You & I: One Direction, Fans and the Co-Construction of Identity

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Abstract

This thesis maps the processes of fan and celebrity identity co-construction in the boy band One Direction. Building on Lauren Berlant’s conception of intimacy as the desire for shared narratives, and Judith Butler’s assertion that identity is inherently performative, I show that fan production—as it responds to and shapes One Direction’s song lyrics and mass media presence—offers significant opportunities for co-construction between fans and the group. This co-construction emphasises the performative nature of identity and allows for representations of identity in One Direction to be simultaneously normative and malleable in the hands of fans. Further, this co-construction draws attention to the tension between the desire for intimacy with the celebrity and the inherent distance between celebrity and fan.

In Chapter 1, I discuss short-form self-insertion fan fiction. This fan fiction demonstrates that identity can be reduced to a set of easily intelligible societal norms that can be endlessly performed. The identities represented in this fan fiction reflect the identities represented in One Direction’s songs. The repetitive, overtly constructed nature of the identities in the fan fiction, however, show normative identities in One Direction songs and in fan fiction to be performative guidelines, thus revealing their potential for malleability and subversion.

Chapter 2 is concerned with a long-form fan fiction featuring a member of One Direction falling in love with a fan. This fiction demonstrates the powerful individual connection to One Direction and how this connection is integral to—but also in tension with—a tangibly influential fan collective. Having established the relationship between the individual and the collective this chapter examines collective initiatives that assert fan presence and influence.

In Chapter 3, I discuss homoerotic fan fiction. In this fan fiction, the desire for intimacy with the celebrity manifests in the desire to uncover an “authentic” identity beneath performative heterosexuality. The chapter reveals tensions between performativity and authenticity in identity construction and demonstrates fan desire to shape One Direction’s identities.

This thesis demonstrates that One Direction and their fans are involved in a process of identity co-construction via song lyrics and fan production. It shows that to study celebrity fan production in the age of the internet is to reimagine the old
dichotomies between mass popular culture and its consumers, celebrity and fan, intimacy and public performance.
“Nothing can come between you and I. Not even the gods above could separate the two of us”—One Direction, “You & I,” (2012).

This thesis is dedicated to Directioners worldwide.
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# Table of Contents

Introduction 1

Chapter One: Imagining Inhabitability 16

Chapter Two: Intimacy and Distance, the Individual and the Collective 35

Chapter Three: Nobody Knows You the Way I Do: Authenticity, Performativity, and Homoerotic Fan Fiction 54

Conclusion 78

Works Cited 85
List of Figures

Figure 1. “Olivia Imagine” 23

Figure 2. “Billboard Advertisement” 47

Figure 3. “Vlogger Ziall” 73
Introduction

“‘Cos it’s you, oh it’s you, it’s you they add up to. I’m in love with you, and all these little things”— One Direction, “You & I” (2013)

In 2014 I was playing in two indie bands and living in Montreal, utterly convinced that The Smiths were a good band and One Direction were a bad band. In fact, One Direction weren’t even a band at all—they were silly. Then, on a recommendation from a former band mate, I decided to watch the One Direction film This Is Us (2012). “Their songs have great hooks,” he told me, “and they’re really sweet about their fans.” In the film, there is a whole lot of screaming and crying, a bit of talk about the One Direction boys, and a quick mention of how fans utilise social media to communicate with each other and propel the success of the group. In the end, it prompted me to give listening to One Direction a go, just to see what all the fuss was about. The first song I came across was “Little Things” (2012). In the song, One Direction’s five members sing about loving someone in spite of all the things that person might not love about themselves. “It’s you,” they sing over and over, “I’m in love with you and all your little things” (One Direction 2012). I couldn’t stop thinking about One Direction fans listening to this song and feeling as though the group were singing directly to them, as though they could be the girl unhappy with “the crinkles” by her eyes, or the “freckles on [her] cheek” (One Direction 2012). This Is Us and “Little Things” made me think about the relationship between pop stars and their fans, about what happens when pop songs suggest roles for their listeners when, in the age of social media, fans have the ability to respond en masse to these songs and the roles they offer. And perhaps even more pertinently, what happens when pop stars start responding in turn to the roles offered back to them by fans. I wrote this thesis to understand how all the little things produced by One Direction and their fans could collectively have such an impact on fan and celebrity identity.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the celebrity and fandom associated with popular music as a process of identity co-construction. Specifically, it will look at British/Irish boy band One Direction and material produced by fans of the band in response to lyrics and the group’s mass media presence. Material produced by fans includes but is not limited to, fan fiction, social media posts, and hashtag campaigns. In examining One Direction fan production, this thesis will argue that celebrity and
fan identity are co-constructed and that these identities can be simultaneously normative, malleable, and queer.

One Direction provides a compelling case study of changes in the way older mass media and fan forms (celebrity culture, pop music, fan fiction) function in response to the rise of the internet and social media. The group also offers a means for understanding how these changes to mass media forms impact upon cultural production, and the role of pop music, celebrity, and their audiences in co-constructing identity in the twenty-first century. Originally made up of five members—Niall Horan, Zayn Malik, Liam Payne, Harry Styles, and Louis Tomlinson—One Direction began on the television talent show The X-Factor in 2010, with the members initially auditioning as solo acts before being grouped together to avoid elimination. The group released four albums beginning in 2011, with Syco and Columbia Records before Malik announced he was leaving the group in 2015. At the end of 2015, following Malik’s departure, One Direction released their fifth studio album after announcing they would be taking a hiatus to focus on their personal lives. Having had their start on reality television, One Direction have thus been publicly constructed from their very conception. The plethora of fan fiction and other social media cultural production surrounding the band has since then contributed greatly to One Direction’s impact on popular culture and the group’s success in the marketplace. This fan fiction and social media cultural production are overtly concerned with constructing identities in the mass media and on social media. Thus, One Direction illustrate celebrity and fandom as a process of identity co-construction.

Identity co-construction in this thesis can be understood as the “telling of stories both by and about the self: stories the person tells others about themselves, or stories others tell about the person, or stories in which the person is included” (Whitebrook 2001, 22). One Direction present “stories” about themselves to the mass media through their songs, music videos, and media appearances. But they also rely on stories told about them by fans (in fan fiction and on social networks) to perpetuate their cultural relevance through a presence on social media as well as in the mass media. One Direction’s cultural relevance relies on fans telling stories that extend and shape the stories One Direction and their producers have already told about themselves. Furthermore, these stories depend for their effectiveness on generating a sense of intimacy. Lauren Berlant explains: “intimacy … involves an aspiration for a narrative about something shared, a story about both oneself and others that will turn
out in a particular way” (1998, 281). Stories told by One Direction implicitly and sometimes explicitly reference fans. Similarly, stories told by fans in response to One Direction not only construct One Direction but also fan identities and in so doing generate a sense of intimacy. Crucially, however, “the inwardness of intimacy is met by a corresponding publicness” (1998, 281). The impulse for One Direction and fans to write and share narratives and stories about one another, while generating intimacy, is also necessarily a public act of identity construction.

In other words, the narratives that construct the identity of One Direction and their fans necessarily rely on a tension between intimate revelations and public performance. In addition to understanding identity as being produced by storytelling, therefore, this thesis also draws on Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* (1990), which defines identity as a series of repeated public performances. Butler’s performative theory helps explain how the identity narratives of One Direction and their fans depend simultaneously on a rhetoric of intimacy and publicity. Specifically, One Direction fan fiction and fan social media presence are stories about the self and others that are shared publicly and so are inherently performative. Fan fiction publicly constructs a narrative about others while social media posts are a series of public performances that can then be used to form a narrative about the writer or somebody else. Butler argues that there is no true or stable “interior” identity, but rather a multitude of rules that the gendered self must abide by in order to produce an “intelligible” external identity. Butler explains, “the ‘coherence’ and ‘continuity’ of ‘the person’ are not logical or analytic features of personhood, but rather socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility” (1990, 23). In other words, public performances of identity rely upon constructing and sharing coherent narratives about the self in order to present a socially intelligible identity. Furthermore, “the rules that govern intelligible identity, i.e., that enable and restrict the intelligible assertion of an ‘I,’ rules that are partially structured along matrices of gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality, operate through repetition” (Butler 1990, 198). This thesis examines fan production that replicates heteronormative relationships and identity signifiers in order to investigate the female fan’s position in connection to celebrities, men, heterosexual relationships, and their own identity as young women and as fans. Butler also suggests, however, that there is room for subversion in replicating normative expressions of identity. She states: “it is only within the practices of repetitive signifying that a subversion of identity becomes possible”
The fan production that replicates normative relationships and identity signifiers, as this thesis will demonstrate, is itself replicated to the point of finding identity to be ultimately malleable, even within a strictly normative framework. Additionally, much of this fan production is posted online under pseudonymous usernames and so remains largely anonymous. This relative anonymity means that each time this fan production is shared online it moves further and further away from the person who originally produced it and thus further from its original “identity” and context, and potentially even from its original purpose.

Butler’s work is integral to understanding identity in One Direction and in fan production as being both normative and malleable. Later, this thesis looks at fan production that centres on queer narratives; production that reveals the malleable nature of identity at the same time as it encounters a fundamental tension in the way society understands sexuality. Eve Sedgwick writes: “Western culture has placed what it calls sexuality in a more and more distinctly privileged relation to our most prized constructs of individual identity, truth, and knowledge” (1990, 3), suggesting that society understands sexuality to be a component of a true, original, or core identity. Yet, according to Butler, there is no such thing as core identity. Fan fiction dealing with queer identity reveals that, like Butler, fans understand heterosexuality and other normative behaviours to be essentially performative. At the same time, however, fans demonstrate a desire to uncover something beneath externally performed identity. In the name of uncovering something more than performative heterosexuality, queer fan fiction writes narratives in which One Direction are really homosexual. The writing of these revelatory narratives generates intimacy, but at the same time these narratives are necessarily public and are equally as constructed as the fans perceive One Direction’s heterosexual personas to be. What this fan fiction uncovers is homosexuality, but this uncovering is also a reinterpretation and reconstruction of identity performances offered by One Direction in the mass media.

There is a growing body of literature regarding popular music, fan fiction, social media, and celebrity culture (Baker et al. 2013; Busse 2006; Chambers 2013; Jamison 2013; Kaplan 2012; Repogle 2014; Rojek 2012). Jamison’s book *Fic: Why Fan Fiction is Taking Over the World* (2013) in particular provides not only a comprehensive history of fan fiction—from Sherlock Holmes fan fiction to fan fiction about television shows and celebrities—but also a thorough examination of the methods of fan fiction production and distribution from the nineteenth century
through to the twenty-first. My work builds on the foundations laid by Jamison and other scholars of fan fiction by looking at how advances in technology over the past ten years have allowed social media, popular music, celebrity culture and fan fiction to collide and intersect. Jamison and other critics have shown how the internet allowed fandom and fan fiction to multiply and spread at previously unimaginable rates. My thesis, however, is concerned with how the interconnectivity between fandom, social media and celebrity influences the construction of identity in fan production. The collision of these fields then profoundly affects not only the construction of celebrity and fan identity but also the way traditional mass media works.

Any academic work on popular culture or music inevitably engages longstanding tensions over the status of popular culture. These tensions are due to the residual divide between high culture and popular culture, with high culture considered something that is actively and critically produced and engaged with, while popular culture is taken to be mass-produced and passively and unthinkingly consumed by the masses. Popular music in particular is often considered “not [music] for intellectual contemplation, [or] for discussion of value and worth” (Railton 2001, 324). Throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century “there were a succession of commentators who regarded much popular music as mindless fodder, cynically manufactured for mindless youthful consumers” (Shuker 1994, 18). In fact, it is the manufacturing and the mass production of cultural items and artefacts that seem to broaden the critical divide between high and popular culture. Unlike many high cultural forms, popular music is made up of easily reproducible components. For example, it has a “restricted harmonic palette” that is “familiar and yet distinctive enough to differentiate it from its competitors” (Warner 2003, 7–9). Rather than striving for unique artistry, popular music is written and produced in ways that will ensure maximum financial success. However, simple structure and wide cultural reach also mean that popular music is malleable and easily repurposed. In this thesis, I will show that the malleable and flexible nature of One Direction’s songs allow for significant co-constructive opportunities with fans.

There is also now a sizeable body of critical work that contests the idea that popular cultural consumption and production are passive. Fiske explains that there is always a base level of active popular culture consumption, and explains that fan culture is extremely active: “all popular activities engage in varying degrees of
semiotic productivity, producing meanings and pleasures that pertain to their social situation out of the products of culture industries.” In particular, fans create a “culture with its own systems of production and distribution that forms […] a ‘shadow cultural economy’” (1992, 30). There is, however, still a sense of tension between how we view the consumption of popular culture (such as popular music) and how we understand productivity, with fan production historically conceived as being “outside and often against official cultural capital” (Fiske 1992, 32). Fan production being outside or against official cultural capital depends, though, on what it is you are a fan of and what it is you are producing in response. Early fan fiction, as described by Jamison, relied on the circulation of fanzines, and was dominated almost entirely by men (Jamison 2013, 75). These male fans produced content in response to science fiction throughout the 1950s and the 1960s, and many of them identified as “‘literary fans’ of print-based [science fiction]” (Jamison 2013, 88).

