about say, LGBTQ identities or abortion. Many other audiences had complained to the company and called the content OMM was protesting needlessly provocative. When we spoke on the phone, the executive explained that at the time they'd had a lot of backlash in general; OMM would have been just one entity from which the company fielded complaints. The executive said they couldn't remember this particular apology statement and wasn't the one who generated it, but that it looked like a pretty standard response from the PR department. They also noted neither they nor anyone they could think of at the company would have agreed with the political perspectives of OMM. The executive remembered the company issuing apologies and distancing itself from the content in question, not because of OMM, but because of poor performance combined with complaints from a wide array of customers, audiences and groups. The executive noted that had the company felt more strongly about the content, or if OMM's complaints had appeared overtly political in some way, the company likely wouldn't have apologized so readily. Although the apology was touted as a victory by OMM online, it seems clear that to the executive and the company, OMM wasn't memorable and the apology did not constitute any acknowledgement or endorsement of OMM specifically. At the same time, that the company responded at all considering what the executive described as their opposing political viewpoints (and an implied actual distaste

for the group once the executive realized who they were), demonstrates that a number of companies likely do reach out to OMM privately.

This corporate practice of making private overtures to OMM or its members seems like a strategy performed by at least some companies the group targets. It is meant to, if possible, smooth things over in a way that doesn't attract attention, will not publicly link the company to OMM, and will be difficult for others to track. It demonstrates an industrial willingness to, at least sometimes, directly engage with controversial interest and other audience groups, especially if companies feel they can protect profits and avoid controversy while maintaining a certain degree of deniability. As described earlier in the dissertation, one of OMM's tactics is to provide opportunities for quiet acquiescence by sponsors. Monica Cole told me the group is pleased when companies simply drop their sponsorship/content without comment: "We don't have to have recognition or the 'victory' per se, but the main thing is that we're getting inappropriate advertising off the air and inappropriate programs cancelled."

Some responses from the industries come from industrial insiders who consider themselves allied with the OMM cause. And sometimes, these allies do not feel a need to hide their support of OMM. Monica mentioned that when the group contacted Mike Lindell, the founder and CEO of the online pillow company MyPillow, to ask him to pull MyPillow ads airing during the Fox series *The Mick*, he responded that he:

... did not know that his ads were being aired during the show ...his ads were supposed to be on Fox News only, not Fox Network. And so he contacted them, let them know that he'll pull all his advertising on all the networks, because he also had Fox Business. He's a Christian and his company is based on Christian values, and he said he'd pull all the advertising...

On the OMM website, Monica described how she was granted quick and friendly access to the head of the company: "I spoke to My Pillow's CEO Mike Lindell on the phone,

and he thanked IMM for alerting him that his ads were airing during this show. He ... doesn't agree with anything on this program" (*The Mick*). Lindell is known as very publicly Christian-conservative and a familiar of President Donald Trump; he also made headlines in 2018 by publicly refusing to join other companies that pulled their ads from Laura Ingraham's conservative Fox News TV show after she mocked a teen survivor of the Stoneman Douglas High School shooting (Gutierrez, 2018). Thus it makes sense Lindell's brand responded so swiftly and publicly to OMM's concerns. However, it seems rare that companies respond in this manner to OMM. For any individual or company but the most conservatively aligned, it seems likely that OMM's status as an arm of an organization designated a hate group means most companies would consider it too risky to respond in any other way than distancing themselves. For Lindell however, and perhaps other media companies and sponsors with similar politics, responding positively to OMM may pay off. After celebrating this MyPillow "victory," the OMM website post stated to members: "My Pillow has been thanked on your behalf. No further action is needed, but you can keep their decision in mind while shopping."

It also seems that OMM might have additional allies in the media industries and elsewhere that respond to the group more privately. These individuals may agree with the group, and may even try to quietly support or advocate for their cause. Or their public statements or private responses to the group may demonstrate to OMM and like-minded allies that they are correct in their imaginings of industrial wrongs. Tina Griffin insisted to me that there are many people in the media industries who feel the way she does about media content and the industries themselves. She described them as stuck, however, in

liberal industries in which they could lose their careers for believing as they do. Tina explained:

... a lot of celebs told me face to face, “Tina, this is a job. We see this movie shoot, we do this video - it’s our job. And parents have to be responsible on what they let their own kids watch or see or listen to.”

Tina explained many stop there and excuse themselves from what they might see as the consequences of their work in media. Indeed, a big part of Tina’s public speaking consists of demonstrating that media industries do believe their products are harmful, and take pains to protect themselves and their families while unleashing the content on the rest of the world. Tina referenced public statements made by celebrities and other industry insiders that constituted:

... proof that celebrities shelter their own kids from their own entertainment that they’re pushing on kids. Here’s their admission that they re-write the lyrics for their kids to listen to. Here’s their admission that they keep their kids safe. Like Steve Jobs never let any Apple devices in his home for his kids<sup>48</sup>.

These stories validate the imaginings about the industries held by Tina, OMM and its members. The celebrities that allegedly commit these hypocritical practices, even if they have admitted it directly to Tina or an ally, are still often framed as irresponsible. Other industrial insiders however, leave the industries or become more outspoken about their beliefs. Some of these former “insiders” are featured on Monica’s website and speaking tour, as part of “Hollywood Exposed,” where they and Tina give “the inside scoop” about the “behind the scenes” lifestyle in Hollywood and otherwise demonstrate the dangers of the media (Griffin, 2018). Their accounts are presented as industrial responses from insiders gone rogue.

---

<sup>48</sup> Multiple reports, including Bilton (2014), corroborate this claim.

Tina described others working in the entertainment industries who feel extreme guilt about the products made by their employers. She told me a story about working on the set of the film *Little Black Book*, where she met the now-late actress Brittany Murphy. Tina said she had a 20 to 30 minute conversation with the actress about the film *8 Mile* that Murphy starred in with the rapper Eminem. Tina said she ultimately ended up asking Murphy, not in a “nasty” way: “Do you agree with selling drugs and sex to kids?” Tina continued the story:

And she’s like, “Tina, I hate it. I feel guilty. I go home at night after shooting a scene, I feel guilty.” She goes, “I don’t want to be promoting that message.” She goes, “I feel like I have to in order to get ahead in the industry.” And I literally, the words burned in my mind, I will be sharing her story until the day that I die, and I share it every single time I speak. ...It’s a huge eye-opener to me that there are also celebrities living and working in L.A. that don’t agree with what they’re saying and doing on TV and music videos, but feel like they have to because if they don’t, they will no longer work in the industry.

Thus, whether relayed by individuals in the industries directly to OMM and its allies, or simply selected from public statements, these industrial “responses” to Christian-conservative concerns are often taken as indictments of media industries, confirmation of OMM’s cause and claims, and often even industrial admissions of guilt. Indeed, industrial responses by insiders that ignore OMM or ridicule them seem to work the same way to the group. Clearly, those in the industries often mean these varied responses to communicate very different messages. Even without having provided interviews for this study, their actions or inactions usually demonstrate their intent quite clearly.

## **Discussion**

Some scholars (Terranova, 2000; Andrejevic, 2008; Fuchs, 2014; Jones, 2014) charge that media industries inevitably look to commodify fandom and invested online

audiences and that ultimately their treatment of fan/user productivity constitutes exploitation. The charge of exploitation is lobbed because industrial mechanisms of power are said not to care about fan demands or representational concerns, and instead will appropriate audience labor without giving audiences an actual say in the production of content or workings of industry. Certainly, there are results from the XMC case study that point to this often being the case, especially with the highest corporate decision-makers in the media industries. What is also revealed however, is that there is often a sharp disconnect between those at the top of industrial hierarchies, and the “creative” workers tasked with actual content creation. It is not insignificant that *these* are the members of industries interacting most intimately with audiences.

I propose that such intimacy might work in four possible ways. First, it may lead to creative workers lobbying for, and subtly working toward, audience demands and politics. Although in many ways corporate attention to fandom has increased in the last decade and the landscape of audience/industry interaction has been transformed, this would mean that much as with the original *Xena* fandom, audiences’ close social/affective connections with creatives could lead to the production of subversive/progressive content. Such fan-industry collaboration to queer media content, and perhaps for creatives, to undermine and disrupt heteronormative corporate bosses and mandates, would certainly exemplify queer tactics as described early in the dissertation. Second, if creative workers in the industries make the closest connections to audiences, and those connections facilitate influence, then those audiences with which creative workers don’t easily identify have little chance at influencing media content and industries. This seems to certainly be the case with OMM. If older, primarily white

Christian-conservative women cannot convince media's creative workers to identify with them and their politics, it stands to reason other groups may struggle as well. While it might seem reassuring that a hate group encounters obstacles to influence, scholars should ask which other identities and communities' might encounter barriers in petitioning for their causes because industry insiders can't "relate" to them. Even more, what are the implications of a creative who *does* identify with OMM's politics? Many scholars look to support their arguments equating audience productivity with exploitation with the proof of these audiences' "failures" to reach their goals. Such arguments often leave uninterrogated the implicit assumption in their work that the audiences' "success" would have constituted subversion or progress. Could industry executives' aversion to risk sometimes actually function to limit creatives' identification with audiences that might have resulted in abusive or retrograde content? We must examine scholarly assumptions that activism always seeks progressive or liberatory outcomes. Fourth, if industrial seats of power identify creative workers as effective ambassadors to audiences, we can expect workers to soon be saddled with the resultant expectations of creating and maintaining these affective ties. These new job requirements would necessitate workers previously tasked with primarily creative jobs also perform what Baym (2018) calls "the intimate work of connection"<sup>49</sup>.

Finally, I'd argue that this chapter shows it does no inherent harm to acknowledge that some industrial perspectives are not necessarily calculating, untrue, motivated by greed, or meant to obfuscate. For instance, the creatives who are closest to XMC and

---

<sup>49</sup> Indeed, Baym (2018) provides an important account of how such expectations have played out in the music industries and contributed to an increase in musicians' uncompensated, emotionally exhausting, anxiety-inducing affective labor to "connect" with their audiences.

other *Xena* fans seem equally frustrated with network/studio executives, often creatively *and* politically. When these individuals told me or fans about their limited power over their work and the “realities” of industrial norms, there is no fundamental reason to anticipate they were working to preserve audience labor at the expense of their demands, a charge lobbed at almost any industrial pushback to audience desires (Andrejevic, 2008; Fuchs, 2014). This instead confirms what Wasco (2003), Deuze (2007), Caldwell (2008), Johnson (2013) and Baym (2018) demonstrate are the complexities of media industries, their labor practices and power structures, and the dangers of efforts at collapsing them into one “industrial” perspective analytically (Hesmondhalgh, 2002). Indeed, scholarly imaginings of oversimplified “industries” filled with homogenous goals of profitability minimize the important work toward intersectional representation produced by independent media (Christian, 2017) and obfuscates the internal labor practices and divisions within mainstream media industries. In particular, such sweeping generalizations can distract from intra-industry exploitation including precarious labor (Wasco, 2003; Deuz, 2007, Caldwell, 2008), the implications of globalization for labor and culture (Deuze, 2007; Curtin & Sanson, 2015), segregation and inequalities based on identity (Warner, 2015; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2015; Conor, Gill & Taylor, 2015) and the move to gig economies for creatives (Baym, 2018).

