Preface

Geek-centered and inspired productions have accelerated their march into the mainstream with many recent events—including the success of Marvel's cinematic universe, the rising popularity of video games, and even theatrical screenings of episodes of *Doctor Who*—all bringing geek culture into the spotlight. This rising power and visibility has brought renewed attention to the geek identity's hostility to marginalized groups, including, but certainly not limited to, women. The marginalization of women in geek culture can seem odd when viewed numerically: women compose a large part of the audience of these media. However, they are underrepresented among creators, and mostly invisible or secondary in the works themselves. We examine the state of geek cultural identity and the self-fulfilling prophecy of "geekdom" as a space where women are continually marginalized and instrumentalized instead of given voice. Our focus is on reading digital popular culture as a testimonial and manifesto of geek identity. Examining the identity politics and construction of the geek "hero" can reveal the ways in which these texts across media are encoded with a defensiveness of geek as other that is out of touch with the reality of culture. In turn, this disconnect has grave consequences for the space of women and men both in these texts and communities, as has recently been demonstrated through movements such as Gamergate. These expressions of toxic masculinity and identity policing have given rise to a question from both the media and the community: what aspects of geek culture provide rich fuel for these surges of hostility?

The authors of this work both identify as American geeks and fans as well as scholars dedicated to media studies through different disciplinary lenses.

The franchises, stories, and heroes under discussion here are the same characters that we have grown up with, plastered on office walls, and followed through adaptations and remakes. We have stood in line for the *Star Wars* prequels, attended midnight launch parties for *Harry Potter* novels, and even sat in a theater for a special showing of the extended editions of the entire *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. And yes, we've written fanfiction, obsessively followed shipper tags and fan artists on Tumblr, and engaged in many heated late-night debates over the adaptation choices of *Game of Thrones*. The heroes under examination here are our heroes: the characters we grew up with, and are still growing up with, should not be immune from analysis and critique. While we acknowledge that some critics might be concerned with the positioning of two women-assigned authors of a study on geek masculinity, we believe that this study is not merely concerned with toxic geek masculinity but with the continual rejection and negative framing of femininity within geek spaces: it is impossible to discuss one without addressing both. Throughout, we engage and reject the false binary of masculine/feminine as well as the identities of man and woman: we understand "man" and "woman" to be identity categories including both cis and trans men and women. However, representations of cis men and women dominate geek media, and representation of trans men and women as well as nonbinary, genderqueer, and other gender-nonconforming people remains a distant goal that this discourse of toxic masculinity plays a role in restricting. As we've navigated our own identities as fans, academics, and geeks, we have been continually aware of the challenges of the outsider, and it has informed much of our previous collaborative research on the positioning of non-cis man as other in STEM and the games community.

Our intention is to explore how geek identity has taken assumptions of marginalization as foundational. The perceived status of geek identity as marginalized and threatened even as geek culture has become mainstreamed are contradictory forces at play in the current battle over the renegotiation of the geek identity. To understand this construction, we will look at the very nature of the hero in geek-marketed media, both in spaces marked for science fiction and fantasy and in narratives that seek to reflect geek culture back at itself. These dueling visions of geek-as-victim and geek-as-hero give rise to the hypermasculine geek, an identity forged by rejecting both feminine-marked culture and constructions as well as the traditional athletic male aesthetic. We explore how this identity's relationship to established cultural hierarchies makes it difficult for geekdom to reconcile itself with its new dominant position in pop culture even as it remains dedicated to an identity as the outsider hero: an archetype seen everywhere from

Supernatural to *Firefly* to *Doctor Who*. The challenge to this archetype by those the geek community views as outsiders results in tensions and struggles sending ripples throughout both popular culture and the larger STEM community. These have become more and more pronounced with geek culture's apparent increasing significance and visibility. Over the past few years, we have witnessed the rise of gamer collectives dedicated to excluding women and feminists through movements such as Gamergate, increased attention to hostilities towards women at comic and film conventions, and the continual harassment and threats towards women across geek media who become visible as producers or fans.

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