In 1966, Star Trek aired and along came “media fans,” producing fan fiction set in the world created by the Star Trek writers in a way that science fiction fans had not done up until this point (Jamison 2013, 83). Many Star Trek fans were women and Jamison explains that “mass-media broadcasts of the source material,” “increasing access to technologies of reproduction,” and “women’s lib” allowed these women to take up a more prominent position in science fiction fandom (Jamison 2013, 84). Literary science fiction fans, however, “decried the supposed superficiality of ‘media fans’” (Jamison 2013, 88). While there were also great numbers of male media fans, the dismissal of media fans as “superficial” is implicitly gendered, as the number of “media fans who wrote media fanfic skewed closer to 90 percent female” (Jamison 2013, 89). In line with this gendered prejudice against so-called media fans, “One Direction and its fans are seen as immature, and their fic as underdeveloped fantasy” (Arrow 2013, 325). Further, One Direction fans are not necessarily or always concerned with operating their fandom outside of official cultural capital, much of the fan production is in fact inline with the official aims of the One Direction brand. Jamison and Arrow demonstrate there is historical and current tension between fandoms and certain fan production. This tension means that there is not only a divide between what we perceive as high and low culture, but also a divide among fans themselves over what constitutes worthwhile fandom and fan production and what does not, and this divide is strongly gendered.
Chris Rankin writes: “there are two types of fan; the obsessed individual and the hysterical crowd” (2013, 157). It is not a stretch to imagine the “obsessed individual” as the literary science fiction fan of the mid-twentieth century, or as (ironically) a current fan of media that is considered suitably serious. While being categorised as an “obsessed fan” might not be particularly flattering, it is certainly more so than being a part of the “hysterical crowd,” a categorisation that is negatively coded feminine. Bowlby explains that while we may no longer see the consumer as “a part of a jellyishly susceptible mass, having become instead an individual endowed with rights of which, by implication, his or her previous incarnations had been deprived,” in “ceasing to be seen as passive, exploited and dim, the consumer has ceased to be seen as female” (2000, 7). The active consumer is not coded as feminine, while the passive consumer of years gone by has often been depicted as an unthinking and easily led woman (Bowlby 2000, 123), or a collective of out of control female consumers. This feminine coding is significant because, while the standard consumer might not be seen as passive, fan culture that is centred around women and popular culture produced for women is typically seen as producing fans or consumers who are in thrall to their emotions and bodies, and who are unable to effectively regulate their consumption (Baker et al. 2013, 15; Humble 2012, 86; Mitchell 2012, 124; Shuker 1994, 168). The residual assumption that feminine consumption is unthinking and exploitable and therefore only a marginal contributor culturally and in the marketplace is challenged when we consider something like One Direction. With One Direction, the consumption of pop music and celebrity identity by young girls becomes a part of an active contribution, via the writing and sharing of fan fiction, to the construction of said music and identity in the twenty-first century marketplace.

The wide cultural reach and malleability of One Direction and the non-passive consumption of content surrounding them allow for co-construction, and this co-construction relies on groups of fans coming together to produce fan texts in response to the One Direction mass media content they are consuming. This coming together to share fan content builds a sense of community among the many millions of One Direction fans. Obviously, it is not possible for someone invested in One Direction to know all the other people invested in One Direction, but this does not mean that One Direction and their fans are not a community. Here Anderson’s “imagined community” is a useful concept. In reference to the rise of print culture, he argues “print-capitalism […] made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think
about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways” (1982, 52), and popular music and identity function in a similar manner. Instead of direct contact, the One Direction fan community engage with one another by writing and reading stories by and about one another online. Anderson explains, “what […] made the new communities imaginable was a half-fortuitous, but explosive, interaction between a system of production and productive relations (capitalism), a technology of communications (print), and the fatality of human linguistic diversity” (1986, 56). One Direction are part of an industrialised, capitalist system, and they communicate via the mass media (print, photographs, videos) and online social media (where fans browse content and communicate with one another), and they are an example of popular music that communicates via sentiment that can be understood regardless of linguistic barriers. Even more so than print media, social media allows fans an apparently limitless potential for connecting with one another. Fans can read about One Direction online, they can read what other fans are writing about the group, and they can instantly respond to each other. Jamison states: “fanfiction communities collect people who may be very far apart in physical space and connects them, in ‘close’ proximity in virtual space, through near-simultaneous activities of authoring, editing, responding, and illustrating” (2013, 13). The content they are authoring, editing, and responding to is narratives about themselves, about one another, and about One Direction, and it is these narratives, as well as the potential to connect with other fans over these narratives, that binds them together as a community.

Fan communities help pop groups such as One Direction to gain traction in traditional mass media via the production of a huge body of public textual and visual work that furthers the celebrity and identity narratives surrounding the pop artist. Celebrity and identity narratives are furthered in part by the proliferation of media content online, and this happens primarily through social networking sites. Deborah Chambers suggests that there are four ways in which one can examine the configuration of content in “networked publics” (social media platforms) (2013, 73). These are persistence: “the automatic recording and archiving of online expressions;” replicability: “the potential for these bits to be duplicated;” scalability: “the potential visibility of content in networked publics” and searchability: “the way content in networked publics can be accessed through search” (Chambers 2013, 73). In the context of this thesis, I examine to what extent content meets these criteria and so successfully furthers celebrity and fan identity, and in turn how the success of
particular fan content is influenced by or influences elements of One Direction’s mass media content and image. One Direction and fans post content online that is then indefinitely stored on social networks or other online archives and, regardless of popularity, achieves persistence. Replicability is dependent on the initial appeal of whatever is produced by One Direction or posted online by One Direction or fans. For example, if a video of One Direction was posted online fans might then break the video down into gifs of the most entertaining moments; duplicates of either the entire video or parts of the video then multiply online. The more appealing a piece of content posted online, the more likely it is to be replicated (or remediated), and the more it is replicated/duplicated the more visible it is online to both fans and One Direction. If this popular content can be easily searched for via social networking sites or search engines then its visibility only increases, as does the likelihood of it being replicated. Chambers’ taxonomy is useful in the context of this thesis because it provides a framework for determining which elements of mass media content produced by One Direction are considered appealing enough to replicate to the point that they achieve increased online visibility. Increased online visibility allows for constructive opportunities to arise between One Direction and fans because One Direction are then able to cater (or not cater) to particular fan desires, and the fans, in turn, generate greater online presence and visibility for the group at the same time as they repurpose official One Direction content to meet their own ends.

There are two primary means of distributing (or archiving) content and establishing celebrity and fan identity online. The first is “official” and/or personal social media accounts linked to celebrities that share official media material, and the second is fan accounts dedicated to distributing and sharing both official content and fan-produced content. Firstly, One Direction have personal social media accounts (Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat), and accounts such as these “allow celebrities to (appear to) communicate directly with fans” (Repogle 2014, 736). This “direct” communication has the effect of making the celebrity appear more human, approachable and honest, as they produce the impression or the illusion of direct communication. Through social media, fans are able to observe the supposedly unfiltered and genuine thoughts and activities of their favourite celebrities at what appears to be much closer and more unmediated proximity than ever before. As Rojek states: “[the internet] gives stargazers unprecedented opportunities to participate, in conjunction with stars, in building celebrity brands” (2012, 12). The diminished
distance between the world of the celebrity and the world of the fan on social media allows for the fan to imagine they are a more equal participant in maintaining and furthering the celebrity and success of their chosen idol, and this can be seen through the persistent social media presence of One Direction fans. These fans push not only for recognition from One Direction themselves, but also for other mass media outlets to recognise the group and their content in a way that appeals to the desires of the fans.

Additionally, fan accounts serve to distribute content among other fans, establishing particular online identities and modes of communicating. For the most part, fan social media presence takes the form of microblog posts. Microblogging “is a form of length-delimited […] communication using a social networking service,” and a social networking service “allow[s] short posts to be published online and users to subscribe to feeds of other users’ updates” (Zappavigna 2012, 34). Zappavigna notes “microblogging has a phatic function,” (35) as well as an information sharing function. This phatic function can be seen in One Direction fan content that sets up a scenario that is open enough for almost any fan to insert herself into the narrative. Furthermore, outside of any phatic function or distribution of content designed specifically for fans, microblogging “can be used as a form of ‘back-channel communication.’ The back channel is supplementary media running parallel to some main form of communication” (Zappavigna 2012, 38). In this instance, the main form of communication is One Direction content issued directly from the group and the record label, while the back channel is social media content posted and distributed among fans. One Direction fan content, however, is a powerful back channel, with social media content posted by fans often altering the course of official One Direction media, for example pushing songs that were never singles onto the charts via the use of hashtags,¹ or raising funds to take out advertising in major mass media outlets.

The particular elements of fan production addressed in this thesis are fan fiction in its ‘traditional’ long form narrative style, and fan fiction as it has been adapted to fit microblogging and image/media internet culture. Humble defines fan

¹“No Control” from the album *Four* (2014) was not a single but in 2015 it went to the top of the Billboard charts after fans streamed it online and tirelessly encouraged others to do so too by sharing the hashtag #NoControlProject.
fiction as “the activity of writing stories that carry on from an originating text—a film, a TV show, or a book—and circulating those stories among a community of like-minded fans” (2012, 96). This definition does not include fan fiction written on celebrities, a genre of fan fiction that has become increasingly popular over the past fifteen years. Busse provides a more open definition, describing fan fiction as the “narrative expansion of media texts” (Busse 2006, 254). She continues: “[fan fiction] writers use pop stars as their protagonists, constructing fictional narratives that supplement and enhance those disseminated by the media” (Busse 2006, 254). The impulse to extend celebrity narratives via fan fiction can perhaps be explained by Walter Benjamin, who states: “every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction.” He explains “technical reproduction can put the copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself […] it enables the original to meet the beholder halfway” (1935, 3–4). This thesis is concerned with the co-construction of media content and celebrity and fan identity in the twenty-first century, and in the twenty-first century reproductions of celebrity images are available en masse for the fan or the everyday consumer. These easily and readily available images “meet the beholder halfway” and invoke a sense of intimacy which encourages further reproduction of the celebrity image via writing or image replication or doctoring to bring the “object” (celebrity) even closer to the fan/beholder, making fan fiction and fan art “reproduction[s] of a reproduction” (Huyssen 1986, 146). Bringing the image of the celebrity closer to the fan, however, emphasises the real distance between fan and celebrity. But, it is this distance that allows for reproduction and therefore co-construction.

Fan fiction, particularly fan fiction about celebrities such as One Direction uses “the available material while inventing what is not and cannot be known, which forces [fans] to simultaneously believe and disavow the ‘reality’ presented by the media” (Busse 2006, 256). As a result, the way traditional mass media functions is altered as fans simultaneously take from it and undermine it in order to further particularly appealing elements of celebrity identity. Furthermore, “fan productivity is not limited to the production of new texts: it also participates in the construction of the original text” (Fiske 1992, 40), meaning that “when [the] industrial text meets its fans, their participation reunites and reworks it, so that its moment of reception becomes the moment of production” (1992, 41). For One Direction fans, the original
text, or the industrial text is not limited to the music but also to the celebrity identity of the members of the group. Fan production not only reworks the musical/lyrical content but also reworks and constructs celebrity identity in relation to fan identity.

Fan fiction, particularly fan fiction about celebrities, is at the forefront of a larger transformation in the creative economy. David Roh writing on fan fiction states: “the present landscape for creativity is rapidly moving toward fragmentation, decentralization, and multiplicity” (2015, 3). When we consider online fan production, however, while it might be made up of fragments of information, it is hardly decentralised. Fans accumulate information on social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Tumblr, syndicated news and gossip websites, and platforms such as YouTube where content relating to literally anything is all uploaded to the same online space. Social media and sites like YouTube have millions of users and these users can be in direct or indirect contact with one another and can consume content at any time. Furthermore, fan fiction and other fan production is published on social networking sites as well as on sites dedicated specifically to collecting and archiving fan fiction such as An Archive of Our Own (a website that features fan fiction about fictional characters and celebrities). Roh continues, contradicting in part his previous comments, “a seismic shift is afoot, from singular to collaborative creativity as the economic and infrastructural basis for cultural production transforms” (2015, 4). Fan production gathers information from platforms that are absolutely centralized, and this centralization allows for greater collaborative creativity because it allows fans near unlimited access to information, to each other, and to celebrities. Because these platforms are huge and public and operate in an attention economy, and because via these platforms fans are able to uncover factual information about celebrities as well as countless fictional narratives, there is pressure for those creating fan fiction to effectively build narratives that combine pieces of truth embedded in fiction.