From the results of the XMC case study, we can see that for audiences, it likely pays to be 1) at least relatively politically aligned with the media you’re looking to impact, and 2) working to establish and nurture interpersonal relationships with members of industries. For OMM, these prerequisites are often not met. The results from the OMM case study show that in recognition of these limitations, OMM organizes through an



embrace of the oppositional, marginal and excluded. Taken together, the results from this chapter are meant to demonstrate that deploying an imagined industry analytic to an industry-based study allows for a nuanced analysis that recognizes the complex interplays between media industries and audiences. Indeed, in this chapter we see that the industries have responded to audience tactics that were developed based on *audiences'* imaginaries of those industries. Understanding to which tactics the industries respond, and how, provides further insight into the cycle of imaginaries at work in audience/industry interactions. For instance, if OMM imagines a TV producer's show is too sexually explicit and anti-Christian, they might thus employ the tactic of targeting the show's sponsors. In response, the producer, angry at what she imagines to be the hateful and oppressive identities and goals of the group's members, writes a scene in which OMM is portrayed as comprised of hateful and hypocritical women. In it, one of the moms is portrayed in an explicit sexual encounter. OMM, vindicated in their imagined anti-Christian industry, galvanizes its members with this proof of the group's marginalization and oppression. And so on, and so on. Allowing us to peel back the layers of imaginaries and tactics, the imagined industry analytic again provides useful data that informs related scholarly debates.

## Chapter 7 - Conclusion

In one day, I received two e-mails. The first e-mail called me a homophobe because we didn't 'out' the characters. She was very adamant that this was all for merchandising, this was all for publicity, and: "If you weren't such homophobes, you would have just written the characters as they obviously are!" OK. Within five minutes I got another e-mail from some guy who was complaining to me that I was part of the gay agenda and that I was trying to infiltrate the youth: "Yeah, you don't say it out loud, but *that's* the genius of your propaganda," ...I got those two e-mails within five minutes of each other! So... I forwarded them to each other - with a note that said: "perhaps you two should switch TV sets."

– "James," Producer/Writer (*Xena: Warrior Princess*)

The above story told by "James" comes from one of my very first interviews for what I imagined to be a short research project about a declining fandom and its legacy as one of the first influential online fan communities. I had traveled to what was supposed to be the last Official *Xena* Convention. It was 2014, and in actuality, the event had been billed "*The Absolute Last*" Official *Xena* convention. This was because, in every year in recent memory, the convention organizers warned *Xena* fans that attendance had been dwindling, and soon they would not be able to throw a yearly event to celebrate a TV series that had gone on the air in the mid 90s (and had been *off* the air for over a dozen years and counting). Each year, however, this spurred the fans to action, and suddenly attendance would turn out to be much higher than expected. In fact, the fans pulled this off one more time the very year I attended. The *truly* last official *Xena* convention was held one year later, in 2015. It was billed "The Final Journey" and celebrated the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the series. Of course, at the time, I did not know any of this. Instead, I had

come to talk to fans of the series *Xena: Warrior Princess* while I could still find them all in one place.

I met and talked to a lot of great fans, and I was surprised to also meet “James,” who had worked on the original series as a producer and writer. He had a lot to say about the impact of the series, the longevity of the fandom, and most interestingly, the interactions and relationships that had developed over the years between fans and the cast and crew of the show. I began to realize there was more happening at this convention than I had originally anticipated. But it was the story James told me about the two viewer emails, detailed in the quote above, that really intrigued me. There was so much at play in the interaction that James described. Two fans who had seen the exact same content had very different reactions to it. Those fans’ identities clearly played a defining role in how they interpreted the content, but interestingly, so too did what they imagined was *James’s* identity. While one perceived that only a homophobe could have written this queer-baiting tease of a show, the other saw content obviously produced by an agent of the “Gay Agenda.” Not only had they perceived all of this about James, but they used a new medium - the internet - to reach out and let him know what they thought about him and his work. What motivated their assumptions about James? Why did they perceive the internet as a tool for opposing him?

And then there was James, who in other conversations told me he was politically aligned with the LGBTQ community and detailed all the queer subtext he had written into the show on their behalf. And yet James clearly understood these two viewers as occupying opposite and extreme ends of some imagined “audience spectrum.” Indeed, his forwarded email replies were meant to poke fun at the viewers, and communicate his

disinterest in their opinions. The identical replies however, ridiculed the LGBTQ-identified viewer in exactly the same manner as the homophobic one. What did that mean about *his* allegiances and willingness to engage with audiences? What had *other* LGBTQ fans done that prompted his narrative changes to queer the series? What about their understandings of who James was, and how they might petition him, managed to actually result in on-screen changes?

All of these questions emerged in just this one audience/industry interaction, and set the scene for what would become a much larger and more complex study. My curiosity about all of the actors and actions involved led me to methodological and analytical obstacles, given the volume and complexity of the stakeholders and objects at play: texts, audiences, producers, industries, technologies, power, identities, politics, amongst many others. I initially considered an industrial or political-economic approach that would center interviews with James and other industry data to tell me why he reacted as he did. But, what of those viewers? Should I instead call this a fan study and, like Henry Jenkins, look for online community and fan (re)production? But, these two e-mailers weren't even fans. Anti-fans? Activists? And where was identity in all of this anyway? What would feminists or queer theorists have to say about it? If I wanted to study how interactions like this happened, and why, I was afraid there was no one approach that could usefully study, or account for, the nuances of the relationships, interactions, identities and tactics involved.

These problems led me to this dissertation project, and the development of the “imagined industry” analytic framework presented within it. While it certainly does not account for every moving piece of audience/industry interactions, it *is* meant to be a

useful addition to methodological and analytic toolboxes that are increasingly spread thin trying to account for the complex digitally mediated interactions between media audiences and industries. It is also meant to lend legitimacy to *each* analytic approach/perspective with which these phenomena might typically be examined, and demonstrate how a focus on social constructions can allow such approaches to usefully speak to one another. And finally, the dissertation's results are meant to demonstrate for media studies scholars what we see in James's story to be true: conflicting interpretations can still tell us a lot, *and* make for an interesting story.

### **Revisiting the Results of the Dissertation**

The research presented in this dissertation was conducted to better understand media audience/industry interactions and influence. By articulating, deploying, and centering an "imagined industry" analytic framework/perspective, I sought to demonstrate the concept's methodological and analytic value in revealing nuanced results and implications that reflect the complexities of these interactions. Below, I include the research questions explored in the dissertation, with brief reviews of the empirically informed answers.

RQ1: How and why do some audience groups form and organize online?

XMC and OMM are both descendants of older, larger active audience groups. The members of each came together online because of shared feelings about media content and industries, and a desire to influence them. The organization, history, relationships,

and technological/tactical lineages of each group's predecessor informed the newer group's formation, structure, alliances and activist commitments.

RQ2: How do these audience members and groups construct or imagine media industries, industry practices, and opportunities/limitations for influencing media industries?

The dissertation's results indicate that both groups share three primary imaginaries about media industries. These are: (1) the industry is exclusive, insular and motivated by profit, (2) the industry is wrong, and (3) the industry is risk-averse. The groups often diverged in their accounts of *why* and *how* the industries are this way, but these overarching imaginaries contained many sub-imaginaries and importantly, informed each group's estimation of how much they might influence the industries, and which tactics would prove most effective.

RQ3: What tactics (especially digital) do these audience groups deploy to impact or influence media industries and why?

The tactics deployed by each group to influence media industries were developed in response to particular imaginaries. The dissertation's results demonstrated that in response to the "the industry is exclusive, insular and motivated by profit" imaginary, the groups planned and employed actions within the tactical themes: "power recognizes power" or "learn the game." Both tactics were meant to reduce the distance between the groups and the industries that is implied by the imaginary. In response to the "the industry is wrong" imaginary, the groups planned and employed actions within the tactical theme: "educate the industries & society." This tactic was meant to inform and

publicize the groups' causes, values, and perceived exclusion/marginalization - to their members, to industries, and to wider society. Finally, in response to the "the industry is risk-averse" imaginary, the groups planned and employed actions within the tactical themes: "negotiate delicately," or "courting controversy." These tactics were meant to achieve results by, on the one hand, calming the skittish industries, and on the other, frightening them by threatening controversy. Often, group tactics were devised in response to more than one imaginary and shared characteristics with multiple tactical themes.

RQ4: How are these tactics informed or impacted by identity? What does this tell us about the goals and limits of queer theory, especially in relation to the digital?

Multiple empirical and analytic results of this dissertation point to both groups' imaginaries, and thus tactics, being informed by members' identities, and importantly, the imagined identities of those in the media industries. The results demonstrate that both groups tend to imagine mainstream industrial identities and politics as oppositional to their own, and thus frame themselves (and their identities) as marginalized by the media. The internet's tendency to flatten interpretations of power contributes to online audiences' easy identification with marginalization. Both group's digital tactics are designed to subvert oppressive norms with a power derived from activists' locations "at the margins." It is significant that a Christian-conservative group with heteronormative goals *and* a politically liberal, heavily feminist/LGBTQ group *both* imagine (and profess) that their tactics disrupt normativity. I argue queer theory must further define its goals,

tactics and parameters in recognition of its vulnerability to co-optation in the contemporary digital/political age.

RQ5: How do members of media industries understand these audience groups, their constructions and tactics, and their potential/ability to influence industries?

The dissertation's results demonstrate that those in the media industries are often aware of these audience groups, sometimes respond to them in ways that cannot be traced to group actions, and sometimes respond and interact directly with the groups. Industrial responses tend to differ significantly for XMC and OMM. For XMC, industrial understandings of the group are revealed within three response themes: "Industrial awareness," "Building community: Creatives' identification with fans," and "Artistic authority and creative control." These responses show the pertinent industries are aware of XMC but are divided in their willingness to share ownership of *Xena*. For OMM, industrial understandings of the group are revealed within two response themes: "Ridicule and confront" and "Private overtures and 'secret' allies." These responses show that most industries that do answer OMM either do so humorously to invalidate the group's legitimacy, or secretly reach out as concerned companies or even allies. In the final section of the dissertation in which I push the project's results to speak "beyond active audiences," I argue that due to industries' large, widespread, diverse and hierarchical nature, there are a multitude of industrial estimations of the potentiality of audience influence. Further I note that the evidence presented in the dissertation suggests these estimations also reflect the identity and positionality of the industrial worker in relation to *their* imagined audience.



