'All my life men like you have sneered at me. And all my life I've been knocking men like you into the dust': *Game of Thrones* **in Online Feminist Communities**

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The blogosphere is awash with women and men writing about topics of great concern to feminists (Miller, 2014: 73). Additionally, feminist scholars have debated the merits and demerits of computer-networking technologies and feminist activism (Schulte, 2011: 728), as well as issues relating to representation and popular culture. As part of that latter set of conversations, web publishing platform Kinja, part of online giant *Gawker Media* and launched in April of 2004, has featured a variety of discussions related to *A Song of Ice and Fire* and/or *Game of Thrones*,.

This profile focuses on two main aspects of Kinja and *Game of Thrones*: First, how Kinja handles and shapes feminist fan conversations about *Game of Thrones*; and secondly, what benefits Kinja has when it comes to fan interactions within spaces that are explicitly labelled as feminist.

This profile will focus on *GroupThink, The Powder Room*, and *The Observation Deck*, blogs that are not affiliated with Gawker media, but are instead run by members of the Kinja community. The authors of these blogs are not paid Gawker employees; they are commentators given permission to make blog posts on Kinja. Many commentators have pennames, therefore they will be quoted using these pseudonyms. I interviewed three Kinja users: Lyra, Sadie, and Artie, as well as one Kinja feminist sub-blog moderator, Zap. Lyra is a woman living in Canada who believes that villains are always the more interesting literary characters. Sadie is a woman, a

medical student, and currently lives in the Midwestern United States. Artie is a man who writes recaps of *Game of Thrones* on a Kinja sub-blog, and has 'been online' since August of 1996. Zap is an ardent supporter of House Stark, and she lives in the Northeast United States. Many Kinja users described the benefits of discussing *Game of Thrones* in online feminist forums. Lyra commented:

> Kinja is beneficial due to its wide audience and therefore the likelihood that someone much smarter than I would discuss the show/books in such a way to show connections and symbolism I would have missed. Explicitly feminist spaces give a good chamber to discuss the horrors placed upon women in the books and how the show has increased it to the point of ridiculousness. A feminist space makes it much easier to discuss these hints without worrying about 'just watch it!' and 'it's fiction! Loosen up!' Comments that often occur on more open forums.

Sadie wrote:

> *GroupThink* and *The Powder Room* cultivate an atmosphere for women-oriented conversations on topics of popular culture. This is important for a proper 'feminist' discussion of pop culture works like *Game of Thrones,* which depicts an especially patriarchal environment. On *GroupThink* and in *The Powder Room* women can discuss issues like sexual assault and female oppression without being labelled neurotic, hostile to men or politically over-sensitive; and we can use this *work* as a mirror to reflect less

dramatic but no less significant examples of patriarchy lingering in our own culture.

In particular, first person narrative characters in *Game of Thrones* and *A Song of Ice and Fire* provide a conduit for men to relate to and discuss topics regarding the female experience of Patriarchy. These online platforms allow newcomers [to feminism] to read and interact with those topics, while socialising online among users with a high level of feminist literacy. These dialogues have the potential to inspire understanding and therefore action on a wide variety of issues. Kinja-hosted sites shape a feminist perspective of *Game of Thrones* by underlining specific topics such as the asymmetric nudity portrayed on the show, exploitative changes between the source material and script, and the development of women characters. It is important that television and film be held accountable for depictions of women and other underrepresented groups.

GroupThink moderator Zap wrote:

I think that the benefits of Kinja is that they are user run and user moderated blogs that are as strong as the owners/mods/thread starter want them to be. In my experience, I haven't had the best of luck finding spaces where feminist discussion of science fiction and fantasy works isn't ignored as unimportant or pandering-io9 is an exception to this.[1] I think that in spaces where you are already expecting feminist discussion in some form, it keeps people who aren't looking for that kind of discussion away for the most part. I've found that the authors of discussion posts on *GroupThink* and *Powder Room* are looking to engage in

discussion in the comments which fosters really interesting feminist discourse and tossing around ideas and theories. These aren't 'safe spaces,' as explicitly stated in the rules of the forums, but they are certainly safer spaces, and ones where feminist discussion is encouraged and not glossed over.