Fan fiction writers use the term “canonical” to refer to texts that reflect the pressure to make their texts fit within the larger collective text that is One Direction. Traditionally in fan fiction the term “canon” signifies that the fan text is derived directly from the original text, featuring characters as they were originally written, and the limitations of the fictional world as written by the original author. In celebrity fan fiction the notion of “canonical” stories is still present, but slightly more complex than in fan fiction about fictional characters. For example, some One Direction fan
fiction will label itself as being “canon,” which essentially means that it keeps the members of One Direction as they are represented in the mass media: they are in a world-famous boy band, they keep their assigned personality traits and what we know of their personal lives. But these stories are otherwise totally fabricated, and often feature One Direction in homosexual relationships, which is not technically “canon.” And, of course, these stories cannot be truly “canonical” as the writers do not have access to the members of One Direction, they do not know them, they are only writing what the media has allowed them to see and they are fabricating the rest. Furthermore, what is “canon” for celebrity fan fiction is in a constant state of flux. Arrow states: “with every new piece of evidence, every day, every interview, every tweet, the canon evolves and changes” (2013, 331). With an ever-evolving canon in mind, it becomes apparent that “no single, paradigmatic text usurps the authority of the original; instead, there is an entire body of work, a polyvocal, textual metropolis bustling underneath the surface of the protected canon. In other words, the fan community upends the single author and artefact” (Roh 2015, 63). One Direction fan fiction might acknowledge the “canon” presented to them by the mass media, but at the same time, that mass media canon is influenced by a huge body of texts that construct celebrity identity and the representation of One Direction. If celebrity fan fiction can make unsubstantiated claims about characters and still claim to be “canon,” then it is toying with overt construction, particularly when the unsubstantiated claims relate to homoerotic relationships between celebrities.

Busse draws attention to two primary modes of fan fiction central to this thesis, the “insertion” fantasy, and the “observer” fantasy. In the insertion fantasy “writers may directly insert themselves into the narrative or mould one of the characters to become their representative,” furthermore, “in the insertion fantasy, the text imagines the author entering the story, usually to meet the stars and often to become romantically involved with them” (Busse 2006, 256). The insertion fantasy is particularly relevant for the purposes of this thesis as One Direction’s songwriting team plays on the self-insertion fantasy in their lyrics. Because it is easy for the listener to insert themselves into the often romantic context of the song as the woman or girl being addressed by the group, it then follows that fan fiction about One Direction would continue this process. One Direction fan fiction often pays close attention to particular songs or lyrical tropes used by the group in order to build a platform for more specific fantasy scenarios involving a member of the group and a
fan. One Direction insertion fan fiction seems to be concerned largely with fan identity, although this identity is co-dependent on celebrity identity. By contrast, “in the observer fantasy, the text envisions the characters in a private unobserved state, allowing deeper insight into the star and the ‘real’ persons behind the public screen” (Busse 2006, 256). Busse argues, “the observer fantasy thus seems to replace or supplement the desire to be or have the characters with a desire to see or know about them” (2006, 256). There are examples of both insertion and observer fan fiction in the One Direction fandom. However, I would argue that in both insertion and observer One Direction fan fiction there is a desire to know as much as possible about the group and its members and to display that knowledge through fan fiction, because “in fandom, as in the official culture, the accumulation of knowledge is fundamental to the accumulation of cultural capital” (Fiske 1992, 42). Knowing as much as possible about the group involves constructing complex identity narratives that involve both the fan and the celebrity. In turn, these narratives generate imagined intimacy between the fan and the celebrity, and between fans.

Finally, fan fiction provides a space in which the writer/fan can examine how they understand identity in a way that interrogates both how celebrity identity is publicly presented and how that relates to the fan’s own identity performance. Busse explains, “in their clearly constructed roles, boy bands epitomize issues surrounding identity construction and performativity which are central to all stars and, by extension, all postmodern subjects” (Busse 2006, 255). Fan fiction writers take these already established roles and extend the narratives surrounding them. It is possible for these writers and fans to do so because the celebrity figure has already been established as a narrative construct, a work of fiction that is malleable and open for interpretation. In this regard, “it is often unclear who is a writer and who is a reader and what the difference is” because fan fiction “sometimes references actual ‘real world’ events [and] it sometimes custom-crafts fictional elements masquerading as real” (Jamison 2013, 16). Celebrity functions in the same way, sometimes playing on the celebrity’s real life and other times custom-crafting fictional elements that enhance the “real.” Fans are then constantly engaged in a process of reading celebrity narratives at the same time as they contribute to those narratives, while celebrities and their producers are engaged in publicly writing celebrity identities and reading and gauging fan response. Celebrities such as One Direction, who are so beloved by their fans and yet so far removed from them, provide the ideal means for fans to interrogate
identity, its construction, its relationship to the production of intimacy and distance, and to the tension between the notions of the publicly performed and private self. This interrogation of identity furthers the celebrity of One Direction and, at the same time, the identity of the fan is also furthered through their consumption of One Direction content and consequent fan production.

The first chapter of this thesis examines short form insertion fan fiction. This chapter addresses how the identities constructed in pop songs and in One Direction insertion fan fiction are largely normative, but they are non-specific, easily recognisable, and easily re-purposed and so inherently malleable. Having established that identity in One Direction and in fan production is malleable, I turn in the following chapter to examine how this malleability impacts on fan identity construction. Chapter 2 examines how fan identities are built around intense individual connections and feelings of intimacy with One Direction, and in turn how these individual connections result in a powerful fan collective. In order to appeal to an enormous fan collective made up of people with individual fantasies and expectations, both One Direction’s identity and fan identity need to be malleable. The final chapter of this thesis addresses observer, homoerotic fan fiction as a process of constructing complex identity narratives for One Direction. It is also an investigation of identities that do no conform to heteronormative narratives, and of the potential for fans to shape One Direction’s identities. Collectively, these chapters will show that One Direction and their fans are engaged in a constant feedback loop of identity co-construction that alters the way we understand the relationship between traditional mass media, fans and fan production.
I. Chapter One: Imagining Inhabitability

“Five-foot-something with the skinny jeans” — One Direction, “Midnight Memories” (2013).

This chapter argues that a significant part of modern music is tied up in questions of celebrity and fan identity, and how these identities are constructed via song lyrics and content created in response to these song lyrics. The chapter will focus on identity and how it operates in One Direction songs and in fan fiction, and how pop songs and short form fan fiction are structured. I hope to show that One Direction songs and imagines, in being structured around writing and repeating easily recognisable and relatable identities, co-construct both celebrity and fan identity and media content.

One Direction fans explore notions of celebrity, fan and gender identity by creating narratives that extend the song lyrics into the realm of the celebrity, social media, mass media, and fan culture. One Direction fan fiction is a site of struggle in which the fans attempt to reconcile what shapes their own identities with how they perceive celebrity identity and the popular content they consume. Their perception of their own identity and celebrity identity then shapes not only the fan content they produce but also the mass media content produced by groups such as One Direction. Throughout the chapter, I will focus on several fan fiction case studies, as well as on the One Direction song “Olivia” (2015) and the music video for the song “Night Changes” (2014). Through an extension of formulaic pop song techniques, as illustrated by the song “Olivia,” these fan fiction case studies use social media to construct malleable, easily repeatable identities that fans are able to inhabit. In turn, One Direction in the “Night Changes” video mirror fan appropriation of pop song techniques in fan fiction in order to extend the malleable, inhabitable identity from the song lyrics into the visuals of the music video. The relationship between One Direction pop songs and fan fiction in this sense demonstrates the co-construction of fan and celebrity identity in both fan production and the mass media.

This chapter will focus on a particular kind of fan fiction commonly referred to as “imagines.”

2 Imagines cited in this thesis are listed in a separate section titled “Imagines” beneath the main Works Cited list.
songs and media appearances. One Direction imagines have been cropping up online since around the release of their first album, *Up All Night*, in the United Kingdom in November 2011 and internationally at the beginning of 2012.³ *Up All Night* features their first hit single “What Makes You Beautiful,” which debuted at number one in the United Kingdom and made it to number four on the Billboard Hot 100, garnering the group international fame. Imagines seem to have developed on blogging/microblogging platforms such as Tumblr and Wattpad, with the term “imagines” reflecting the typical formula these microposts follow. An imagine begins “Imagine:” and a short scenario follows depicting a character who represents a fan interacting in some way with a celebrity, in this case, a member of One Direction. The scenario is often romantic, with the fan character and the One Direction character usually inhabiting heteronormative gender roles. Imagines work by combining content produced by One Direction (song lyrics, images, footage) and imaginary scenarios thought up by fans. Instead of writing fan characters with names and distinct characteristics and qualities, imagines typically refer to the fan character only as “you” or “Y/N” (short hand for “your name”) to indicate that you should insert your name and yourself into the scenario.

Fan imagines illustrate Butler’s argument, one of the key foundations of this thesis, that there is no “interior” identity. Identity, rather than being something inherent or innate, relies instead on the public repetition of certain rules of “intelligibility” (Butler 1990, 23). Moreover, these rules are given shape by “gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality” (Butler 1990, 198). The notion of “interior” identity is undermined in imagines as they are almost endlessly repeated. Imagines are repetitive in that they are constructed using a particular formula and are shared between fans (and anyone who cares to look) on social media platforms such as Tumblr, Twitter and Facebook.⁴ The extensive repetition of these imagines via sharing on the internet acts as a public performance of identity shared by many

³ Some examples of early One Direction imagines are “Slow dancing in the middle of a park with Harry” posted in 2011, and “#Imagine you’re on the beach with Zayn watching the sunset,” also posted in 2011. Both blogs began specifically to post One Direction imagines.
individuals, thus maintaining and perpetuating “socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility” (Butler 1990, 23). Furthermore, the relationships in imagines are implicitly coded as heterosexual. At the same time as performing normative values via the imagines, in writing the imagines fans are also writing identities that are in a sense external to themselves: the identity of One Direction members. The identities that are supposedly representative of fans themselves are almost characterless; they are malleable and generalised so that it is possible for almost any fan to insert themselves into any given imagine scenario. Of course, anyone writing fiction is at least attempting to inhabit other identities, but the significance of these imagines is that they are written with open/empty roles that fans are supposed to insert themselves into in order to be a part of the narrative. These self-insert roles are often voiceless and lacking in significant detail, while whichever One Direction member is imagined in the scenario often has a voice, a recognisable character, and an active presence in the text.

In the performance of normative identity, there is, however, as Butler acknowledges, room for subversion. For example, she considers drag as performing a parody of gender roles because, at the same time as it plays into hegemonic, misogynist culture, it also draws attention to the performative nature of what we assume to be naturalised and true identity. She explains that “repetitive signifying” (Butler 1990, 199) can in fact have a subversive effect. One Direction imagines are largely not parodies, but, in writing celebrity voices and creating malleable roles with almost endless potential for self-insertion they “effectively displace the meaning of the original, they imitate the myth of originality itself” (Butler 1990, 188). Additionally, because these imagines are authored either anonymously or pseudonymously and feature an empty space for a fan to insert themselves into the narrative they are doubly displaced from any sense of an “original.” The author is merely an online version or representation of someone, and their relative anonymity and lack of presence in the narratives they are writing allows for their work to be shared widely and removed with ease from its “original” context. Unlike drag, however, for the most part, imagines are not knowingly mocking gender or identity. In this sense, they can perhaps be seen as pastiche, rather than parody. Jameson writes: “[pastiche] is a neutral practice of mimicry, without parody’s ulterior motive, without the satirical impulse, without laughter, without that still latent feeling that there exists something normal compared to which what is being imitated is rather
comic. Pastiche is blank parody, parody that has lost its humour” (1983, 114). Imagines, in their original form, are not designed to mock fans or One Direction; they are small fantasies that mimic the voices of celebrities, and the heteronormative ideal of the role a woman plays in a relationship with a man. Butler, however, counters Jameson’s claim that pastiche is “without laughter”; stating, “the loss of the sense of ‘the normal,’ however, can be its own occasion for laughter, especially when ‘the normal,’ ‘the original’ is revealed to be a copy, and an inevitably failed one, an ideal that no one can embody” (1990, 189). Imagines such as the upcoming case study reveal, through depicting the self-insert fan role as a female celebrity, that One Direction members and their carefully constructed identity and personality traits represent an ideal that can only be obtained by a woman who meets the required standards of heterosexual womanhood, and who is also a celebrity. For teenage girls, this female figure, in a tangible sense, represents an “ideal that no one can embody” but nevertheless she is the representative of the fan in the imagine scenarios. Ultimately fans understand that the members of One Direction exist in the fans’ world as idealised characters that are very much out of reach. Perhaps then fans writing self-insert characters who follow the rules of hegemonic, heteronormative sexuality and gender expression, and who obtain the unobtainable, are somewhat aware of the performative, externally regulated nature of identity. And, while imagines might not quite arrive at parody, they are certainly imitations of “normal” identities that disrupt the continuity of normativity.