## **Beyond Active Audiences: Implications for the study of media audiences and industries in the digital age**

As noted in Chapter 1, many scholars have usefully examined the ways media industries imagine or construct audiences (notably Ang, 1991 and Turow, 2006) and have studied active audiences specifically (notably Radway, 1984; Baym, 2000; and Jenkins, 2012). Indeed, Turow and Draper pointed out in 2014 that there was already “a long string of scholarship on...what individuals within media organizations know or suspect about their audiences,” and a “vast and continuing repository of work on the ways audience members respond to media” (p. 644). Relevant to the groups examined in this dissertation, important prior work has been conducted on fan productivity and campaigns (Scardaville, 2005; Jenkins, 2013; Savage, 2014) and media activism (Montgomery, 1989; Jenkins, 2012; Penney, 2015).

However, Turow and Draper (2014) also argued that, “Perspectives that emphasize the power of individuals who make up the audience do not take into consideration the industrial mechanisms that construct both audiences and the realities to which these audiences are exposed.” This is a common argument made against studies of active audiences (see Andrejevic, 2008; Fuchs, 2014). Yet this very statement by Turow and Draper violates their article’s core premise that audiences are constructed at multiple levels of industry. They do this by conflating constructed audiences with actual audience members and groups. Indeed, the statement ignores that “the realities to which these audiences are exposed” happen to real individuals who inevitably do not exist as industries imagine them. I argue that work showing that some audiences find pleasures

and uses of media entirely divergent from industrial design and expectations (Radway, 1984; Jenkins, 2013), along with studies that interrogate and expose the workings and inaccuracies of constructed market segments (Sender, 2004; Fuller, 2010), reinforce and complement work that argues for the industrially constructed nature of audiences and that looks to understand industrial mechanisms of power. Further, in critiques of work on active audiences (Andrejevic, 2004, 2008; Turow, 2011, Fuchs, 2014), there is an almost stubborn exclusion of Stuart Halls's (2003) discipline-building work on encoding/decoding. Indeed it is more difficult to argue that Jenkins (2013), Radway (1984), and other scholars studying audience readings are naïve and celebratory utopians if you acknowledge their work examines the complexities of media production and reception promised by Halls's seminal work.

Those countering scholarship on active audiences usually charge that despite the “celebrated” audience readings and activities studied, those audiences remain ignorant of, or don't carefully consider, the industrial structures and political-economic conditions producing the media they consume. Indeed, even when results point to fans who carefully think about media industries and savvily remain ambivalent about their ability to intervene in the production and distribution of media, some scholars' standpoints disallow any analysis that concedes their awareness and critical consumption. For instance, Andrejevic (2008) argued that the consequence of the savvy displayed by fans he studied was a: “sense of political inertness—only the dupes imagine that things could be otherwise; the nonduped may well crave social change, but they are not so naïve as to be fooled by their desire into believing that it is actually possible.” In addition, Andrejevic made this claim without accounting for the specificity of the cultural norms

and goals of his site of study, and extrapolated his argument to nearly any fans or other active audiences that might present as aware and invested in understanding media production and industries.

I argue that such readings of active audience research are incorrect, particularly in their assessment that audience research must (and does) naturally omit considerations of media industries and larger structures of media corporations, policies and markets. Almost any thorough examination of active audiences inevitably reveals audience constructions *of industries*. However, such revelations are often embedded in results that primarily describe and analyze audience activities, without as thorough of an accounting for the role of the audience's *imagined industry*. Of course, scholars must attend to the primary object of study in their work, so it is understandable that audience constructions of industries, and the ways they imagine opportunities and limitations for influencing those industries, are often minimized or omitted in the final analysis. This dissertation has demonstrated what it looks like to center these concerns using "the imagined industry" as an analytic framework.

Although I argue Turow and Draper (2014) too quickly dismiss active audience research and too conveniently position work on "corporate digital surveillance" as invalidating any suggestions of user/audience agency, I agree with their premise that social constructionism can provide the tools necessary to deconstruct the increasingly complex, data-driven, "digital media ecosystem" (p. 652). Indeed, the authors suggest the following:

Social constructionism in the context of research on media industry structures and outcomes can help address questions about the implications of actors and their data in the new media system. Comparisons of how non-industry user-creators construct themselves, their audiences and their contributions with the ways a

firm's executives construct themselves, their audiences and their contributions can illuminate the extent and nature of tensions coursing through new production-of-culture fields. The same can be said of comparisons of ways user-creators construct media executives, construct the executives' audience requirements and construct their contributions with the ways the executives see themselves and their mandates. Using the lens of social constructionism, these and other broad approaches to audience can open fascinating windows into the struggles that are forming the digital media environment in which we live" (p. 654)

Of course, this is a rather difficult paragraph to operationalize. We already possess analytic concepts and tools to study self-constructions in these interactions (audience-centered and industry-centered research). Further, Turow (1997, 2011) and others have demonstrated the importance of the industrial construction of audiences in understanding market segmentation and corporate media structures. But I would argue the complexity of their description really suggests a multi-level, multi-directional approach that deploys these extant analytic perspectives *in combination* with newer understandings and deployments of audience constructions of industries. And that social constructionism is meant as the comparative nexus that allows for nuanced analysis and theoretical associations between these entities and perspectives. This, I argue, is what the imagined industry analytic framework provides. And, the dissertation's results are meant to demonstrate its utility in complicating previously limited analyses of these phenomena. Indeed, in media studies there is a tendency to oversimplify conversations around digital media, audiences, and industries - not least because many 'old' media concepts are no longer suited to the complexities of power and influence in industry/audience interactions. In the following section, I address two questions with which much of the current literature is often preoccupied, but that predominant analytic structures tend to flatten: "The Question of Efficacy," and "The Question of Tactics." This final section builds on the empirical infrastructure I've built thus far to tease out some remaining

points of focus from the research questions and apply the “imagined industry’s” imperative for nuance.

### **The Question of Efficacy: Embracing the Interpretive Perspective**

“The fans have a lot more power than they used to. And I don’t think the studios want you to know that...”

- “Eddie,” Admin (Xena Movie Campaign)

“...We know what we’re doing is right and what the Bible tells us is right. And we focus on that more so than the victories, but we do feel like we’re making a big difference...”

- Monica Cole, Director (One Million Moms)

“You know as vocal as the fans are, that’s not necessarily what changes corporations’ minds, you know?”

- Adrienne Wilkinson, Actress (Livia/Eve on *Xena: Warrior Princess*)

“You toy with the fan community to your own peril. You want to make people who are going to make web pages, who are going to mobilize other fans, who are going to show up at the conventions. That is the black powder that you build an even bigger community out of, you know?”

- Javier Grillo-Marxuach, Producer/Writer (Unproduced *Xena* Reboot)

Fan studies often get bogged down in the relationship between the fan and the text (hence the preponderance of work on fan fiction, “shipping,” and remixing and (re)production). This is important work, but unfortunately is sometimes deployed as the primary contribution from fan studies scholarship to audience/industry interactions and

relationships. Strangely, when the field *does* examine fans' relationships to industries, it suddenly takes an industry-centric approach that privileges and prioritizes industrial or scholarly narratives about how the industries work and fans' chances at impacting them (Andrejevic, 2008; Stanfill, 2015). Returning to Turow and Draper (2014), we see them demonstrate a tendency, especially for scholars with an industrial or political-economic approach, to reduce audience activities and audience/industry interactions to a question of efficacy:

“...Despite the contentions regarding digital-powers-to-the-people, important questions remain that the proponents of such views almost never raise: How broad and deep is this power by individuals and volunteer networks of collaborators compared to the large institutional brokers of cultural and political power in society? Is the new individual or group autonomy the central force that will shape the way Americans and others learn about the world and realize opportunities to benefit from it, or will other emerging factors be more important, more decisive? (p. 649)

Indeed, not only do the authors center efficacy as the most pertinent question, they suggest that for claims of audience/user agency to be useful or worthy of further analysis, it must be demonstrated that they will become the “central force” in America and the wider world. That is a tall order, and few analyses work toward such large-scale claims. As evidenced in the participant quotes opening this section, various actors in audience/industry interactions hold varying estimations of the efficacy or outcomes of active audiences. “Success” is defined differently by XMC and OMM, and still differently again by members of the industries.

OMM performs an explicit tactic to demonstrate the efficacy of their campaigns; they claim all “victories” as their own. For example, if a show OMM boycotts is canceled, the group argues it was because of their demands, because audiences recognize the content as offensive, and because OMM is correct in their estimations that audiences

have no interest in supporting such content. In this way, OMM's "wins" work to prove the validity of their claims against the industries and about the strength of their own group. The members of OMM also often read industrial actions and statements as coded indicators of success. For instance, OMM had long boycotted JC Penney, first due to their hiring of Ellen DeGeneres and later due to their catalogs' featuring LGBTQ families. When JC Penney backtracked on what had been a large-scale rebranding of the company (the hiring of DeGeneres and the distribution of the "offensive" catalogs occurred during this rebrand), OMM declared victory. JC Penney aired a commercial apologizing to customers for the rebrand. However, the commercial and wide-scale coverage of the backtracking and apology made no explicit mention of the two issues that had caused the OMM boycott. Instead, they focused on the failures of the rebrand in trying to attract upper class, tech-savvy customers, store design changes, and especially the elimination of sales. However, to OMM, JC Penney had been speaking directly to the group. Cole explained:

The commercial *did* say that, "we're sorry that we offended customers," that "we want to welcome you back," that "we're going back to the way it used to be." So even though it was vague, it was still an apology, and our supporters want to support these companies that are trying to do the right thing and just remain neutral, so our supporters went back to shopping at JC Penny at that time.

Thus, OMM defines its own success in very particular ways. And, importantly, doesn't see efficacy as a necessary component of successful activism anyway. Cole explained that God calls the group to "remain faithful in doing what we know is right," *not* to be successful. So, for the group, success is defined as fulfilling duties required as part of a higher calling, and no industrial action could likely alter their definitions of such efficacy.

XMC, especially when I spoke with them in the early days following the announcement of the reboot project and the hiring of Grillo-Marxuach, enthusiastically

pointed to the tactics they were sure had caused them to be successful in their mission. As the group watched the reboot plans unravel however, their enthusiasm waned, and the number of active admins and volunteers began dropping. Much later, after Ariel told me about the challenges of sustaining the group's membership and passion, I asked if she still believed the group had caused the reboot to even be considered by NBCUniversal:

Yes, I do. And, it wasn't just us, because we aren't the only *Xena* fans who have been campaigning. But as far as I know, we are the longest lasting organization or website, or fan site, dedicated to a *Xena* revival. So I don't want to take all the credit, but I think we were part of a movement that made it get that far.