One such incident is described by Artie:

> A year ago after the show portrayed yet another major character being raped, I put together an article on sexual consent in *Game of Thrones* / *A Song of Ice and Fire*. Its first edit was bad. Like, insulting-to-the-audience bad, because it read like I was stating that rape in a fictional universe is only rape if it was criminally/legally considered (in that fictional universe) as rape. Which is not at all how rape is defined, but my brain took hours for me to reread what I wrote and see where I had disastrously erred. From both *Groupthink* and *Observation Deck* I got quick and firm comments insisting that I was seriously using words poorly, that I had written up something that sounded like rape apologia, and I'm still mortified that my first edit was that terrible.

As we can see, contextually, from Artie's comment: commenters from an online feminist forum used Artie's post as an opportunity to explain rape culture, as well as how and why rape culture is problematic. A conversation has taken place between women around the subject of a man's published words and comments. This move towards collective action through textuality (manufactured in the commentariat) is perhaps one of the most apparent aspects of feminist e-spaces (Daniels, 2009: 129). The *GroupThink* commentators on Artie's first edit of an article on

sexual consent in *Game of Thrones* / *A Song of Ice and Fire* manifested as a 'collective

organized for social change' (Daniels, 2009: 129).

While the 'feminist' label of these online feminist communities is indicative of the

textual interchange and activism on the forum, the Kinja users interviewed all acknowledged the

double-edged-Valyrian Steel sword that is the Kinja platform itself. Many mentioned 'trolls'.[2]

Lyra elaborates:

> I don't think Kinja itself does very much at all. It's a system that marginally works. The
>
> flip side of it being easy to join and use is that trolls and other ne'er-do-wells can come in
>
> very easily and disrupt the environment, with minimal repercussions. Everyone uses
>
> these forums despite Kinja, really.

 Artie has similar sentiments:

> The not-main-site blogs are generally lower population than the main sites so abusive
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> commenters are much less frequent and better conversations can happen. Although…
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> even in less public fora there's still trolls who want to derail conversations and bash
>
> feminism….I'd like to say that it's making feminist fan conversations about *Game of*
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> *Thrones* better but as a software Kinja is not optimal at allowing content users to
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> moderate the comments on their content. I couldn't throw away incendiary comments by
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> that troll on an article I wrote for a blog because only moderators of the blog can throw
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> away incendiary comments. So in general I think Kinja allows for the creation of better
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> conversations than some other commenting platforms like Disqus. But there's still

specific areas wherein the labyrinth of rules regulating how Kinja works leads to some

drawbacks.

Those interviewed for this profile have claimed that online feminist communities hosted

on Kinja makes feminist discourse of *Game of Thrones* / *A Song of Ice and Fire,* 'better'. The

blogs themselves are discussed as a place to help shape online *feminist* discussions on *Game of*

Thrones.

That being said, there is a dark underbelly to Kinja, as there is commonly understood to

be too much of the internet. The participants of this profile described 'trolls' who strive to agitate

the online community. Another drawback of Kinja for online feminists and open feminist

discussion is the fact that, far from being safe spaces, these are open commenting forums. Kinja

itself is described by one user as being 'not optimal'. Yet, Kinja draws many like-minded

feminist commentators and contributors. By withstanding the onslaught of trolls, and refusing to

be bullied off of public forums, those who comment or post in Kinja online feminist

communities discussing *Game of Thrones* / *A Song of Ice and Fire* are effectively participating in

an act of feminist resistance to misogynist efforts to silence the opinions of feminist fantasy fans,

or simply, women on the internet.

Feminist fans of *Game of Thrones* / *A Song of Ice and Fire* utilise feminist online

communities as a way to discuss events occurring on the page or on the screen with likeminded

individuals. Occasionally, like in the case of Artie, the treatise of feminist online communities

can result in collective action through textuality. Those who identify as feminist fans of *Game of*

Thrones / *A Song of Ice and Fire* can also face gendered harassment. While misogynists who do

not take feminist critiques or conversations of *Game of Thrones* / *A Song of Ice and Fire*

seriously may sneer at online feminist communities, those participating on them continue to

knock their opponents into the dust by remaining committed to feminist causes.

References

Artiofab, 2016. Interview. Conducted 30 June 2016.

LTE, 2016. Interview. Conducted 26 June 2016.

Miller, K., 2014. 'Feminism Online: A Beginning Roadmap.' *Women & Language*, 37.2, 71-73.

Sadie, 2016. Interview. Conducted 8 July 2016.

Zap, 2016. Interview. Conducted 8 July 2016.

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[1] Io9 is a Gawker Media blog that focuses on science fiction, fantasy, science, technology news, texts, and various other forms of media.

[2] An 'Internet troll' is an individual that revels in causing discord or by starting arguments. These are fostered by inflammatory posts or commentary.