Further, Jameson is writing on pastiche as a feature of postmodernism. He writes that “the modernist aesthetic is in some way organically linked to the conception of a unique self and private identity, a unique personality and individuality, which can be expected to generate its own unique vision of the world and to forge its own unique, unmistakable style” (Jameson 1983, 114). But now, in a postmodernist world, and perhaps even in a post-postmodernist world, “in the age of corporate capitalism, […] that older bourgeois individual subject no longer exists” (1983, 115). And, further, the individual subject, from a poststructuralist perspective may never have existed, “rather this construct is merely a philosophical and cultural mystification which sought to persuade people that they ‘had’ individual subjects and possessed this unique personal identity” (Jameson 1983, 115). Evidently, the fan characters in One Direction imagines are reduced to externally recognisable performances of normative identity, performances of identity that are socially
accepted as an inherent and intrinsic part of personal, individual identities. Essentially they are so void of any individual characteristics that they are inhabitable by almost any girl or woman who chooses to follow the set norms. So, in a sense, imagines refute the notion of the individual subject, and instead write characters that many fans relate to at the same time they understand that these characters could be anyone (who conforms) as well as themselves.

Jameson also suggests that in light of the individual subject no longer being possible, or no longer existing, pastiche is part of “a world in which stylistic innovation is no longer possible” (1983, 115). He claims, “all that is left is to imitate dead styles, to speak through the masks and the voices of the styles in the imaginary museum” (Jameson 1983, 115). One Direction imagines combine imitations of a number of different styles. They draw from pop songs, pop lyricism, the language of celebrity, and generalised understanding of gender roles and heterosexuality. But the loss of stylistic innovation is not inherently limiting for One Direction or for the fans creating imagines. In combining material from a multiplicity of styles, imagines arguably embody pastiche in a way that is innovative and allows for an interesting examination of fan and celebrity identity in the twenty-first century.

Imagines are fan fiction, and fan fiction is a fan response to popular media content. One Direction write songs and appear in public, and many fans use fan fiction to respond to their songs and performances. By replicating relationships depicted in songs in their fan fiction, these fans find a way to share their feelings and connect with other people who feel the same way and share the same interests. The relationships and gender roles depicted in songs and then in fan fiction are easily recognisable and thus make it easier to connect with other people who recognise and relate to the performance of these particular identity codes. Lewis argues, “by participating in fandom, fans construct coherent identities for themselves. In the process, they enter a domain of cultural activity of their own making which is, potentially, a source of empowerment in struggles against oppressive ideologies and unsatisfactory circumstance of everyday life” (Lewis 1992, 3; emphasis mine).

Furthermore, while pop music does not typically diverge from heteronormative relationship models and patriarchal gender roles, it does provide a means for young women and girls to explore their (often latent) desires and sexuality, elements of their identity often ignored if not outright denied by society. Through shared appreciation for celebrities and pop music, girls are able to explore their identities and make
connections with their peers. Kehily states: “friendship groups enable girls to act out different facets of normative femininity, projecting themselves into situations” while at the same time “celebrities remain distant objects of desire, providing girls with an opportunity to position themselves within heterosexual relations of desire in anticipation of their practice” (Kehily 2012, 259–60).

As well as forging bonds between girls, the hegemonic world of the pop song is open to interpretation. As Shuker claims, “cultural meanings are ultimately made by consumers, even if this process is under conditions and opportunities not of their own choosing” and cultural hegemony is always open for redefinition and reinterpretation (1994, 15–23). What teenage girls are taking from One Direction’s heteronormative love songs is a sense of love and support that they perhaps feel is lacking in their everyday lives and a framework through which to explore their romantic and sexual desires. In Morgan Spurlock’s One Direction documentary film This Is Us (2012), fans interviewed report that the primary reasons they feel so strongly about One Direction are that they feel understood and loved. One fan states: “I know they love me, even [if] they don’t know me, I know.” Additionally, they feel connected to other fans. One girl explains that she has met her closest friends through the One Direction fandom, and that has been the most important thing for her. They are shaping their identities by working with what they are given in pop songs such as One Direction’s. While fan fiction does not move completely away from cultural hegemony it does at least partially allow for hegemonic relationships to be reimagined on the fan’s own terms. Fan fiction “becomes an instrument for their pleasure and perversion, endlessly malleable, continually rewritten, a constantly shifting locus of desire” (Humble 2012, 100). Instead of leaving it at the song expressing desire and longing for a female figure, and being content with being a passive object of desire, fans take the songs, the celebrity pop stars behind the songs, and reimagine scenarios that work for their particular desires.

One Direction imagines mirror the highly conventional and formulaic structures of the pop song. Pop songs are “highly sectionalized, non-developmental forms with short, concise, well-defined sections that deliver the content in small, easily followed portions” (Warner 2003, 9). They are “not about realising individual visions or making us see the world in new ways, but about providing popular tunes and clichés in which to express commonplace feelings—love, loss, jealousy” (Frith 2007, 170). One Direction songs work by describing easily relatable situations
involving love and heartache, and at least two roles, the man (or in this case, men) singing the song, and the often anonymous woman, who is the subject of the song. Like popular fiction, One Direction pop songs rely on “a limited number of forms or genres of [...] pleasure [...] using fictional lures that hook readers into the text, so that they are driven to repeat the experience at regular intervals” (Glover and McCracken 2012, 2). Their songs are quite consistently about “romantic complications” (Glover and McCracken 2012, 2) and, furthermore, boy bands are made up of young men who are supposed to be objects of romantic desire. The boys in boy bands are a collection of archetypal personalities, for example, the bad boy, the joker, the nice boy, the womanizer. Even if these personality traits aren’t necessarily represented in the songs, listeners are able to more closely align their personal experiences or fantasies with what the group are singing about, because the group cover a range of “desirable” masculine traits. These traits are related to perhaps the “generic form” of the celebrity, “an apparently singular nexus of personal quirks, irreducible to type, yet, paradoxically, the epitome of a type or prototype that almost everyone eventually wants to see or be like” (Roach 2007, 6). Listeners are able to insert themselves into the narrative as the anonymous woman, perhaps imagining themselves in relation to a member of the group that most closely aligns with their desires. In a sense, the potential for listeners to insert themselves into pop songs and pop narratives in a number of ways means that One Direction’s music produces a version of universality. Or rather, the music is formulaic and so are the representations of love, sexuality and gender and so the listener finds them easily recognisable, even if these representations are inevitably exclusionary.

Like pop songs, imagines are “non-developmental forms” with “concise, well-defined sections that deliver the content in small, easily followed portions” (Warner 2003, 9). And, like the pop song, a musical format made to be “infinitely repeatable” (Warner 2003, 9), imagines rely on the repetition of lyrical themes, images, and footage of One Direction. In this respect, fans writing imagines “understand the conventions of the originating text” and said text is “wrested from the author’s control and rewritten to suit the whims and demands of its readers” (Humble 2012, 100). While the pop song itself is malleable and easily inhabited by any number of people, the power of imagines is that they take widely recognised and understood content related to One Direction and repurpose it from an individual as well as a generic perspective. Those who share a particular perspective then share on online networks
such as Tumblr the imagines that they relate to. And, if you don’t relate to a certain perspective then you can make your own imagine to work out your relationship to the music and celebrity on your own terms. One Direction songs then act as a framework for further exploration and construction of both celebrity and fan identity.

I now turn to an imagine (fig.1) written in response to the One Direction song “Olivia” (Made in the AM, 2015) in order to show how the inhabitability of the pop song and the fan fiction interact in order to enable an exploration and construction of celebrity and fan identity. In this imagine the lyric persona is trying to convince Olivia, his lover/former lover, that he does sincerely love her, and is lamenting the fact that he is/was not enough for her. This imagine makes reference to a song, uses images from a One Direction press conference, appropriates Harry Styles’ voice,
involves a romantic situation, and develops a character reliant on both fan and celebrity identity. At times, this imagine mirrors and extends the lyric techniques displayed in the song and depends upon a representation of Harry Styles stating that he wrote the song about a real person, thus enabling the self-insertion fantasy. And, even though this imagine references a song with a specific woman’s name, it still works within the “universally” habitable quality of both the imagine format and One Direction songs. In this case, the subject addressed in the imagine doesn’t necessarily have this name, and is still referred to as “you” throughout the scenario. Furthermore, in the song itself, the name Olivia only comes up in the chorus, while the verses shift between “I,” “you,” and “she.” In the chorus, it seems that Olivia serves more as a play on words than anything else, with the lyrics in the chorus sonically resembling “Olivia”: “I live for you, I long for you, Olivia. I’ve been idolizing the light in your eyes, Olivia” (One Direction 2015). The song “Olivia” follows a typical lyric format: it is in the first person, it is an expression of the persona’s emotions, and it is an address to a simultaneously absent and present love. When we consider that the song was written by three men and sung by four men (only one of whom was involved in the song writing process), we understand that the poet, or rather songwriter, “is not saying these things but representing them being said by someone” (Culler 2015, 110). The “Olivia” imagine, via representations of things being said, draws attention to the “simultaneously absent and present” nature of the relationship between celebrities and fans. The distance inherent in this relationship allows for the fan writer to inhabit multiple identities and roles in their writing and, as a result, construct both fan and celebrity identity. Culler, writing on Sappho’s address to Aphrodite, states: “especially powerful and seductive in the representation of Aphrodite’s response is the transition from reported speech to direct discourse” (2015, 14). Similarly, the first half of the imagine reports that Harry talks about his song and his love for “you” in an interview, the second half of the imagine shows Harry saying these things directly in a doctored gif. The first verse of the song also contains reported speech: “you told me I didn’t give you enough” and “all of your friends said I’d be leaving you” (One Direction 2015) Culler continues on the topic of Aphrodite’s address: “this transition displays for us the stakes of apostrophic address—the wish, seldom realized in the later lyric, that entities addressed might in their turn respond” (2015, 14). In the song, Olivia does not respond, but in the world of the imagine, not only does the Olivia figure confirm the anxieties expressed in the song, but she also addresses Harry
(albeit indirectly), and receives a response. Furthermore, if Olivia could reasonably be any number of women who conform to normative standards of femininity then the imagine itself is a response from the “addressed entities” of the song. Culler concludes that Sappho’s poem “gives us lyric as performance and event, as a public act of […] ‘triangulated address’ – speaking to listeners though an apostrophic address to an absent power” (2015, 15). In the context of the song, Olivia is the absent power, and she does not respond because she does not exist and it is really the listener who is being addressed. Outside the song (in the imagine) the listener fabricates a response from the Olivia figure, which addresses the absent power that is Harry Styles, and his absence allows for a fabricated response from him. Olivia, however, does not get to speak in the imagine; her speech is all reported and it is only Harry and the narrator who get to speak, emphasising the distance between celebrity and fan. One Direction might address the fan, and the fan might respond, but this communication is never direct. The song and the imagine involve multiple instances of representations of things being said by someone, but not necessarily by the writer.

The distance between celebrity and fan is again emphasised in this imagine with the “you” figure being famous, or at least sought out by the media, too. The “you” figure has given “several” interviews in which she has confessed to feeling insecure about her relationship with Harry Styles, the author of this imagine perhaps playing on Styles’ reputation for being a playboy. For this reason, Harry has announced publicly that “Olivia” was written about the “you” figure, a song that begs “please believe me, don’t you see the things you mean to me? Oh I love you, I love you” (One Direction 2015). The imagine mirrors the content of the song, and the communication between Harry and the “you” figure is indirect. “You” has announced in interviews that she is worried about her relationship, and Harry has addressed these insecurities indirectly through the medium of the pop song, and through an interview with the press. In this sense the imagine scenario mirrors the scenario fans find themselves in with celebrities outside of the imaginary. All communication is necessarily indirect and takes place through fan interpretation of songs and other communication media such as interviews or social media. In the world that this imagine creates, however, for someone in a relationship with Harry Styles to achieve this kind of indirect communication they must also be a celebrity. With this in mind, it is important to note that the imagine places equal importance on the celebrity production (in this case an interview with Harry Styles) as it does on the music
production, or the production of the song. The importance of fan production is also implicitly stressed through the existence and public sharing of the imagine itself.

The communication depicted in the imagine has interesting connotations when one considers the combination of truth seeking and fantasy involved with fans engaging with media content produced by celebrities. Busse explains, “the question of truth and reality are central in [fan] writing” (2006, 256). Harry Styles is listed as having co-written “Olivia” alongside professional songwriters Julian Bunetta and John Ryan, and so, in some small way, the song is a communication from Harry to the fans, but the fans are conscious that this communication is mediated by other songwriters, by the rest of One Direction, and by the mass media. Part of the truth sought after is the person the song might be directed at, but due to the nature of the songwriting process fans have reason to believe that love songs by One Direction are hardly addressed to one particular person, and they know that Harry Styles isn’t dating anyone named Olivia. So, in this sense, the small elements of ‘truth’ that can be uncovered serve to fuel the fantasy. The imagine combines two separate features. It begins with text on a pink background, setting the scene, and is followed by gifs from a real interview, where make-believe dialogue has been superimposed. In taking content from the mass media and repurposing it to suit fan narratives, this imagine is an example of fans disavowing what is presented to them as “reality” by the media, and of the blurring of lines between mass media production and fan social media production.