Thus, Ariel still imagined that in many ways the group had been successful, and worked to share that success with the wider community of allied groups working toward the same goals. The group's understandings of efficacy may change again depending on future activity around the franchise.

How industries imagine active audience efficacy clearly varies greatly not only in the wider industries, but within smaller industrial communities. As evidenced earlier in the dissertation there is certainly a divide between creatives and executives when it comes to being open to audience influence. Writer/producer James demonstrated this in a story about a studio that had invited him in as a possible writer for a series:

I remember being in a heated discussion with the president of a studio... And when I structure my series, I have a rule, you *do not* alienate your fans. You don't. You encourage them. ...And this guy was just adamant that those were "those wackos." You know, "we're not trying to please the wackos." And I couldn't make him understand that ... I know how to include them and foster them. And he pointed out to me that that's just a tiny sliver of our audience. And I said, "And that tiny sliver of the audience is responsible for the largest merchandising spike of any TV series." And that is absolutely true, especially if the fans respect you, and they feel love coming back to them.

However, as also detailed earlier in the dissertation, there are divides even among the creatives who are generally seen as more "fan friendly." During an interview, I told *Xena*



actress Adrienne Wilkinson I thought *Xena* fans seemed frustrated at not getting responses from NBCUniversal when, in the 1990s they had avenues for direct communication to showrunners and other cast and crew. When I asked her if that type of audience access is more difficult to achieve in the contemporary moment, she replied:

Oh, gosh. I don't know that I have the expertise to really speak on that, because I wasn't part of those conversations ever. I mean, it sounds terrible, but part of me would say they didn't really ever have as much control as they thought that they did.

She clarified that the people allowing fans access during the original series were creatives, not NBC, and that those relationships take time to build. She said for this new project, fans couldn't really expect to *begin* with a say in the project. Her statements reveal a different understanding of the possibilities for fan efficacy in comparison to, say Javier Grillo-Marxuach, who *did* reach out to fans immediately for the new project.

Wilkinson immediately pointed this out, saying:

It's so funny because I've heard people talking about how they really wanted to rip Javier a new one in some way, and I just think, "you're missing the point entirely." He respects the fandom so much that he is reaching out to you from the beginning. Which is unheard of. So, I mean, if they are feeling disrespected, I really think they're not reading the room correctly.

Clearly, those in the industries have different ideas of the protocol for audiences seeking access to the industries. These seem highly tied to industrial perceptions of the possibilities for efficacy and the related norms of audience/industry relationships and industrial hierarchies.

Noting these differences in industrial understandings of efficacy, it is important to remember that the identity and goals of the groups matter in these industrial estimations of audiences' tactical success. As explained in the previous chapter, it is difficult to determine industrial thoughts about OMM, as they are much less likely to engage the

group than industries do XMC. In the previous chapter, I mentioned a former executive who told me that an OMM campaign against their former employer (that OMM claimed as a success) wasn't actually dropped in response to OMM demands. Instead, it was wider audience and market forces that led to the company's changes. There is also reason to believe that some in the industries perceive of OMM's activism as leading to a paradoxical efficacy. In other words, they may believe that OMM actually brings attention to the content they boycott, thus potentially boosting its success. Further, if industries stand against the group politically, forces might rally against the group, thus actually increasing the efficacy of the politics of the original content and producer. For instance, this seems to have been the outcome with the OMM campaign against DeGeneres, which caused audiences to rally behind her, JC Penney, and even LGBTQ causes like GLAAD. Similarly, when OMM demanded Toys R Us remove an *Archie* comic book from their shelves because it featured a same-sex wedding, the store refused and ended up selling out. The *Archie* Comics CEO stated in a press release: "Our fans have come out in full force to support Kevin...He is, without a doubt, the most important new character in Archie history. He's here to stay" (Flood, 2012). Thus, some in the industries may have the impression a campaign like OMM can actually unwittingly increase the efficacy of *industrial* content and causes, while harming the reputation of the audience group itself.

Examining this multitude of perspectives through the imagined industry analytic helps to provide a nuanced view of the debates around efficacy. The analytic's "opening up" of the complexities of perspectives also works to expose the flaws in an analytic that might reduce these nuanced interactions and relationships to an objective question of

efficacy. In other words, what audiences perceive and what industries perceive, even if their imaginings differ, can both be true. This should be an uncontroversial claim for those who work in qualitative media studies. Indeed, most political-economic or critical-cultural media researchers are not working from a positivist perspective of scholarship, or the world. Most of our work is interpretive and allowing these interpretations to productively speak with one another can allow for useful insights for researchers of audiences, industries, policy, identity, technology, and wider society. For instance, one can imagine how the perspectives detailed here regarding efficacy could be deployed in really any object of study related to audience/producer interactions and relationships. The added utility of an imagined industry perspective is that its attention to overlapping and interacting social constructions requires that analyses inform and work in conversation with other studies. In this, the framework also necessitates the scholar approach others' analyses of related objects and social constructions with an intellectual generosity that takes their findings as valid (if methodologically and analytically sound), and looks for ways such work might complement their own to provide a more nuanced understanding of these interactions.

### **The Question of Tactics: Co-Opting Queer? Queer Theory in the Digital Age**

“I’ve had discussions, some long discussions, with some atheists over the last couple of months that say, ‘you’re not counter culture. Culture *is* Christian!’ I’m like, ‘It isn’t!’ Today’s culture isn’t Christian-related, it’s anything *but* Christian-related, and that’s why I’m wanting to do counter to what today’s culture is promoting - to go against the grain.”

- Tina Griffin, Blogger/Speaker (“Counter Culture Mom” and OMM Affiliate)

What is at once obvious about the two case studies examined in this dissertation is how much they differ. OMM is primarily composed of heterosexual Christian-conservative women performing activism online to fight LGBTQ representations and other media content they label “explicit” or “offensive.” Xena Movie Campaign is an online group with a heavily female and LGBTQ-identified and allied membership. Members perform activism for feminist, queer, intersectional representation in their quest for a new *Xena* project. Indeed, these differences are partially why the groups were selected for a comparative case study. However, another reason I selected the groups for a comparative case study was that I had an inclination that, in many ways, they are very similar. And as evidenced in the previous chapters, the empirical results of this dissertation revealed just how similar. Most notably, the two groups share the same imaginings of media industries, and perform the same types of digital tactics in response.

In Chapter 1, I combined literatures on queer theory and studies of technology to hone in on conceptions of queer digital tactics so that I might locate and analyze them as they appeared in the dissertation results. Prevailing understandings of queer tactics are that they are tactics that look to subvert norms. Or, as Halperin (1995) explained: “whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant.” It looks for possibilities of “...reordering the relations among sexual behaviours, erotic identities, constructions of gender, forms of knowledge, regimes of enunciation.” Indeed, as we see here, queer tactics are predominately understood as tactics deployed based on gender and sexual identities. These identities, usually shorthanded as LGBTQ, are understood as marginalized within larger heteronormative societal structures.

In Chapter 1, I also described the turn by some queer theorists away from the theory's commitments to gender and sexuality to a focus on deviation. For instance, Ahmed (2006) argued that leaving behind gender and sexuality would allow for moving:

...between sexual and social registers, without flattening them or reducing them to a single line. Although this approach risks losing the specificity of queer as a commitment to a life of sexual deviation, it also sustains the significance of "deviation" in what makes queer lives queer. (p. 161)

Operationalizing this queer tactical approach (sans LGBTQ anchors) for the case studies then, I attempt to locate queer tactics, and I find them immediately. Indeed, I find I am studying a "deviant" group, excluded and ridiculed by the mainstream, that organizes to disrupt media's and societies' norms. Thus, the group seems to be practicing the very definition of queer tactics. An influencer in the group explained to me the oppressive environment with which they contend, as well as their hope in the internet as a tool for organizing and resistance:

... We are blasted a lot just because it is going against the grain... They're very hateful for how they attack us: saying they're going to burn your family, "we're going to hunt you down," "you're all going to die." There's been some pretty nasty stuff that's been said over the airwaves, but, still, I think that technology and the digital age have made it easier and made people more bold, banding together... And a lot of people are fed up of watching from the side lines, and that's why you see a lot more activism happening online and in real life."

Of course, this activist is Tina Griffin, Christian-Conservative blogger and a member of OMM.

Naturally, I know Griffin isn't queer. She would never identify as such. And we've spoken at length and I know well her opinions about LGBTQ identities. I've heard her repeatedly argue *for* heteronormativity and, for example, describe how horrible it is that media are creating a culture in which children think: "What's the big deal if two mommies get married and adopt a baby?" The dissertation's findings point to *XMC*

embodying a classically understood embodiment of queer tactics, in which they organize (at least partially based on their marginalized gender identities/sexuality) to subvert the heteronormative tropes of mainstream media content. So, how can queer theory also read Griffin as queer? It is because queer theory, displaced from its foundation in LGBTQ identities, simply calls for tactics that deviate from norms. A majority (62%) of Americans support same-sex marriage (Pew, 2018). Thus, approval of same-sex marriage is now a norm, *and* a federally-protected right. OMM's beliefs and activism, then, deviate from these norms<sup>50</sup>. Returning to Ahmed's (2006) claim that "deviation is what makes queer lives queer," I'd argue that no, *queer sex* (and relatedly, gender) is what makes queer lives queer.

So, how did this happen? Why does OMM practice "queer" tactics according to definitions of queering generated by some prominent queer theorists? Their tactics closely resemble those of XMC (a more traditionally queer-identified group). And yet their identities, politics and goals are diametrically opposed. The results of this dissertation suggest that OMM's deployment of queer tactics has more to do with their complicated relationships with industries than with queerness or sexuality. The "imagined industry" analytic framework revealed the group's imaginings of industries, how these were informed and experienced online, and the resultant tactics the group enacted that they imagined would be most effective toward their cause. As alluded to in

---

<sup>50</sup> It must be acknowledged here that many who would align themselves with even an identity-based queer politics oppose same-sex marriage. Indeed, a prevailing queer argument is that seeking state-sanctioned marriage is assimilationist, homonormative, and pragmatic at the expense of a future-based queer politics (See Munoz, 2009). Still, those with this stance would never position themselves against same-sex marriage *in defense of* state-protected "traditional" heterosexual marriage. And this is the "queer" tactic OMM deploys.

Chapter 1, there is a history of debate over queer theory's need for gender and sexuality based politics (See Jagose, 1996). However, Jagose is emblematic of a tendency from those older debates to, even when acquiescing to theoretical notions of vulnerability, claim an inability to even imagine a near future in which (anti-LGBTQ) heterosexuals might be able to both access<sup>51</sup> queer theory *and* effectively appropriate its tactics. As the scope of this dissertation is wide and meant to demonstrate the imagined industry's analytic potential for a variety of different objects at play in the case studies, I will avoid dense queer theoretical maneuvers. Instead, based on the successful "Queer OMM" thought experiment presented, below I offer four brief, empirically-informed claims about (for) queer theory.