There is a tension in this imagine, as it represents two contradictory positions. On the one hand, the imagine works on an understanding that the song is a collective address: it is possible for any fan to insert themselves into the narrative of the song. On the other hand, however, this imagine only works under the assumption that the song could be directed at one particular person, and, as touched on earlier, that particular person must also be a celebrity. This imagine concerns a song off the most recent One Direction album. As the fame of the group increases, the likelihood of a regular fan becoming involved with a member of the group decreases, and so the fantasies seem to become more elaborate. *Made in the A.M* (2015) is arguably One Direction at peak fame, and so the “you” figure in the imagine is a public figure herself. Potentially the author of this imagine chose the song “Olivia” because it not only illustrates the potential for collective address as well as particular address but also because of the way the song talks about Olivia and the singer’s relationship with
In the chorus we hear, “I’ve been idolizing the light in your eyes, Olivia,” while it is the fans who in reality idolize One Direction (One Direction 2015). So, the fan writing this imagine extrapolates from the idolatry sentiment in the song, and writes a fan character who is a celebrity and so in a position to be idolized by One Direction in a similar way to how One Direction are idolized by fans. In the same way that fans write about One Direction to express devotion, a member of One Direction, in the world of this imagine, might write a song and speak to a journalist about his devotion to his celebrity love.

In another imagine posted on the same blog, “Award Show” (2016), the subject of the imagine has won an award but is unable to attend the awards ceremony, so her boyfriend Harry Styles goes and accepts the award on her behalf. Beneath the exposition of the scene is another set of doctored gifs, this time depicting Harry giving an acceptance speech on behalf of his celebrity girlfriend. In the speech Harry outlines how he believes the subject of this imagine would feel about receiving the award. He states: “I want to say thanks to her fans for her. You guys are everything to her and she really cares about you. The last couple of years has been very stressful for her because of her new album and an upcoming tour, but you guys really supported her. And I really appreciate that you take care of her. That means a lot for both me and her” (“Award Show” 2016). This imagine takes what One Direction typically say about their fans (that they are thankful for their support) and indirectly puts those words in the mouth of the subject of the imagine who is a celebrity in the world of the imagine but technically represents a fan. The subject, however, still does not get to speak, Harry Styles speaks for her, although the fan is the one writing Harry’s words, even if they are words inspired by things he has been known to say. The idea of the subject of the imagine being a celebrity too is connected to the contradictory positions imagines are built on. On the one hand, fans imagine direct address from One Direction, and on the other hand, this address is shaped by a sense of unbridgeable distance between the fantasy world of the celebrity and the world of the fan.

The sense of distance between the fantasy world of the celebrity and fans is implicitly explored in the song “Olivia.” In the bridge of this song Harry sings, “you

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5 This distance has been explored in One Direction songs before with the group often referring back to their own celebrity, or to a sense of remove from a lover. In “Back For You” (2012), the group sing, “I’m watching you from the stage/ your smile is on
live in my imagination,” and this can be read in a number of ways. In the context of the song, it can be seen as an acknowledgement of the clearly make-believe or constructed Olivia figure, or, outside of the song it could be seen as a sneaky reference to the role a member of One Direction plays in the life of a fan, a role that exists only in imagination. Or, perhaps the line alludes to the fan as object of One Direction’s desire as being only fantasy, with fans existing only as a vague “you,” an amorphous, generalised figure. With these allusions in mind, it isn’t a huge jump to consider that this line in the song may even be a reference to fan imagines, which have done so much to propel and shape the group’s popularity, as well as their celebrity identity.

Keeping in mind the significant presence of imagines in the One Direction fandom, the music video for the single “Night Changes” (directed by Ben Winston) off the album Four (2014) becomes an even more explicit example of fan production shaping One Direction’s mass media production. This video follows almost the same format as imagines. The music video features all five members of One Direction on their own individual dates, and it is shot in such a way that the viewer feels as though they are on the date too. Prior to 2014 and the “Night Changes” video (and after as well), One Direction imagines frequently make reference to being asked on dates or to going on dates with a member of One Direction. In many imagines posted in 2013 on one blog, the scenario ends with “Y/N” (Your Name) being asked on a date. In one imagine, “Y/N” is Niall’s cousin and is going to meet his band mates for the first time. She is worried they won’t like her but Harry is especially friendly and watches her all day. Finally, he says, “You’re just really beautiful (Y/N). And I was wondering if I could take you on a date tomorrow?” (“Niall’s Cousin” 2013). In another imagine from the same blog, “Y/N” is at Liam’s flat hanging out with One Direction, her close friends who are home on a break from tour, and they are behaving strangely. It turns
out of course, that Liam has a crush on “Y/N” and he eventually admits, “Fine (Y/N), I like you. Will you go on a date with me?” (“At Liam’s Flat” 2013).

Obviously, a music video is different from the short, concise nature of the imagine in that the length of the song often requires a slightly more complicated or involved narrative, or at least more action. And, of course, an imagine utilises text and sometimes images to get the point across, while a music video is comprised of video images and music, and very occasionally a small amount of dialogue. The “Night Changes” music video doesn’t feature any dialogue (aside from the song), only visuals and music. It runs for exactly four minutes, meaning that it features a lot more content than the average imagine. The video, however, is broken into five distinct parts, and it shifts back and forward between them. The parts are the individual dates and they are separated into more or less even sections (dependent on whoever is singing at the time), with each member of One Direction initially getting between fifteen to twenty seconds of screen time to introduce their date scenario and sing their verse. The segmentation of the video makes the individual storylines easier to follow, the segments are short and concise, and as the song progresses the movement between the segments speeds up, allowing all the storylines to develop at the same time. The segmentation into small units recalls the concise scenarios of the imagine genre.

Furthermore, the One Direction member is the only thing in focus in any given scene: it is possible to make out the background but the only clear image is a One Direction boy looking down the barrel of the lens, as though he is making eye contact with you. This singular focus is similar to an imagine in that the One Direction member in an imagine is the only clearly defined character, the character that draws the reader’s attention, while the perspective is that of an indeterminate female “you” who remains undescribed, or in this case off screen.

Of course, almost everything One Direction (and any celebrity) does involves clearly defined and easily recognisable character traits. Imagines are often tailored to what fans know of One Direction members’ personalities, and One Direction’s official content in turn pushes specific personality traits for each member of the group. In the “Night Changes” video, each date is tailored to what fans have come to understand the boys’ personalities to be and relates back to the initial personality traits assigned to the boys’ by Sony. Leaked Sony documents originally made to pitch the group feature “personality is:” and “style is:” and fan quote sections to sell each boy as a certain celebrity or personality “type.” For example, Zayn is described as “The
Dark Horse, Poser, A Player, Vulnerable” (O’Connor, 2015) and his date features him taking his date to a fancy restaurant and flirting with her across the table until an ex-boyfriend shows up and dumps a plate of spaghetti on his head. Harry, whose pull quote in the Sony documents (from an anonymous “casual” fan) describes him as someone “adventurous” who “takes more risks” (O’Connor 2015), takes his date ice skating, and drops her onto the ice trying to perform a complicated trick. Of course, the way One Direction are perceived by fans has changed over the years, with fans having not only the group’s music and visuals to build on, but also many interviews and public appearances. The “Night Changes” video, however, is carefully executed so that fans are able to watch and recognise behaviour that they expect from individual members of One Direction.

Furthermore, while the above examples of dates in imagines are non-specific, there are imagines from the blog 1dboysimagines.tumblr.com (there may be countless other examples) that feature date activities more closely related to what happens in the “Night Changes” video. In one imagine, posted on June 20th 2013, before the “Night Changes” video was released in 2014, “Y/N” and Liam are celebrating their first anniversary and take a trip to Disney World where they spend their time “indulging in sweets” and “riding rides countless times” (“Disney World” 2013). This imagine pre-emptively imagines Liam’s date at the carnival in the “Night Changes” video. Another, posted January 2nd 2013, features “Y/N” and Niall spending a “calm day indoors” where they “cuddle up next to one another on the couch” (“Calm Day With Niall” 2013), similar to Niall’s scene in the music video, a quiet date night at home by the fire.

These imagines end happily. The Disney World imagine ends in a marriage proposal, and the quiet indoor date with Niall ends in an intimate moment. The dates in the music video, however, all end in disaster. As previously mentioned, Zayn gets spaghetti on his head and his date leaves, Harry injures his date, Liam gets ill on a ride at the carnival and vomits in his date’s hat, Niall sets himself on fire and dumps

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6 In two other imagines, Louis takes Y/N to “a fancy restaurant in Central London” and Zayn arranges a dinner with candles and rose petals. Unfortunately these imagines have since been deleted from 1dboysimagines.tumblr.com, and though they were posted in 2013 around the same time as the Liam and Niall imagines, the screenshots I took do not include a date and so I was unable to properly include them.
red punch on his date’s lap (she is wearing a white dress), and Louis gets pulled over by the police and arrested. In this sense, while the imagines are themselves a kind of pastiche of One Direction and fans, the “Night Changes” video is almost a pastiche or parody of imagines. The video “involve[s] the imitation or, better still, the mimicry of other styles and particularly of the mannerisms and stylistic twitches of other styles” (Jameson 1983, 113), and yet, in the end, it undermines the one running theme of imagines and of the kind of pop songs that One Direction sing, that everything between “Y/N” and the One Direction member or love interest works out in the end. In watching One Direction fail so miserably on their dates we are brought back to Butler’s “original” that turns out to be a “failed copy” and “an ideal that no one can embody” (Butler 1990, 189).

In “Night Changes,” One Direction are playing the part of the fan’s dream. They are on dreamy dates, they are handsome and attentive, and yet it all falls apart literally and in the sense that the video fails where imagines succeed in maintaining the fantasy. While fan imagines seek to replicate the habitable nature of One Direction’s songs, the “Night Changes” video does not achieve the same level of habitability. An imagine works because it is text based. “Y/N” is short hand for “your name,” as in, insert your name here, a characterless way of signifying a self-insert role, and, for the most part the only images in imagines are of One Direction or of particular outfits you might wear in the depicted scenario. The fan character is never given any specific traits. In the “Night Changes” video, however, the all-encompassing illusion that you are on the date with a member of One Direction is occasionally broken when you glimpse a part of the girl on the date; her hand crops up a few times, and her leg, foot and lap do too. She is white, which on its own is enough to alienate a decent portion of the fan base, but the mere fact that we see her at all is jarring as the appeal of the video is that you, as a viewer, are able to fully immerse yourself in the fantasy of going on a date with a member of One Direction. Seeing someone else’s body parts pulls the viewer out of the scenario and back to feeling like an observer. The disastrous endings on the dates perhaps shatter the fantasy, to a degree, as well. The fantasy endings written in the imagines, marriage and love, are revealed to be impossible by the “Night Changes” video. Both the video and imagines maintain a sense of distance and impossibility between One Direction and the fans. This distance, however, allows room for both fans and the group to
create fan and mass media content that feeds off the other in a way that is mutually constructive of both content and fan and celebrity identity.

One Direction imagines, though not in themselves necessarily parodies, have taken on another life on the internet, with blogs dedicated to collecting and posting “bad” One Direction imagines. Some of these imagines are considered to be funny on their own: the scenarios might be totally absurd or they might be so mundane that the reader finds it hard to understand why they were written at all. Others have been doctored to make them seem like something they are not, with text poorly erased and different text and images added. There are even imagines that are made deliberately as jokes. Sometimes it is obvious what has been made as a joke. For example, a clearly doctored imagine reads: “Imagine: Harry: I made a list. You: what about? Harry: What I love about you. You: That must be a short list. Harry: You’re right. I only wrote one word ‘Everything.’” In this imagine “Dark” has been written in different, darker font so that Harry is now “Dark Harry,” and “NOTHING” has been printed across “Everything” (“Dark Harry” 2016). Others, however, are not as clear. For example, superimposed over a photograph of Zayn holding a lizard is text that reads: “imagine: Zayn says he has a surprise for you and you think your [sic] getting married but he gets you a lizard instead” (“Zayn Lizard” 2015). Both imagines work within the typical imagine format though one obviously undermines the intention behind imagines by making it so that the fan character ends up insulted by a Harry figure who is less than ideal, while the other undermines the formula in that the fan character does not get a romantic proposal but instead an absurd pet. It is difficult to say with certainty who started making these mocking imagines, imagines by the very nature of their intent and the platforms they are shared on generally have relatively anonymous authorship, but it seems as though One Direction fans, usually older ones, are involved. The person who runs bad1dimagines.tumblr.com states that she is 20 years old in the FAQ section of her blog and that she is a One Direction fan. Fans parodying fan activity within the fandom perhaps indicates a growing level of self-awareness and might be linked back to Jameson’s claim that “stylistic innovation is no longer possible” and “all that is left is to imitate dead styles” (1983, 115). Perhaps as you grow out of your early teens the impulse to write these scenarios decreases, and mocking and repurposing imagines becomes a way of remaining active within the fandom. And, as One Direction are currently on hiatus and there is less official and
mass media content related to them, maybe the only way to continue is to repurpose old material to new ends.

Berlant, writing on the sense of optimism generated by consuming things that are supposed to make us feel good but which might ultimately prevent us from flourishing, explains: “one of optimism’s ordinary pleasures is to induce conventionality, that place where appetites find a shape in the predictable comforts of the good-life genres that a person or a world has seen fit to formulate” (2011, 2). One Direction’s pop songs, obviously, encourage a conventional, normative understanding of love, relationships between men and women, and gender roles. The depictions in these songs are so familiar they provide a sense of comfort for the listener, the songs are repetitive and easy to consume quickly and again and again, and they provide a space in which the listener can work out their relationship to romance, heterosexuality, and even gender. For teenage girls, pop groups like One Direction allow them to shape their identities around “predictable” and simplified models of heterosexuality.

But, Berlant continues: “optimism doesn’t just manifest an aim to become stupid or simple—often the risk of attachment taken in its throes manifests an intelligence beyond rational calculation” (2011, 2). One Direction fans are intensely attached to One Direction because the group directly cater to their presumed needs and desires in a heteronormative, patriarchal society. But, this attachment manifests in fans producing fan fiction, specifically imagines. And, imagines, whether intentionally or not, address identity in a manner that accounts for the “death of the subject” (Jameson 1983, 114) by writing generalised, non-specific fan characters that could represent any fan and that mirror the inhabitable “you” figure in One Direction songs. The fan character then interacts with a member of One Direction who is given voice by the fan writing the imagine, and their speech is dictated both by what the fan wants and by the fan’s understanding of the archetypal identities assigned to the members of One Direction. Imagines are structured in such a way that they seem to understand that identities can be imitated, performed and endlessly repeated so that the idea of there being an original or core identity is lost along the way and is ultimately unimportant.

Finally, One Direction songs inspire and influence imagines and fan fiction, and in turn imagines and fan fiction provide One Direction with an understanding of what it is fans want so their content can reflect the content that fans are producing.
Ultimately, fan and celebrity identity is constructed via the reproduction of One Direction official content in imagines and the reproduction of fan content in official One Direction content. The identities constructed in pop songs and in imagines are largely normative, but their non-specific and easily recognisable character traits show some awareness of how cultural hegemony influences identity performance. Imagines are not necessarily subversive but there is room in fan production for subversive representations of identity. Following the discussion in this chapter regarding the construction of fan identities in relation to celebrity identity and media content, the next chapter will build on how the construction of fan identities as being malleable and without core functions in regard to the individual fan relationship to One Direction and how this individual relationship relates to a fan collective made up of millions of people. The following chapter will then consider how this fan collective (made up of individuals) is able to influence One Direction and the identity narratives surrounding them.
II. Chapter Two: Intimacy and Distance, the Individual and the Collective

“I’m looking out at the crowd you’re everywhere”— One Direction, “Back For You” (2012).

The previous chapter explores how One Direction and fans write and repeat easily recognisable and relatable identities in pop songs and in imagines. In One Direction songs the representations of love, sexuality and gender are formulaic, and so the fan finds them easily recognisable. The fan then repeats these formulaic representations in the form of imagines. Through imagines One Direction fans explore the notion that identities are endlessly imitable and performable, to the point that the notion of core identity is lost, or even completely disregarded in these representations. In imagines both One Direction and fans become malleable, empty and essentially inhabitable identity signifiers, One Direction acting as voice boxes for fan desires and fantasies. Though malleable, One Direction and fan identity are defined in relation to one another. One Direction act as an empty or malleable signifier onto which fans project desires, needs and imaginings, while at the same time suggesting roles that fans can inhabit in order to best fulfil their desires, needs and imaginings. Thus, the locus of fan identity and One Direction’s identity is constantly shifting depending on the fans and what it is they desire from One Direction. One Direction’s success relies on their ability to suggest roles that can be inhabited by a wide range, or at least a large number of individuals. Fan identity is then reliant on an individual connection to One Direction born out of particular desires or imaginings, but at the same time, the individual fan is a part of a much broader collective of fans whose desires and imaginings may vary, but still ultimately connect fans with one another.

This chapter suggests that fan identity is dependent simultaneously on the individual connection to One Direction and on the connection with other fans that forms the fan collective. This fan collective ultimately holds some influence over One Direction and their continued commercial and critical success. In order to explore this relationship between individual fan identity and the fan collective this chapter will draw on fan fiction that features a member of One Direction falling in love with a fan, a campaign run by fans to raise money for an advertisement in Billboard Magazine, and an online collective of LGBTQ+ One Direction fans known as Rainbow Direction. These examples will show: (1) How the individual connects to One
Direction by asserting the intensity of a personal connection to the group at the same time as connecting with a collective of fans who also understand the intensity of a personal connection to the group, (2) The power of the nameless fan collective, and (3) The capacity of the collective to acknowledge diversity of individual identities at the same time as the individual is overwhelmed by collective power. These examples demonstrate how individual fans experience an imagined intimacy with One Direction, as well as a shared intimacy with other fans. This individual imagined intimacy with One Direction, however, is both rebuked and reinforced by the collective. The collective reinforces individual intimacy and builds intimacy between fans by sharing fantasies via reading and sharing fan fiction and imaginings. But at the same time, the collective is challenged by the potential for actual intimate individual relationships with One Direction. Actual relationships shatter the illusion of potential intimacy between One Direction and the individual fan, an illusion, or fantasy, on which the collective relies.

One Direction appeal to the individual and to the collective by playing on a sense of shared intimacy and fan power, established from the beginning of their career on the reality television show The X-Factor. One Direction’s appearance on The X-Factor forged a sense of intimacy between themselves and viewers/fans by allowing viewers/fans access to apparently private, emotional moments. Additionally, their being on The X-Factor also appealed to the feeling of power viewers experience when watching voter-based reality television shows. This sense of intimacy and power has continued throughout One Direction’s career via songs that make the listener imagine they are being directly addressed (or that it could be them in the song), via fan fiction, and via the massive online presence and sway of One Direction fans. To give some idea of the size of fan presence online, the official One Direction twitter account (@onedirection) has over thirty million followers and their Facebook page has nearly forty million likes. It is difficult to know how many posts about One Direction have been made on websites like Tumblr and Twitter, but on popular fan fiction site Wattpad a basic search for “One Direction” calls up nearly three hundred thousand

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7 A tweet from Louis Tomlinson’s personal Twitter account became the second most retweeted tweet in history with over two million retweets (Soteriou 2016). The tweet reads “Always in my heart @Harry_Styles . Yours sincerely Louis” and overtook Barack Obama’s “Four more years” tweet in 2012 (Soteriou 2016).
results, and on An Archive of Our Own, another fan fiction site, there are nearly fifty thousand stories about One Direction. On YouTube, the search “One Direction fan videos” produces over thirty-eight million results. Additionally, the group have been nominated for over three hundred awards, and have won one hundred and ninety-five, with many of these awards being voter-based. For example, One Direction were nominated for ten American Music Awards (voter based) and won seven.

Collective and individual fan identity can be understood in relation to the inhabitable “you” figure in One Direction’s songs, and the vague personality types assigned to the members of the group. In marketing terms, the drive behind the One Direction fan collective is similar to the “tribal” impulse generated by individual consumption of certain brands and products. In order to entice the individual, product or brand advertising often encourages a “playful ‘trying on’ of the identities hinted at in advertisements” (Richardson 2013, 123). Crucially, this “trying on” of identities “involves a transportation into the individual’s fantasies related to the self, rather than transportation into the ‘story or world of the ad’” (Richardson 2013, 123). The “you” figure in One Direction’s songs is a role that fans can “try on;” the illusion of direct address suggests that fans should imagine themselves as this “you” figure. And as the previous chapter demonstrated with imagines, being “you” transports the fan into particular fantasies. Following this appeal to individual fantasies and desires, the consumer, according to Richardson, seeks “tribal membership” with other consumers due to a “desire for communion” (Richardson 2013, 124). The “desire for communion” is in turn born out of consumption climate in which “individuals seek products and services less for their use value than for their linking value” (Cova 1997, 307), the “linking value” being the capacity of the product to encourage linkages between consumers. In order to generate these linking values, the brand, in part, needs to “allow itself to be appropriated by the tribe” (Richardson 2013, 124). The brand should act “as a malleable source of linking value” without “fixed meaning,” “a point of departure rather than a fixed destination” (Richardson 2013, 124). In this instance, One Direction is the malleable brand providing a starting point for their fans to determine what it is that connects them by making it easy for fans to imagine themselves in fantasy scenarios with the group. Furthermore, One Direction are malleable in that their typical, attractive, and heterosexual image is generally widely appealing to a range of young women, providing a starting point for any number of fantasies.
One Direction’s appeal to the individual fan began on The X-Factor, a televised talent contest for musicians. Reality television encourages a sense of intimacy between participants and viewers that is not normally experienced in the traditional celebrity/fan relationship. Baruh argues: “reality programs may offer the opportunity for both sides [participant and viewer] to break […] social expectations regarding intimacy. The participants choose disclosure instead of modesty, and viewers choose not to look away, but rather gaze carefully when private moments are revealed” (2009, 195). The X-Factor not only shows live performances; it also features backstage rehearsal footage, interviews with the performers, and “video diaries” where performers discuss their lives and their experiences on the show. As shows like The X-Factor are often high-stress environments, this footage can be emotionally charged. When the members of One Direction were told that they would not be continuing on the show as solo artists, for example, we are shown footage of them crying as they leave the stage (This Is Us 2012). In moments like these viewers are allowed access to the private emotional lives (or at least to public performances that purport to be of their private emotional lives) of participants and this access fosters in the viewer a sense of imagined intimacy with the participant. This sense of intimacy is a significant factor in One Direction’s success as fans feel as though they have been present throughout the group’s journey toward fame in a way that many fans of more traditional celebrities do not. This intimacy and presence builds an individual connection to the group.

Furthermore, voter-based reality television is appealing in part because it encourages the “fantasy that we have some form of power over the contestants” (Richardson 2013, 126) as the “provision of voting facilities can give the audience the feeling that they have been collectively involved in the creation of these new stars” (2013, 126). The individual and intimate connection with the group is then strengthened by the notion that the individual viewer has some control over the success of the contestant/performer; their vote determines whether the contestant/performer will continue on the show, whether their emotional response will be positive or negative. But at the same time, voting power connects fans to a wider network or collective of like-minded people, thus drawing the individual into the fan collective. The fan understands (and hopes) that their vote is one of many contributing to the success of their favourite group.
As well as achieving intimacy through sharing private, emotional moments, reality television develops a connection with the viewer by “celebrating and elevating the apparently ordinary” in order that the audience is allowed to “imagine that they too have what it takes and it is only by accident that they remain unrecognised” (Richardson 2013, 126). From the very outset, One Direction appealed to fans because they themselves seemed to be just average people, and so when it came to producing their own music outside of The X-Factor of course it would make sense that the girl in the songs could be any girl. One Direction having had their start on The X-Factor generates “linking values” between consumers in that from the very beginning fans were led to believe that they played a crucial role in essentially creating One Direction and driving their commercial and critical success. And the impetus to “support” One Direction, by voting for them on The X-Factor, by campaigning online and by consuming their products, comes from the imagined intimacy created by televised access to what would otherwise be private, emotional moments.

In creating “linking values” between fans via their songs, marketing, and appearances on reality television, One Direction foster a sense of imagined intimacy between themselves and their fans. Here, it is helpful to refer back to Berlant’s description of intimacy as involving “an aspiration for a narrative about something shared, a story about both oneself and others that will turn out in a particular way” (1998, 281). The narrative One Direction and their fans share is one of imagined intimacy; it is a fantasy in which fans have the potential to influence One Direction’s lives and to form intimate relationships with particular members of the group. But this narrative is coloured equally by the seemingly unbridgeable distance between One Direction and fans. Shaping this narrative of imagined intimacy is the sense of power fans feel they hold over the critical and commercial success of the group, and the sense of having been allowed access to supposedly private emotional moments, thanks to their start on reality television. This narrative involves the individual fan, and it also involves the fan collective, because it does not only appeal to the sense that as an individual fan you play a role in One Direction’s lives and they play a role in yours, it also appeals to the connection between fans. In this narrative fans have collectively experienced what it means to be a part of One Direction’s success and to fantasise about One Direction and so intimacy is generated between One Direction and their fans, and between fans. Again, Berlant’s writing on intimacy as being “met
by a corresponding publicness” (1998, 281) is illuminating. While the narrative in which a fan is a significant player in One Direction’s world, and where their fantasies are met and they achieve actual individual intimacy with One Direction is in many ways a private narrative, it is also a shared narrative, a fantasy held by many individual fans and shared over and over again in public online spaces.

“Look After You” (2012), published on Wattpad by a user named AmazingPhil, is a work of fan fiction that explores the narrative of individual fan connection with One Direction and the narrative of collective fan identity through a fan character who is simultaneously aspirational and relatable. She is also a representation of fan identity as being inseparable from One Direction. The story is about Eva, an Australian girl who meets Louis online via her music blog. They begin talking regularly until they are close friends, although they never reveal their true identities to one another online. One day Louis tells Eva he is coming to Australia with his band and he would like to meet her in person. The morning they arrange to meet, Eva hears One Direction on the radio and looks them up online. When she meets Louis in person she is shocked to realise he is in One Direction, but of course they fall in love anyway. I have chosen this story as an example because it is in some ways an insertion fantasy, as defined by Busse in the introduction to this thesis, and so directly represents the fan desire for intimacy with One Direction, but also because it represents a relationship formed online between a fan and a celebrity. This relationship is intimate but its conception relies upon a certain anonymity and distance. Furthermore, while “Look After You” is primarily a story about an individual relationship with One Direction it also provides an illuminating insight into the relationship of the individual to the fan collective.