***Queer theory must not prioritize tactics over the body.***

Likely because of the wide analytic and political applicability the choice seems to imply, increasingly some look to embrace queer theory's tactics without its identity-based foundations. "Queer has tended to occupy a predominantly sexual register. Recent signs indicate, however, that its denaturalising project is being brought to bear on other axes of identification than sex and gender" (Jagose, 1996, p. 99). Despite the allure of widespread tactical flexibility in subverting norms, we must avoid a queer theory that divorces tactics from sexuality, and thus from the body. Instead, we should embrace an empirical complexity that refuses to divorce embodied conditions from tactics. Indeed, tactics don't make something queer, and de-norming isn't what makes *someone* queer. (As evidence, just look to Donald Trump, who has recently de-normed contemporary

---

<sup>51</sup> By access they both imply queer theory's limited availability outside of "ivory towers," and fall prey to that same notion of the concept's elitism by refusing to believe the uninitiated might decipher queer theory's esoteric code.

American politics, but likely not in a way that radical LGBTQ activists - no fans of normative politics themselves - would embrace.) It is important to understand that it would be an error to even begin analysis at the level of tactic. As demonstrated in the results of this dissertation, tactics are always informed by imaginaries. It is important to remember that the prized queer tactic of “troubling” stems from Butler’s (2011) contention that the performativity of identity (and the importance of its repetition) is situated as key to its cultural undoing. Butler asserted, “...it is only within the practices of repetitive signifying that a subversion of identity becomes possible” (p. 199). Thus we see that the tactic (troubling) is informed by the performativity of identity (queer), that must at some point orient *against* something.

***The imaginary informs; the internet flattens.***

So, rather than beginning with the tactic, we *could* begin with the imaginary. Indeed, if the performativity of identity requires something to orient *against* for the tactics to emerge, we can recognize parallels from the dissertation’s results. We know that OMM orients themselves against *their imaginings* of media industries. For instance, Griffin imagined media industries thus:

...(The) problem is that the louder mouth right now in the media is the liberal side that is very anti-family, very pro-gay, very anti-life. And because they have the power of the media, it makes it look like 95% of our country is lost. I don’t think that’s the case at all.”

So, to Griffin, the media is always liberal. Thus she imagines it always oriented *against* her values: *anti-family, pro-gay, anti-life*. But the imagined liberal power over the medium, and thus visibility (Gross, 2001), mean her political allies must be many, but rendered invisible. Similarly, OMM member Victoria also situated the “mainstream media” as the very opposite of her identity and values, condemning the people she



understands as *the media*, while infusing *the medium* with tactical potential for her own politics:

I think the mainstream media, I'm completely opposite of it, and I don't trust them with anything. ... I like Fox News, you know, and they may be truthful in 75-90% of what they're saying, but that doesn't mean I'm going to 100% trust everything that they're saying. I'm going to research, listen to what someone else is saying. What is somebody else thinking? What is my president tweeting? ... I actually don't mind him tweeting, I'm fine with that, because he is saying his mind, and I am hearing from my president. Like when he's on TV, and I'm hearing my president talk to me, I know what he's saying, ... it's not hearsay.

So, *the media* are wrong, but the television has the (75-90%) potential to be "right" when utilized by Fox News. Twitter as a medium can be deployed (100%?) tactically by her president for direct communication to allies.

Both women's imagined media industry is liberal, gay, *wrong*. Edelman (2004) argued: "Only the mediation of the signifier allows us to *articulate* those Imaginary relations... (it is) "the signifier, by means of which we always inhabit the order of the Other" (p. 8). And indeed, both women respond to media with an imaginary. It is an imaginary they orient themselves *against*. Therefore, the imaginary informs their movement (tactics) against, and solidifies their identity *as* other. And importantly, *othered*. I argue that for OMM, and most others in the digital age, media's tendency to flatten even more strongly reinforces a propensity to imagine the self as othered, as marginalized. The internet's tendency to flatten is described by Marwick and boyd (2010) in the context of Twitter thus: "

Like many social network sites, Twitter flattens multiple audiences into one – a phenomenon known as 'context collapse'. The requirement to present a verifiable, singular identity makes it impossible to differ self-presentation strategies, creating tension as diverse groups of people flock to social network sites (boyd, 2008). (p. 122)

Context collapse combined with diversity of opinion, identity and experience provoke anxiety and, perhaps ultimately, even tribalism. Marwick and boyd (2010) explained: “The large audiences for sites like Facebook or MySpace may create a lowest-common denominator effect, as individuals only post things they believe their broadest group of acquaintances will find non-offensive” (p. 122). Certainly there are a number of current debates about whether the internet has created a tendency to live in online “filter bubbles.<sup>52</sup>” Whether members of OMM do or do not look to reduce exposure to difference, their experiences of the internet seem to parallel their interactions with entertainment media. Marwick and boyd noted that broadcast television also “collapse(s) diverse social contexts” (p.123). Perhaps this collapse is why both entertainment and digital media, while framed as potentially politically empowering for the group, are imagined as agents of the women’s perceived marginalization.

When I asked Linda if politically, she feels like an insider or an outsider on the internet, she responded thus:

Politically I am bashed, bullied and called every nasty name in the book. It is obvious my views are against mainstream opinions, but it won’t shut me up.... Offenses are a commonplace attack these days as so many want to play the victim, and especially online where they are behind a computer screen to guard them. Or so they think. Just as God intended for the internet to be created and used for His good, the enemy has taken it to his level of deceit with his garbage can filled with vileness. That doesn’t mean he has won. Quite the contrary. There are those of us who have been through the fires of hell that have discovered God fights our battles for us as we enter into our faith with Him, even on the internet.

---

<sup>52</sup> For more on the current anxieties, see Leetaru (2017) in *Forbes* exploring: “Why 2017 was the Year of the Filter Bubble?”

Here we see the imaginary inform, and affirm, Linda's identity. It is an identity oriented against the imagined population of the internet. That imaginary informs Linda's tactic of reclaiming the internet as a weapon for God's purpose.

***We must (re)claim identity to resist co-optation.***

As we've seen, the internet flattens, and this can lead to wider identifications with marginalization. Herein lies the rub in abandoning identity for tactics. If anyone can perceive themselves as marginalized, then they'll always imagine their tactics as countering norms. In that case, anyone's tactics can be claimed as queer tactics. And that's how we get to an analysis that declares OMM is performing queer tactics and looking *to queer* media content. Of course, the analysis is based on imaginaries. However, if marginalization and norms can't be meaningfully located, tactics are in turn flattened as a queer analytic category (and tactics would be all that remained in a queer theory without identity, anyway.) For instance, assuming there is some progressive movement in society, homonormative as it might be, it becomes impossible to identify marginality without the body, particularly the politics of the body, i.e. sex. One example of this is the "norm" of same-sex marriage mentioned earlier. Another is that in 2015, white gay men were *over*represented on television (GLAAD, 2015). Yes, this statistic reveals a lot about how visibility can expose other marginalizations (for instance trans or Black lesbian representation). But it also sounds very much like something an OMM member would say proves gay as media's "norm" (and Christian as marginalized).

Jagose (1996) explained these concerns about what happens when lesbian or gay sexuality is divorced from "queer:"

Although Elizabeth Grosz (1995: 249-50) concedes that part of queer's appeal is 'an ambiguity about what the term "queer" refers to', some of the things it might

refer to make it a risky political category: ‘Lesbian and Gay’ has the advantage of straightforwardly articulating its constituency, while ‘queer’ is capable of accommodating, and will not [sic] doubt provide a political rationale and coverage in the near future for many of the most blatant and extreme forms of heterosexual and patriarchal power games. They too are, in a certain sense, queer, persecuted, ostracized. Heterosexual sadists, pederasts, fetishists, pornographers, pimps, voyeurs suffer from social sanctions: in a certain sense they too can be regarded as oppressed. But to claim an oppression of the order of lesbian and gay, women’s or racial oppression is to ignore the very real complicity and phallic rewards of what might be called ‘deviant sexualities within patriarchal and heterocentric power relations.’” (p. 112)

Indeed, considering their treatment by the media industries they engage, OMM might be oppressed or, at least excluded, in society. I’d argue a queer politics would champion excluding a heteronormative hate group.

Norms suggest boundaries and margins. For queer theory to account for marginalization, there needs to be an othering of the body. For one’s politics to be called “queer,” their body must work to de-naturalize. One must come from a place where they are actually being marginalized for their gender/sexuality identities and practices. There must be bodily stakes to claim the tactical power located in the margins. Thus, I contend that if we separate queer theory and tactics from gender/sexuality, we risk the tactics being co-opted and “queerness” being subsumed. It has always been central to queer theory to not be tied down in defining itself. Still, the commitment to queer gender/sexualities has already been made<sup>53</sup>, shouldn’t be controversial anyway, and must be upheld. Indeed, queer theory needs to work to (re)define itself and its commitments,

---

<sup>53</sup> In 1993, Sedgwick first publicly embraced the word ‘queer,’ defining it around gender/sexuality: “the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or *can’t be* made) to signify monolithically” (p. 8).

lest its theory and tactics be co-opted. And, as I suggest below, conservative appropriation of progressive activism is already happening.

***Conservatives have learned from liberals about identity and how to leverage it.***

When we were helping Trump become president... we were like, “Okay people, you’ve gotta get out there, you’ve gotta vote, you’ve gotta let your voices be heard.” And I think that with that happening, and with him being voted in, it’s like we *were* heard! And so it’s like, “Okay people, our voices *do* work. So it’s kind of empowered the Christian groups... to say our voices are being heard a little bit more. If we stand up a little bit more, maybe we *can* make a difference. By seeing the left activist groups... it’s like, *we* need to stand up.

- Victoria, OMM Member

The dissertation has illustrated the many ways OMM members orient themselves *against* what they perceive to be the dominant culture in the United States. OMM members primarily perform these moves against LGBTQ individuals, communities, and rights. It is their perception that LGBTQ communities and organizations have been exceedingly effective in their activism. In fact, AFA credits them with the decisive victory in the “culture wars.”<sup>54</sup> In seeing LGBTQ groups (whose activism was often informed by critical race theory, feminism, and queer theory) successfully educate and advocate for their identities, values, and social demands, OMM likewise sees a failure in their own groups to do the same. Certainly, their recognition of this success and even the spread of concepts like “the personal is political,” “intersectionality,” etc, does not mean they fully understand, or perhaps accept, the ways they are deployed. For instance, one

---

<sup>54</sup> See Vitagliano, (2018), first mentioned in Chapter 5, for AFA’s account of how “Two Homosexual Men Changed America.”

OMM Facebook commenter distilled work toward LGBTQ education and equality in schools to: “Make LGBT more special than any other straight people.<sup>55</sup>” Still, it seems clear the object is not to *understand* theories of identity, it is to learn how to appropriate them and their tactics.