In this fan fiction Eva is a stand in for the individual fan, possibly even the writer herself. Fans reading the story either imagine themselves as Eva or as being in her position. Fans reading the story are supposed to identify with her at the same time as they aspire to be like her and to have what she has: a relationship with a member of One Direction. Eva’s physical description places her on the border between being something to aspire to and being relatable. When Eva is described in the first chapter, she is easily recognisable as an “every girl” figure, the logical extension of “Y/N” in the imagines. Like in imagines, the concept of the “every girl” in fan fiction like “Look After You” relies on the assumption that any girl can become the “every girl.” The story at times obsessively details Eva’s getting ready to go out in the mornings,
with a focus on her hair and makeup and what she is wearing. The day that Eva goes to meet Louis her whole routine is laid out: “[I] jumped into the shower, washing my body and my hair. Once I got out I plugged the hair dryer in blow drying my hair while running a brush through it, deciding to leave it out naturally” then, not wanting to seem “dressed up” she “settle[s] on a pair of purple short shorts and [a] black All Time Low band T-shirt” then she “put[s] on some light foundation, a small bit of mascara and some heavy eyeliner, making [her] grey eyes stand out” (2012, chapt. 4). Eva’s routine is curiously focussed on both looking natural and on undergoing a certain degree of construction to reach that naturalness. This tension between the natural and the constructed parts of Eva’s appearance suggests that the “every girl” is simultaneously naturally a part of every girl, but requires some degree of work to come to the surface. In this sense, Eva is both relatable and aspirational.

At the beginning of the story, when Eva is describing herself she states: “I wasn’t what people would call ugly, I am quite pretty but there are so many stunning girls out in the world that I could never compare to” (2012, chapt. 1). Her self-deprecating relationship with her physical appearance suggests that she is just like any other girl; though she is attractive her appearance is seemingly nothing out of the ordinary, thus reinforcing the idea that “any” girl can be special enough to be intimate with One Direction. Eva’s self-deprecating attitude is reinforced as being a characteristic of the ideal “every girl” in the song “What Makes You Beautiful,” to which this fan fiction alludes (“What Makes You Beautiful” is the first One Direction song Eva hears in Chapter Two, before she knows Louis is in the group). In this song, One Direction sing to a girl, telling her what makes her beautiful is the fact that she doesn’t know she’s beautiful. Though Eva might consider herself to be perfectly average, her physical description solidifies her position as the feminine ideal.

Eva resembles the “every girl” in One Direction’s songs and seems to be malleable and inhabitable, but this “every girl”—in both the songs and the fan fiction—is not exempt from Butler’s notion that identity is repeated performances of “socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility” (1990, 23). Normative “intelligibility” is not limited to performances of heteronormative relationship structures (as in the imagines); normativity also often presumes a particular standard of middle-class whiteness, thinness, and Anglo-Saxon beauty ideals. One Direction, in writing an apparently malleable and inhabitable female figure in their songs, are playing into and repeating the culturally dominant image of the every girl as white,
middle-class, and conventionally attractive. The every girl, rather than being a representation of the girls listening to One Direction (or for that matter, most girls), is actually the standard to which girls are held, and to which they are supposed to aspire. The every girl in One Direction’s songs is relatable because she is a representation of the “norms of intelligibility” that women and girls’ identities are pervasively shaped and influenced by. Part of the key to achieving an intimate personal relationship with One Direction is presented as being dependent on fitting certain standards of femininity, but the other essential element of fan fiction is generating intimacy with other fans. Fan fiction concerned with intimate relationships between fans and members of One Direction is then driven by that latent creative/generative impulse and by the desire to write fan characters who meet standards of femininity so well they achieve actual intimacy with One Direction.

Fan fiction about intimate relationships between fans and One Direction must necessarily appeal to other fans in order to reinforce the fantasy and linking values in the collective. Felski states: “readerly attachment” takes “the form of a cathexis onto idealized figures” (2008, 34). Eva is easily recognisable because her physical description is normatively intelligible. Her being recognisable to a certain extent makes her relatable to readers, but she is largely an aspirational figure in that she not only represents a femininity that girls are expected to strive for (a femininity that is to a certain degree constructed), but also this particular femininity allows her access to One Direction. Eva’s physical description makes it easy to relate to her, or at least imagine her as a stand in for an “ordinary” girl. While she has certain concrete physical traits there are other parts of her description that remain indistinct. For example, she explains that her “favourite feature is [her] eyes as they tend to change colour depending on [her] mood” (AmazingPhil 2012, chapt. 1). Her ambiguous eye colour, perhaps because it is her “favourite” feature on what she deems an otherwise standard face, prompts readers to write in the comments about their own eyes, describing their colour and their defining features, thus linking Eva to a kind of malleability, and therefore making her more relatable to the masses of individual fans reading this story. Details regarding her age and her personal life are also unclear, at the beginning of the story she mentions school, stating: “I don’t have many friends since at school I am on my own listening to music,” but throughout the story it seems as though she is living on her own and working at a record store (2012 chapt. 1).

Within a framework of cultural norms, Eva could be anyone, all we really know about
her is that she is a young woman close in age to One Direction, who is of average
good looks, likes music and lives in Australia. She is indistinct enough that she acts as
a relatable vehicle for fan fantasies and, at the same time, she has enough distinct
traits that she is easily identifiable as an aspirational representation of the feminine
ideal. Girls are encouraged to believe that this ideal is attainable at the same time as it
remains perpetually just out of reach because it only accommodates certain body
types, skin colours, and sexualities. So, occupying the “every girl” position is equally
as impossible as having an actual relationship with One Direction. Eva is
simultaneously individual and indistinct. Her individuality is necessary in order to
give form to the intense desire for individual intimacy with One Direction, while the
indistinct elements of her character serve to generate intimacy with fans reading the
narrative who also desire individual intimacy with One Direction.

Crucial to Eva’s character, though, and what truly defines her, is her
relationship with Louis. In turn, her relationship to Louis defines her relationship with
other fans, including the story’s readers and the fans in the story. Louis is present in
the story from the very first paragraph, Eva is lying on her bed listening to her
favourite song “Look After You” by The Fray, a song Louis told her about when her
computer notifies her that Louis is online and available to talk. After she begins
talking to Louis online she explains that due to her lack of friends “Louis makes [her]
feel special” (2012, chapt. 1). Eva might describe herself as being nothing special but
her relationship to Louis is what solidifies her identity, nothing happens in Eva’s
narrative unless it brings her closer to Louis. Before Louis and Eva meet Eva goes to
the beach, but she is only there so she can accidentally bump into him without
realising who he is so that when she gets home and sees One Direction on television
she recognises him. When we find out details about her personal life they are usually
related to Louis. For example, her lack of school friends explains how close they are,
and her interest in music was the catalyst for their relationship. Just as the “you” in
One Direction’s songs is a faceless and apparently malleable representation of
woman/girlhood that is simultaneously inhabitable and aspirational, Eva’s life and
personality is largely empty space waiting to be filled by her relationship to One
Direction. In this regard, “Look After You” works in a similar way to imagines, but,
crucially, in this story the fan character has a name and a face. While it is important
for fans to be able to imagine themselves in this narrative, or dream that it could
happen to them, in setting Eva up as an individual character (even if she isn’t really
all that individual), this story illuminates the relationship between the individual fan and the fan collective. 

Eva’s relationship with Louis makes her distinct from other fans, thus highlighting the complex relationship between the individual and the fan collective. Other fans in the story are presented as an annoyance to Eva and to Louis in that as they are all individually convinced that they should be the girl that One Direction want, they attempt to hinder the blossoming relationship between Eva and Louis. While the fantasy of having a relationship with One Direction is normative and accepted within the fandom, actually having a relationship breaks the social understanding within the fan collective. This story, ironically, is fiction about the trouble that occurs when fiction becomes real life. The first time Louis and Eva meet in person their waitress recognises Louis and tells him she loves him. Louis and Eva proceed to mock her, Eva covering her mouth to “stop [herself] from laughing while Louis [looks] a bit disgusted” (2012, chapt. 4). Later in the story, Eva is knocked unconscious and beaten by fans who are jealous she is with One Direction. They yell at her “you stupid whore! Get away from the boys, they are ours” (2012, chapt. 8).

Eva views other fans as a hindrance to her relationship with Louis because their expressions of love and desire for intimacy with One Direction require that Eva is not intimate with One Direction. In the restaurant and on the street the fans’ behaviour is “disgusting” to Louis and Eva because it disregards the established intimacy between them. On the other hand, other fans view Eva as a hindrance to their relationship to One Direction because she disrupts the necessary illusion of intimacy between fans and One Direction by performing actual intimacy with Louis. While Eva is described as being not particularly individual, she achieves her individuality by being the most intimate with One Direction and as a result of this intimacy, she sets herself in opposition to other fans in the story. At the same time, however, Eva’s opposition to other fans also helps to establish her intimacy with Louis, and it is her relationship with Louis that generates intimacy with fans outside of the text.

Convexly, Eva’s position is also reliant on her being a fan of One Direction and so implicitly a member of the fan collective. Although Louis has been Eva’s “closest friend for around six months, who [she] trusted with everything,” he is also “one fifth of the famous boy band One Direction” (2012, chapt. 4). Eva develops a relationship with Louis before she knows who One Direction are, but she becomes a fan of the group before her romantic relationship with Louis begins and, of course, it
is her romantic relationship with Louis that defines her character. Eva becoming a fan of One Direction implies that there must simultaneously be a deep, personal connection between the individual and the member of One Direction, as well as a collective appreciation for the group. Even in positioning herself as distinct from other fans, however, Eva must also be a fan in the story in order to be relatable to readers. Readers comment on the story expressing a desire to be in Eva’s position. For example, user irwinsgirl13 commented: “this fanfic is so awesome! Y can’t this happen 2 me with Harry or any of the boys?! Lol.” This particular fan emphasises the intimacy between fans who share these desires with one another and the malleability of this story and fan fantasies. To her it doesn’t matter that the story is about Eva and Louis, it doesn’t even matter which member of One Direction the story is about, they are seemingly interchangeable, what she wants is the affirmation that these fantasies are shared with herself and other fans, and for a version of this fantasy to play out between her and a member of One Direction. Each fan wants what Eva has, to be the object of One Direction’s desires despite being an average person with an average life. The fan fiction, however, shows that the desire to be a part of a shared fan community and the desire to be personally intimate with One Direction are two different things. Eva can be a fan of One Direction and be personally intimate with Louis, but she cannot be a part of the fan community in the story because she is intimate with Louis. Fans reading the story are a part of a fan community because they each desire intimacy with One Direction but they do not actually have intimacy with One Direction. The desire to be a part of a shared fan community and the desire to be personally intimate with One Direction are necessarily connected and necessarily contradictory. The desire to be personally intimate is the basis for fan community, while actual intimacy requires separation from the fan community.

Fan fiction such as “Look After You” highlights the paradoxical relationship between the individual fan and the fan collective. Eva’s relationship with Louis disrupts the necessary illusion of intimacy between One Direction and their fans in the story by showing that there could actually be an individual relationship that would inhibit the potential for fans to become intimate with One Direction. The fans’ violent attack on Eva is a response to their own imagined intimacy with One Direction being challenged. And yet, although the story demonstrates the devastating impact an individual relationship with One Direction has on the fan collective, it is sympathetic to Eva at the same time as it seeks to appeal to the collective fan base, understanding
the power of the fan collective to read, share and otherwise affirm the story. In the story, it is the individual connection with One Direction that prevails and Eva becomes romantically involved with Louis, but the fan collective is still an overwhelmingly powerful presence. The collective power of fans is portrayed through their massive physical presence and through their ability to mobilise via social networking and texting. For example, when Eva is with One Direction at a restaurant Louis asks the waitress not to tell anyone they are there, but after they have left Eva receives a text message from a friend telling her that One Direction were spotted at the restaurant and she realises that the waitress must have tipped other fans off. The group flee but fans find them and “charge towards [them]” and soon they are “smothered by girls” (2012, chapt. 7). At this point, Eva is lost in the crowd, literally physically overwhelmed and overpowered by the group of fans.