Many scholars of identity identified these threats early on, including within queer theory. Jagose noted in 1996:

Certainly the prospect of being politically mobilised in the interests of those whose sexual practices or identities are understood as antithetical to the broadly progressive politics traditionally articulated by lesbians and gay men is often identified as a major deficiency of the queer model.” (p. 113)

Jagose also pointed to: “...Grosz’s prediction (1995:249, 250) that queer will be hijacked in ‘the near future’ by an unruly band of heterosexual perverts committed to the maintenance of ‘heterocentric power relations’ (p. 114). It is interesting that in these early queer debates, the largest concern was about the adoption of the term and tactics by pedophiles or other disturbing, but “alternative,” sexual crimes/interests. “Traditional” moms fighting for the “rights” to be Christian, heterosexual and conventionally feminine didn’t seem like a threat on any horizon. Still, that is often how OMM members describe their activism. Tina explained to me that since Donald Trump was elected President, there was a renewed energy in this type of “Christian activism:”

...in the last year/year and a half, I’ve never felt or seen more Christians finally putting their petty junk aside, and say, “How can we band together and try and win back this country, win back the culture, and save our kids?” Because of that, I think a lot of people are now being activists, banding together.

---

<sup>55</sup> Such an incorrect interpretation certainly betrays the misplaced envy of the sentiment: that LGBTQ genders and sexuality might have replaced heterosexuality as the dominant cultural power. It also embodies the popular saying: “When you’re accustomed to privilege, equality feels like oppression.”

And religion, gender and sexuality are not the only “identity politics<sup>56</sup>” being wrestled over. They are all considered up for grabs.

Scholars, activists and the wider public are increasingly recognizing these counter-tactics<sup>57</sup>. Herrmann detailed in a 2017 article, “Why the Far Right Wants to be the New ‘Alternative Culture.’” The article concluded that there is undeniable strength in claiming an “alternative” identity: “Nothing could be better for an insurgent political force than to be seen as a scrappy outsider” (Herrman, 2017). Similarly, a *New Republic* article titled, “What the Alt-Right Learned from the Left,” references Nagle’s (2017) research on toxic online movements. And of course, there are likely dozens of dissertations and books currently being written about Donald Trump’s ability to convince heterosexual white middle class voters of their marginalization by people of color, immigrants, LGBTQ people, and the “fake news.” Such widespread co-optation of marginality and its tactics (which have been developed by activists for decades, if not centuries), will be difficult to counter.

Still, I’d argue there *are* answers: social *and* political, on-the-ground *and* theoretical. Queer theory was designed to be, really, the *queerest* of all. Refusing to declare any one serious scholarly goal, it instead sought to “provoke, annoy, bother, irritate, and amuse” (Halberstam, 2011). Halberstam insisted it was there to “fuck things up,” Edelman encouraged it to “embrace death,” and Munoz (2009) used it to “cruise.” Queer theory’s focus on maintaining this tactile flexibility means it might be the one to

---

<sup>56</sup> In an Opinion piece in the *The New York Times*, a conservative professor made, “A Conservative Case for Identity Politics” (Shields, 2018).

<sup>57</sup> See Marwick and Lewis (2018) for an excellent and detailed report on the increase in far-right hacking, radicalization, and media manipulation – many of which are outcomes of such appropriation.

most effectively counter its own co-optation. I hope the results of this research help to encourage scholars to define and deploy queer theory to do just that.



### Appendix: Participant Observation

In addition to interviews and analysis of industry/press coverage and corporate documents, see below for examples of additional data collection/immersion/participant observation for each group.

XMC	OMM
Immersion in XMC social media accounts	Immersion in OMM and AFA social media accounts and official websites
Frequented similar/associated groups' websites and social media accounts	Frequented similar/associated groups' websites and social media accounts
Watched/listened to/read media produced by group and their affiliates <sup>58</sup>	Watched/listened to/read media produced by group and their affiliates <sup>59</sup>
Attended Official <i>Xena</i> Convention and fan-run Xenite Retreat	Signed up for OMM, AFA and Counter Culture Mom mailing lists. Regularly received and read their communications and literature
Brief and informal discussions in-person or online during recruitment efforts, at events or in social media/real life chats, posts or other discussions	Brief and informal discussions online during recruitment efforts, at events or in social media chats, posts or other discussions
Member of internal XMC "Volunteers" Facebook group for approximately one year	

---

<sup>58</sup> Some examples include watching content on the Xena Movie Campaign YouTube channel, including videos released by admins with messages to members, XMC-produced music videos, XMC footage and reports from fan conventions, and recordings of *Xena*/XMC focused panels (at venues like Clexacon and Geek Girl Con), and other fan events. I also read content produced by similar and affiliated campaigns like "The Xena Revival Project," which posts "episodes" in story form as part of a proposed *Xena* revival project.

<sup>59</sup> Some examples include listening to the AFA's radio network (American Family Radio or AFR), watching content produced by AFA's production company American Family Studios, watching content on the AFA and AFR YouTube channels (like interviews with Monica Cole and other OMM/AFA leaders), and reading news on the AFA's news service at OneNewsNow.com. It also included reading affiliated Christian blogs and consuming their content as well, like Counter Culture Mom's "Parent Media Guide" and educational videos from the site. Finally, I watched content noted by participants as "good" (e.g. the film *God's Not Dead*) and "bad" (e.g. the Netflix series *Nailed It*).

## Bibliography

- ACLU of Colorado. (2018). Masterpiece Cakeshop: ACLU case no. 2012-25. Retrieved from <https://aclu-co.org/court-cases/masterpiece-cakeshop/>
- Adam, S. (2012, March 8). *You did it! 'One Million Moms' abandons call for Ellen to be fired, says group is "moving on."* Retrieved from <https://www.glaad.org/blog/you-did-it-one-million-moms-abandons-call-ellen-be-fired-says-group-moving>
- Adams, A. (2001). Why Xena should not have died: A rejoinder to Rob Tapert. *Whoosh!* Retrieved from <http://www.whoosh.org/issue60/adams60.html>
- Ahmed, S. (2006). *Queer phenomenology: Orientations, objects, others*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Allen, H. (1988, June 10). The mighty controversy. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1988/06/10/the-mighty-controversy/d23e3472-a949-4302-8311-684f320199b3/>
- American Family Association. (2017, February 14). *About us*. Retrieved from <https://www.afa.net/who-we-are/our-mission/>
- Andrejevic, M. (2004). *Reality TV: The work of being watched*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Andrejevic, M. (2007). *iSpy: Surveillance and power in the interactive era*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas.
- Andrejevic, M. (2008). Watching television without pity: The productivity of online fans. *Television & New Media*, 9(1), 24–46.
- Ang, I. (1991). *Desperately seeking the audience*. London: Routledge.

- Ariyanto, A., Hornsey, M. J., & Gallois, C. (2007). Group allegiances and perceptions of media bias: Taking into account both the perceiver and the source. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 10(2), 266–279.
- Armstrong, M. (2001, June 26). Fans lose heads over “Xena.” *E! News*. Retrieved from <https://www.eonline.com/news/41807/fans-lose-heads-over-xena>
- Ashford, C. (2009). Queer theory, cyber-ethnographies and researching online sex environments. *Information & Communications Technology Law*, 18(3), 297–314.
- Ayers, J. W., Althouse, B. M., Leas, E. C., Dredze, M., & Allem, J.P. (2017). Internet searches for suicide following the release of *13 Reasons Why*. *JAMA Internal Medicine*, 177(10), 1527–1529.
- Barrett-Fox, R. (2011). Anger and compassion on the picket line: Ethnography and emotion in the study of Westboro Baptist Church. *Journal of Hate Studies*, 9(1), 11–32.
- Baym, N. K. (2000). *Tune in, log on: Soaps, fandom, and online community*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Baym, N. K. (2012). Fans or friends?: Seeing social media audiences as musicians do. *Participations Journal of Audience & Reception Studies*, 9(2), 286-316.
- Baym, N. K. (2013). Data not seen: The uses and shortcomings of social media metrics. *First Monday*, 18(10).
- Baym, N. K. (2018). *Playing to the crowd: Musicians, audiences, and the intimate work of connection*. New York: New York University Press.
- Bermejo, F. (2009). Audience manufacture in historical perspective: From broadcasting to Google. *New Media & Society*, 11(1–2), 133–154.

- Bersani, L. (1996). *Homos*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Bhattarai, A. (2017, March 30). Carl's Jr.: Sex no longer sells. *Washington Post*.  
Retrieved from  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/business/wp/2017/03/30/carls-jr-sex-no-longer-sells/>
- Bianculli, D. (2001, June 25). Fans' fury at 'Xena' finale. *New York Daily News*.  
Retrieved from <http://www.nydailynews.com/archives/entertainment/fans-fury-xena-finale-article-1.905625>
- Bilton, N. (2014, September 10). Steve Jobs was a low-tech parent. *The New York Times*.  
Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/11/fashion/steve-jobs-apple-was-a-low-tech-parent.html>
- Bird, S. E. (2003). *The audience in everyday life: Living in a media world*. New York: Routledge.
- Boellstorff, T. (2008). *Coming of age in Second Life: An anthropologist explores the virtually human*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Boellstorff, T., Nardi, B., Pearce, C., & Taylor, T. L. (2012). *Ethnography and virtual worlds: A handbook of method*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Box Office Mojo. (2018). *God's Not Dead*. Retrieved from  
<http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=godsnotdead.htm>
- boyd, d. (2011). Social network sites as networked publics. In Z. Papacharissi (Ed.), *A networked self* (pp. 39-58). New York: Routledge.
- Brough, M. M., & Shresthova, S. (2012). Fandom meets activism: Rethinking civic and political participation. *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 10.

- Bryson, M. (2004). When Jill jacks in: Queer women and the net. *Feminist Media Studies*, 4(3), 239–254.
- Butler, J. (2011). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Caldwell, J. T. (2008). *Production culture: Industrial reflexivity and critical practice in film and television*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Castells, M. (2001). *The internet galaxy: Reflections on the internet, business, and society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Castells, M. (2009). *Communication power*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chestang, R. (2012, February 7). Ellen DeGeneres slams One Million Moms. *Entertainment Tonight*. Retrieved from [https://www.etonline.com/tv/118806\\_Ellen\\_DeGeneres\\_Slams\\_One\\_Million\\_Moms](https://www.etonline.com/tv/118806_Ellen_DeGeneres_Slams_One_Million_Moms)
- Christian, A. J. (2017). The value of representation: Toward a critique of networked television performance. *International Journal of Communication*, 11, 1552-1574.
- Chung, S. K., & Kirby, M. S. (2009). Media literacy art education: Logos, culture, jamming, and activism. *Art Education*, 62(1), 34–39.
- ClexaCon. (2018). *ClexaCon*. Retrieved from <https://www.clexacon.com>
- Coleman, G. (2015). *Hacker, hoaxer, whistleblower, spy: The many faces of Anonymous*. London: Verso.
- Conor, B., Gill, R., & Taylor, S. (2015). Gender and creative labour. *The Sociological Review*, 63(1), 1–22.
- Cowan, R. S. (1985). *More work for mother: The ironies of household technology from the open hearth to the microwave*. New York: Basic Books.

- Curtin, M., & Sanson, K. (2016). *Precarious creativity: Global media, local labor*. Oakland: University of California Press.
- Davis, R. (2018, May 16). How far will the dark go ... this time? *AFA*. Retrieved from <http://www.afa.net/the-stand/culture/2018/05/how-far-will-the-dark-go-this-time/>
- Davis, W. P., & Peiser, J. (2018, May 31). 'Roseanne,' the reboot: A timeline. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/29/business/media/roseanne-reboot-timeline.html>
- Deuze, M. (2007). Convergence culture in the creative industries. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 10(2), 243–263.
- Doty, A. (1993). *Making things perfectly queer: Interpreting mass culture*. Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press.
- Douglas, S. J. (1987). *Inventing American broadcasting, 1899-1922*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Du Gay, P. (Ed.). (2003). *Production of culture/Cultures of production*. London: Sage.
- Earl, J., & Kimport, K. (2009). Movement societies and digital protest: Fan activism and other nonpolitical protest online. *Sociological Theory*, 27(3), 220–243.
- Edelman, L. (1998). The future is kid stuff: Queer theory, disidentification, and the death drive. *Narrative*, 6(1), 18–30.
- Edelman, L. (2004). *No future: Queer theory and the death drive*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (2011). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes* (2nd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Ewen, S. (2001). *Captains of consciousness: Advertising and the social roots of the consumer culture*. New York: Basic Books.
- Fahey, P. M. (1991). Advocacy group boycotting of network television advertisers and its effects on programming content. *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, 140(2), 647–709.
- Fanlore. (2017). *For the greater good*. Retrieved from [https://fanlore.org/wiki/For\\_The\\_Greater\\_Good](https://fanlore.org/wiki/For_The_Greater_Good)
- Fathallah, J. (2015). Moriarty's ghost: Or the queer disruption of the BBC's *Sherlock*. *Television & New Media*, 16(5), 490–500.
- Feagin, J. R., Orum, A. M., & Sjoberg, G. (1991). *A case for the case study*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
- File, T. (2013). Computer and internet use in the United States: Population characteristics. *U.S. Census Bureau*. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/prod/2013pubs/p20-569.pdf>
- Fiske, J. (1987). *Television culture*. London: Routledge.
- Fiske, J. (1992). The cultural economy of fandom. In L.A. Lewis (Ed.), *The Adoring audience: Fan culture and popular media* (pp. 30–49). London: Routledge.
- Fuchs, C. (2011). *Foundations of critical media and information studies*. New York: Routledge.
- Fuchs, C. (2014). *Social media: A critical introduction*. London: Sage.
- Gaiman, N. (2015, May 29). “One Million Moms” says new Fox TV series “Lucifer” “mocks the bible,” starts petition urging for show’s cancellation. Retrieved from

<http://neil-gaiman.tumblr.com/post/120223970701/one-million-moms-says-new-fox-tv-series>

- Gamson, J. (1995). Must identity movements self-destruct? A queer dilemma. *Social Problems*, 42(3), 390–407.
- Gauntlett, D., & Hill, A. (1999). *TV living: Television, culture and everyday life*. New York: Routledge.
- Gilbert, S. (2017, August 1). Did *13 Reasons Why* spark a suicide contagion effect? *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2017/08/13-reasons-why-demonstrates-cultures-power/535518/>
- Gitelman, L. (2006). *Always already new: Media, history and the data of culture*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Gitlin, T. (1983). *Inside prime time*. New York: Pantheon.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. New York: Doubleday.
- Goldberg, L. (2015, July 20). ‘Xena: Warrior Princess’ reboot in the works at NBC (Exclusive). *The Hollywood Reporter*. Retrieved from <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/xena-warrior-princess-reboot-nbc-809355>
- Gray, J. (2003). New audiences, new textualities: Anti-fans and non-fans. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 6(1), 64–81.
- Gray, J., Sandvoss, C., & Harrington, C. L. (Eds.). (2007). Introduction: Why study fans? In *Fandom: Identities and communities in a mediated world* (pp. 1–16). New York: New York University Press.



- Griffin, T. M. (2018). *Biography*. Retrieved from <https://counterculturemom.com/biography/>
- Grindstaff, L. (2002). *The money shot: Trash, class, and the making of TV talk shows*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Gross, L. (2001). *Up from invisibility: Lesbians, gay men, and the media in America*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Gutierrez, L. (2018, April 4). 8 things about the MyPillow guy: His drug past, why Trump loves him, a boycott. *The Kansas City Star*. Retrieved from <http://www.kansascity.com/news/nation-world/article207904039.html>
- Gwenllian-Jones, S. (2000). Starring Lucy Lawless? *Continuum*, 14(1), 9–22.
- Halberstam, J. (2011). *The queer art of failure*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Hamming, J. E. (2001). Whatever turns you on: Becoming-lesbian and the production of desire in the Xenaverse. *Genders*, 34. Retrieved from <https://www.colorado.edu/gendersarchive1998-2013/2001/10/01/whatever-turns-you-becoming-lesbian-and-production-desire-xenaverse>
- Hanmer, R. (2014). “Xenasubtexttalk.” *Feminist Media Studies*, 14(4), 608–622.
- Hanson, H. (2016, November 26). “One Million Moms” is going totally ballistic over this new Zales ad. *Huffington Post*. Retrieved from [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/one-million-mom-zales-ad-lesbian-couple\\_us\\_5839fe77e4b09b605600b77f](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/one-million-mom-zales-ad-lesbian-couple_us_5839fe77e4b09b605600b77f)
- Henick, M. (2017). Why “13 Reasons Why” is dangerous. *CNN*. Retrieved from <https://www.cnn.com/2017/05/03/opinions/13-reasons-why-gets-it-wrong-henick-opinion/index.html>

- Herman, E. S., & Chomsky, N. (1988). *Manufacturing consent: The political economy of the mass media*. New York: Pantheon.
- Hesmondhalgh, D., & Baker, S. (2015). Sex, gender and work segregation in the cultural industries. *The Sociological Review*, 63(S1), 23–36.
- Hine, C. (2015). *Ethnography for the Internet: Embedded, embodied and everyday*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Hollar, J. (2010). Dropping Dobbs: A victory for media activism, and the challenge ahead. *NACLA Report on the Americas*, 43(1), 46–48.
- Howard, J. (2017, April 25). Why teen mental health experts are focused on ‘13 Reasons Why.’ *CNN*. Retrieved from <https://www.cnn.com/2017/04/25/health/13-reasons-why-teen-suicide-debate-explainer/index.html>
- Jenkins, H. (2006a). *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide*. New York: NYU Press.
- Jenkins, H. (2006b). *Fans, bloggers, and gamers: Exploring participatory culture*. New York: NYU Press.
- Jenkins, H. (2013). *Textual poachers: Television fans and participatory culture*. New York: Routledge.
- Johnson, D. (2007). Inviting audiences in: The spatial reorganization of production and consumption in ‘TVIII.’ *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 5(1), 61–80.
- Johnson, D. (2013). *Media franchising: Creative license and collaboration in the culture industries*. New York: NYU Press.
- Johnson, E. (2018). *About me*. Retrieved from <https://activistmommy.com/about/>

- Jones, B. (2013). Fifty shades of exploitation: Fan labor and *Fifty Shades of Grey*. *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 15.
- Keeling, K. (2014). Queer OS. *Cinema Journal*, 53(2), 152–157.
- Kiesler, S. (Ed.). (1997). *Culture of the internet*. New York: Psychology Press.
- Kirkland, J. (2018, May 23). The worst part of *Roseanne* was the bad writing – not the bad politics. *Esquire*. Retrieved from <https://www.esquire.com/entertainment/tv/a20874028/roseanne-reboot-finale-review/>
- Krieg, R. (2017, May 22). How ‘Xena: Warrior Princess’ paved the way for modern female TV characters. *Blasting News*. Retrieved from <https://us.blastingnews.com/showbiz-tv/2017/05/how-xena-warrior-princess-paved-the-way-for-modern-female-tv-characters-001717943.html>
- Larsen, K., & Zubernis, L. (2012). *Fandom at the crossroads: Celebration, shame and fan/producer relationships*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Lawless, L. (2014, November 11). Lucy Lawless: When the star becomes fan of a fan. *NZ Herald*. Retrieved from [https://www.nzherald.co.nz/entertainment/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=1501119&objectid=11356793](https://www.nzherald.co.nz/entertainment/news/article.cfm?c_id=1501119&objectid=11356793)
- Lessig, L. (2006). *Code: Version 2.0*. New York: Basic Books.
- Light, A. (2011). HCI as heterodoxy: Technologies of identity and the queering of interaction with computers. *Interacting with Computers*, 23(5), 430–438.
- Lingel, J. (2012). Ethics and dilemmas of online ethnography. In *CHI '12 Extended Abstracts on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (pp. 41–50). New York: ACM.

- Lingel, J. (2017). *Digital countercultures and the struggle for community*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Litt, E. (2012). Knock, knock. Who's there? The imagined audience. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 56(3), 330–345.
- Livingstone, S. (2004). The challenge of changing audiences: Or, what is the audience researcher to do in the age of the internet? *European Journal of Communication*, 19(1), 75–86.
- Livingstone, S. (2010). Giving people a voice: On the critical role of the interview in the history of audience research. *Communication, Culture and Critique*, 3(4), 566–571.
- Livingstone, S. (2015). Active audiences? The debate progresses but is far from resolved. *Communication Theory*, 25(4), 439–446.
- Lovett, J. (2015, August 13). *Xena reboot confirmed to be in development*. Retrieved from <http://comicbook.com/2015/08/13/xena-reboot-confirmed-to-be-in-development/>
- Markovitz, A. (2014, March 23). Box office report: 'Divergent' heads straight for \$56 million win. *Entertainment Weekly*. Retrieved from <http://ew.com/article/2014/03/23/box-office-report-divergent/>
- Marvin, C. (1988). *When old technologies were new: Thinking about electric communication in the late nineteenth century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- McChesney, R. D. (2004). *The problem of the media: U.S. communication politics in the twenty-first century*. New York: NYU Press.

- McClintock, P. (2018, March 20). Box office: 'I Can Only Imagine' revives faith-based genre. *The Hollywood Reporter*. Retrieved from <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/i-can-imagine-revives-faith-based-genre-at-box-office-1095373>
- McGuigan, L., & Manzerolle, V. (Eds.). (2014). *The audience commodity in a digital age: Revisiting a critical theory of commercial media*. New York: Peter Lang.
- McIntosh, A. (2016, August 31). 24 fictional characters who helped people realise they were queer. *Buzzfeed*. Retrieved from <https://www.buzzfeed.com/abigailmcintosh/fictional-characters-who-helped-people-realise-they-were>
- McNutt, M. (2018). *The 100* and the social contract of social TV. *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 26.
- Montgomery, K. C. (1989). *Target: Prime time. Advocacy groups and the struggle over entertainment television*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Morozov, E. (2011). *The net delusion: The dark side of internet freedom*. New York: Public Affairs.
- Mosco, V. (2009). *The political economy of communication*. London: Sage.
- Muñoz, J. E. (2009). *Cruising utopia: The then and there of queer futurity*. New York: NYU Press.
- Murdock, G. (1978). Blindspots about western Marxism: A reply to Dallas Smythe. *CTheory*, 2(2), 109–115.
- Nader, L. (1972). Up the anthropologist: Perspectives gained from studying up. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED065375>

- Nakamura, L. (2015). The unwanted labour of social media: Women of colour call out culture as venture community management. *New Formations: A Journal of Culture/Theory/Politics*, 86(1), 106–112.
- Napoli, P. M. (2011). *Audience evolution: New technologies and the transformation of media audiences*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Nardi, B. (2010). *My life as a night elf priest: An anthropological account of World of Warcraft*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Ng, E. (2017). Between text, paratext, and context: Queerbaiting and the contemporary media landscape. *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 24.
- Nichols, J. M. (2017, March 2). One Million Moms is freaking out about this gay cartoon kiss. *Huffington Post*. Retrieved from [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/one-million-moms-gay-kiss\\_us\\_58b84043e4b0a8ded67aed3e](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/one-million-moms-gay-kiss_us_58b84043e4b0a8ded67aed3e)
- Nolasco, S. (2017, August 11). ‘Xena’ stars have discussed possible reboot, Renee O’Connor reveals. *Fox News*. Retrieved from <http://www.foxnews.com/entertainment/2017/08/11/xena-stars-have-discussed-possible-reboot-renee-oconnor-reveals.html>
- Olsen, D. (2017). *The New Religious Right vs. the National Endowment for the Arts: The thrill of victory and the agony of defeat*. Retrieved from <http://firstamendmentstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/nea.pdf>
- Ostrander, S. A. (1995). “Surely you’re not in this just to be helpful”: Access, rapport, and interviews in three studies of elites. In *Studying Elites Using Qualitative Methods* (pp. 133–150). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

- Ownby, T. (2002, September 6). *Donald Wildmon, the American Family Association, and the theology of media activism*. Retrieved from <http://www.livedtheology.org/resources/donald-wildmon-the-american-family-association-and-the-theology-of-media-activism/>
- Patterson, E. (2018). Must tweet TV: ABC's #TGIT and the cultural work of programming social television. *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 26.
- Penley, C., & Ross, A. (Eds.). (1991). *Technoculture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Penney, J. (2015). Responding to offending images in the digital age: Censorious and satirical discourses in LGBT media activism. *Communication, Culture & Critique*, 8(2), 217–234.
- Puar, J. (2015, October 14). Lucy Lawless discusses her potential return to XENA: WARRIOR PRINCESS. *Geeky Tyrant*. Retrieved from <https://geektyrant.com/news/lucy-lawless-discusses-her-potential-return-to-xena-warrior-princess>
- Pure Flix. (2018). *About us*. Retrieved from <https://pureflix.com/about>
- Radway, J. A. (1984). *Reading the romance: Women, patriarchy, and popular literature*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Radway, J. (1990). Ethnography among elites: Comparing discourses of power. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 13(2), 3–11.
- Radway, J. A. (1997). *A feeling for books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, literary taste, and middle-class desire*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

- Reagin, N., & Rubenstein, A. (2010). "I'm Buffy, and you're history": Putting fan studies into history. *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 6.
- Rheingold, H. (1993). *The virtual community: Homesteading on the electronic frontier*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Rosen, C. (2015, July 20). Xena: Warrior Princess: NBC looking at reboot. *Entertainment Weekly*. Retrieved from <http://ew.com/article/2015/07/20/xena-warrior-princess-reboot/>
- Rosman, K. (2018, January 20). Forget Netflix and chill. Try Pure Flix and pray. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/22/style/forget-netflix-and-chill-try-pure-flix-and-pray.html>
- Ross, S. M. (2008). *Beyond the box: Television and the internet*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing.
- Roth, D. (2018, January 18). Firsts: The first musical episode of a sci-fi TV show isn't what you think. *Syfy Wire*. Retrieved from <http://www.syfy.com/syfywire/firsts-the-first-musical-episode-of-a-sci-fi-tv-show-isnt-what-you-think>
- Salandra, A. (2016, August 13). Lucy Lawless is totally here for a Black, lesbian Xena. *NewNowNext*. Retrieved from <http://www.newnownext.com/lucy-lawless-xena-warrior-princess-black-lesbian/08/2016/>
- Savage, C. (2014). Chuck versus the ratings: Savvy fans and "save our show" campaigns. *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 15.
- Scardaville, M. C. (2005). Accidental activists: Fan activism in the soap opera community. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 48(7), 881–901.



- Scott, S. (2008). Authorized resistance: Is fan production frakked? In T. Potter & C. W. Marshall (Eds.), *Cylons in America: Critical Studies in Battlestar Galactica* (pp. 210–223). New York: Continuum.
- Scott, S. (2013). Battlestar Galactica: Ancillary content and affirmational fandom. In E. Thompson & J. Mittell (Eds.), *How To Watch Television*. New York: NYU Press.
- Sender, K. (2004). *Business, not politics: The making of the gay market*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Silverman, R. (2001). What Xena giveth, Xena taketh away. *The Gay & Lesbian Review Worldwide*, 8(5).
- Smith, A. (2001, June 28). ‘We have no apologies for ‘Xena’ dying.’ *New York Post*. Retrieved from <https://nypost.com/2001/06/28/we-have-no-apologies-for-xena-dying/>
- Smythe, D. W. (1977). Communications: Blindspot of Western Marxism. *CTheory*, 1(3), 1–27.
- Sprague, M. (2018, May 28). Original CHARMED star slams reboot. *Dread Central*. Retrieved from <https://www.dreadcentral.com/news/274717/original-charmed-star-slams-reboot/>
- Stallman, R. (2014). *On hacking*. Retrieved from <https://stallman.org/articles/on-hacking.html>
- Stockwell, A. (1996, August 20). Flirting with Xena. *The Advocate*. Retrieved from <http://ausxip.com/articles/1996/advocate20-8-96.php>
- Stone, A. R. (1996). *The war of desire and technology at the close of the mechanical age*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.

- Strecker, E. (2012, October 9). “New Normal” responds to One Million Moms. *Entertainment Weekly*. Retrieved from <https://ew.com/article/2012/10/09/one-million-moms-new-normal/>
- Stromer-Galley, J., & Schiappa, E. (1998). The argumentative burdens of audience conjectures: Audience research in popular culture criticism. *Communication Theory*, 8(1), 27–62.
- Taylor, C. (2004). *Modern social imaginaries*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Tellis, W. (1997). Introduction to case study. *The Qualitative Report*, 3(2), 1–14.
- Terranova, T. (2000). Free labor: Producing culture for the digital economy. *Social Text*, 63(18, 2), 33–58.
- Thunderclap. (2018). *Thunderclap: How it works*. Retrieved from <https://www.thunderclap.it/howitworks>
- Trendacosta, K. (2016, May 6). How a studio’s fear of lesbians dictated *Xena*’s opening credits. *Gizmodo*. Retrieved from <https://io9.gizmodo.com/how-a-studios-fear-of-lesbians-dictated-xenas-opening-c-1775098779>
- Turow, J. (1984). Pressure groups and television entertainment: A framework for analysis. In W. D. Rowland & B. Watkins (Eds.), *Interpreting television: Current research perspectives* (pp. 142–162). Beverly Hills: Sage.
- Turow, J. (1997). *Media systems in society: understanding industries, strategies, and power* (2nd ed.). New York: Longman Pub Group.
- Turow, J. (2004). The role of “the audience” in publishing children’s books. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 16(2), 90–99.

- Turow, J. (2006). *Niche envy: Marketing discrimination in the digital age*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Turow, J. (2010). *Playing doctor: Television, storytelling, and medical power*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Turow, J. (2011). *The daily you: How the new advertising industry is defining your identity and your worth*. New York: Yale University Press.
- Turow, J. (2013). Commentary: The industrial construction of audiences in mass media industries: Notes toward a research agenda. *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 36(1), 270–275.
- Turow, J. (2017). *The aisles have eyes: How retailers track your shopping, strip your privacy, and define your power*. New York: Yale University Press.
- Turow, J., & Draper, N. (2014). Industry conceptions of audience in the digital space: A research agenda. *Cultural Studies*, 28(4), 643–656.
- Vitagliano, E. (2018, February 12). *How two homosexual men changed America*. Retrieved from <http://www.afa.net/the-stand/culture/2018/02/how-two-homosexual-men-changed-america/>
- Warner, K. J. (2015). *The cultural politics of colorblind TV casting*. New York: Routledge.
- Warner, M. (2002). *Publics and counterpublics*. New York: Zone Books.
- Wasko, J. (2003). *How Hollywood works*. London: Sage.
- White, K. (2018, May 15). *Guilty of indoctrinating with good morals*. Retrieved <http://www.afa.net/the-stand/family/2018/05/guilty-of-indoctrinating-with-good-morals/>

- Wildmon, D. E., & Nulton, R. (1989). *Don Wildmon: The man the networks love to hate*. Wilmore, KY: Bristol Books.
- Williams, S. (2013, December 16). *8 hilarious protests One Million Moms launched this year*. Retrieved from <https://www.care2.com/causes/8-hilarious-protests-one-million-moms-launched-this-year.html>
- Wilson, P. (2004). Jamming *Big Brother*: Webcasting, audience intervention and narrative activism. In S. Murray, & L. Ouellette (Eds.). *Reality TV: Remaking television culture* (pp. 323–343). New York: New York University Press.
- Wolff, C. (1988, July 26). Mighty Mouse flying high on flowers? *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/1988/07/26/nyregion/mighty-mouse-flying-high-on-flowers.html>
- Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research: Design and methods* (5<sup>th</sup> edition). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Young, C. (2005, September 15). What we owe Xena. *Salon*. Retrieved from [https://www.salon.com/2005/09/15/xena\\_2/](https://www.salon.com/2005/09/15/xena_2/)
- Zittrain, J. (2008). *The future of the internet - and how to stop it*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Zubernis, L., & Larsen, K. (2012). *Fandom at the crossroads: Celebration, shame and fan/producer relationships*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.