Additionally, it is not only in the context of the story that the collective overpowers the individual; it is the fan collective that affirms the fantasy presented in this story and bolsters certain expressions of fan identity. This particular story has been read over eight hundred thousand times, while the most popular One Direction fan fiction on Wattpad (“Anonymous || n.h” by samemistakes_) has been read over twelve million times. In the fantasy, the individual connection is ultimately the most powerful. However this is a fantasy and in reality it is the collective that is the most influential when it comes to having a direct impact within the fandom and on One Direction. The individual connection to One Direction is only powerful because fantasies about individual intimacy in stories such as “Look After You” perform collective identification for fans, as affirmed by the tens of thousands who have read the story. In the story, the collective tries to overpower the individual connection but cannot do so, while outside of the story the “real” collective is championing the individual connection between Eva and Louis by sharing and reading the story. However, in reality, individual intimate relationships threaten the collective because they shatter the illusion of intimacy between fans and One Direction. So, fans in the story are overpowered by the individual connection, but the individual connection in the story is only so powerful because fans outside of the story endorse it.

The power of the collective is not only evidenced by and in popular works of fan fiction; One Direction fans, as a collective, have been hugely influential when it has come to the group’s critical and commercial success, as is evidenced by the numbers listed earlier in this chapter. In May 2015, a small group of fans in Australia
went even further in demonstrating fan power by initiating a project called #TilTheEnd. The goal of the project was to raise enough money to take out advertising space in Billboard Magazine to thank One Direction on behalf of fans and to congratulate them on the release of their album *Made in the A.M.* The fans were determined to raise money in any way they could, calling on donations from other fans and trying to build publicity and momentum for the campaign via the hashtag #TilTheEnd on Twitter and other social media platforms.

*Figure 2. The advertisement fans designed and paid to put in Billboard Magazine on October 20th, 2015, image available at [https://tiltheendfanproject.com](https://tiltheendfanproject.com)*

The #TilTheEnd campaign is evidence of fans inhabiting the role carved out for them on The X-Factor as the determiners of One Direction’s success. On their website the fans state: “we are the most passionate and influential fans in the world”
and they go on to discuss the rumour that One Direction will not get back together following their hiatus, and the importance of showing everyone that One Direction fans are still here, and still want the group to continue. These fans decided that the best way to show this was to put something in Billboard Magazine, “THE magazine for the power players who run the music industry” (tiltheendfanproject 2015). Here the fans are attempting to exert some measure of power over those who might be unsure of One Direction’s staying power in the music industry/market. In order to exert this power, it is important that the fans present themselves as a collective rather than as individuals. The advertisement does not identify any fans who contributed by name, not even the fans that organised it, and the content of the advertisement was decided as a collective, with the group of fans in Australia receiving feedback from other fans on proposed text and design. The advertisement is simply signed “Directioners Worldwide, #TilTheEnd” (fig. 2).

Individual fan identity in this campaign is subsumed by the collective. One Direction are the only people named in the advertisement, and their names are surrounded by what fans have deemed to be their shared best qualities, so, as in “Look After You,” fan identity is defined by the fan relationship to One Direction and by values that they agree bring them together. The members of One Direction are each represented by a microphone, their names written at the bottom (fig. 2). Each microphone is filled with text describing the best qualities of each member. Harry, for example, is “genuine,” Liam is “dedicated,” Niall is “brave,” and Louis is “powerful” (fig. 2). Each microphone, in large text, also describes the members of One Direction as “lifesavers.” The fans are not individually represented, but their collective identity is represented by the qualities that they believe are the most important in the members of One Direction, and by the shared belief that One Direction have played a “life saving” role for fans. One Direction are tied together by their roles as “lifesavers” just as the fans are tied together by their collective understanding of what One Direction have meant to them.

In a similar way, individual fan identity is overwhelmed by the fan’s relationship to One Direction in online spaces where fans use pictures of members of One Direction as their icons and variations of One Direction’s names as their screen names. Liam Payne, noticing fan accounts responding to his tweets, asked on Twitter on December 29th 2014, “Hmmm why is everyone me???” The answer to his question being that in order to build connections with fans outside of fan fiction, fans must
closely align their identity with One Direction in an effort to broadcast their devotion to the group. The connections built with other fans are what make the collective. Fans allowing their individual identities to be subsumed by their devotion to One Direction allows movements like #TilTheEnd to be successful because the collective is more powerful than the individual. The collective, however, also manages to achieve a sense of intimacy with One Direction that the individual is not able to achieve. The power of the collective means that campaigns like #TilTheEnd actually reach One Direction and elicit a response from them. For example, Liam responded to the Twitter icons all being pictures of him, and after the advertisement appeared in Billboard magazine, Louis Tomlinson thanked fans for their support at a concert, saying “we have the best fans in the world, and it’s as simple as that […] things like the little ad in the Billboard magazine […] looks incredible” (tiltheendfanproject 2015). The #TilTheEnd campaign emphasises the paradoxical relationship between the individual fan and the fan collective. The fan collective is the only way that fans can tangibly achieve intimacy with One Direction, but at the same time, it is the collective that destroys intimacy in that it overwhelms the individual. Additionally, even the intimacy generated by the collective in prompting One Direction to respond to them is indirect. Louis speaking to a crowd from a stage involves an implicit distance, even if he and fans are in the same space. Additionally, the video ending up on social media and being shared between fans maintains a level of distance and indirect contact between One Direction and fans, despite the collective having had a personal impact on the group that the individual could not achieve alone.

The previous two examples are evidence of fans working within the established roles presented by the One Direction brand: the intimate relationship between the fan and One Direction (as evidenced by Eva and Louis in “Look After You”), and the collective power of individuals who come together in the name of One Direction’s continued commercial and critical success. Rainbow Direction, on the other hand, is an example of fans really testing the malleability of the One Direction brand and the inhabitable “every girl.” Adopting the “every girl” persona is seemingly essential to achieving intimacy with One Direction. But, while One Direction singing about girls who are “five foot something” and wearing “skinny jeans” might prompt listeners to fill in the blanks to form an image of a white, conventionally attractive “every girl,” it is necessary to remember that this image “is a point of departure rather than a final destination” (Richardson 2013, 124). If female fans believe (as they are
encouraged to believe by the mass media) that they can become the standard of femininity, or at least perform it in order to fulfil a fantasy, then they can also believe that they could be the girl in a One Direction song. At the same time, however, if they understand the every girl to be as much a fantasy as their potential relationships with One Direction then that fantasy has the potential to be reworked, as is evidenced by Rainbow Direction.

Rainbow Direction, a collective of LGBTQ+ One Direction fans describe themselves as being “a diverse group of fans who are committed to equality and inclusiveness” who want to “make this fandom a safe and enjoyable space for LGBTQ+ fans” (Rainbow Direction 2014). Rainbow Direction is a kind of merger of the individual fan and collective identity. It is a collective movement that also acknowledges and emphasises individuality and diversity. One Direction is what all the fans have in common, but there are a variety of different reasons for why fans might be drawn to One Direction. Richardson argues that “it follows from the relatively ephemeral quality of tribal experience that the resulting sense of shared identity requires constant reaffirmation” and “the degree to which members of tribes remain willing to engage with particular narratives may be related to the extent to which those narratives continue to reflect and affirm their shared linking values” (2013, 124). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, One Direction’s success is dependent on their appealing to as many people as possible, and in order to appeal to as many people as possible, their brand must be malleable. Richardson suggests that consumers “expand on [the] narrative” that is offered to them by brands, even though they may remain limited to the “world suggested by that [brand]” (2013, 123).

Rainbow Direction seek to expand the One Direction narrative to include identities that are not heteronormative and they do that by working in online fandom spaces and at concerts, attempting to assert the presence of LGBTQ+ fans to both One Direction and other fans. Implicit in One Direction’s brand is the idea that any fan can insert themselves into the narrative of the songs, and any fan can be a powerful influencer when it comes to One Direction’s position in the mass media. It follows then that fans expect the One Direction fandom, and narratives pertaining to One Direction, to continue to be open and malleable spaces. If a significant number of One Direction fans identify as LGBTQ+ then there needs to be room in the One Direction fandom for these fans to exist and share linking values with other fans.
LGBTQ+ One Direction fans are faced with a group whose public image is deeply rooted in heteronormativity. As a truly malleable brand, One Direction need to be able to be repurposed to meet fans desires and needs. In order to repurpose One Direction to be relatable to queer experiences, fans begin “cherry-picking elements of band members’ identities to engineer relatability” (Lancaster 2016). Fans channel these cherry-picked morsels of relatability into fan fiction, fan art, and into discussions of band members’ sexuality, hoping to establish that there is more to One Direction than a purely heterosexual, heteronormative exterior. Online groups like Rainbow Direction are not focused on fan fiction; rather they put the focus on fans’ relationships to their sexuality and gender identity, encouraging them to be open and comfortable with their identities. If there is a chance, however, that One Direction could be something other than heterosexual, or even acknowledge something more than heterosexuality in their brand, queer fans might feel more represented and more comfortable about their identities. Furthermore, the internet provides fans with a forum onto which they can “broadcast their own ideas and experiences” to the point that bands like One Direction are “demoted to runners-up, replaced in fans’ hearts by a desire for representation” (Lancaster 2016). Lancaster draws attention to the power of these online spaces, stating that in “retrofit[ting] their favourite pop stars to align with their queer perspectives,” fans are “actively working to represent themselves in the pop culture they’re expected to passively consume” (2016). Groups like Rainbow Direction, however, go further than to simply reaffirm queer identities and experiences online: their online and offline presences work to increase representation and acceptance of queer identities in the One Direction fandom and brand.

Groups like Rainbow Direction hope to support fans who identify as LGBTQ+ and also hope to create a space where LGBTQ+ fans are accepted by other fans. In order to do so, Rainbow Direction needs a presence in online spaces as well as in physical spaces such as concerts where both fans and One Direction are coming together. For the collective, “the bulk of their work happens online, where a dedicated behind-the-scenes team offers personalized advice to young fans who reach out with questions about their sexuality or requests for real-world resources” (Lancaster 2016). The work that happens around and at concerts, however, is just as important because it consolidates the efforts of the online presence. In 2015, One Direction shows in Europe “regularly saw hundreds of fans meeting up with Rainbow Direction organizers to make signs, bracelets, and heart-shaped crafts to distribute before
concerts” (Lancaster 2016). In making and distributing these items, LGBTQ+ fans asserted their presence in the One Direction fandom and at shows by increasing their visibility and presenting themselves as an organised collective. Rainbow Direction also provided its community with “maps of the stadiums and arenas where the band played. Each image was superimposed with a rainbow flag, dividing the seating chart into coloured sections corresponding to the hues of the flag. The maps made it easy for fans to screenshot their section’s colour […]. During a specific song in the set, they’d pull up the screenshot, raise their phones in the air, and help make the stadium into a shining rainbow flag” (Lancaster 2016). Large-scale action like making a rainbow flag at a concert in an arena is the kind of thing that attracts the attention of One Direction, and soon, the group (or at least their team) became involved, changing the lighting during the song “Girl Almighty” to a rainbow pattern (Lancaster 2016).

Through their collective presence at One Direction concerts Rainbow Direction were able to influence One Direction to the point that they were implicitly voicing their support for LGBTQ+ fans, not only by changing the lighting but also by bringing rainbow flags on stage, and speaking out in interviews about equal rights (Lancaster 2016). Influencing One Direction is crucial for groups like Rainbow Direction, because One Direction’s tacit support of queer rights then in turn influences fans who may otherwise be ignorant of the difficulties LGBTQ+ fans encounter in fandoms that are otherwise predominantly heteronormative. Essentially, One Direction showing support of One Direction provides the impetus for the broader One Direction fan collective to reassess and reaffirm their linking values; if fans are there because they believe strongly in One Direction, and One Direction support LGBTQ+ fans, then the collective must acknowledge this too, and reaffirm ties with LGBTQ+ fans. And furthermore, in acknowledging queer identities and experiences, One Direction provide queer fans with a reason to continue to support the group and engage in the fan collective.

Fan identity is twofold. Firstly, it is born out of an intensely personal and individual connection with One Direction. This personal connection is encouraged by One Direction acting as a malleable if not empty signifier onto which fans can project their own individual desires and fantasies. Secondly, fan identity is dependent on a large collective of other like-minded individuals who share fantasies regarding One Direction, and who collectively hold some influence over One Direction and their critical and commercial success. One Direction fans come together and form a large
collective based on an understanding and shared appreciation of the imagined potential for individual intimate relationships with One Direction, and for the potential real power of the fan collective. In this chapter, “Look After You” shows how the fantasy of an individual intimate relationship with One Direction brings fans together in a moment of shared imagining, and reinforces the individual connection with One Direction at the same time as emphasising the power of the collective. The Billboard Magazine campaign shows that while the individual connection is what brings fans together, ultimately it is the collective that overwhelms the individual. It is the collective that is able to hold the most actual power over One Direction, and it is the collective that is able to directly impact on One Direction as people as well as commercially. Rainbow Direction shows that there is room within the collective for contestation and expansion of fan identities. Although One Direction largely officially encourages normative narratives, as a brand that hopes to appeal to as many fans’ fantasies as possible, their malleability allows for fans to construct alternative narratives that appeal to particular fantasies and desires that may be outside of the heteronormative narratives. These alternative narratives reaffirm linking values with other fans, reinforcing that normativity in One Direction is a “point of departure” rather than a “final destination.” Keeping in mind the constant tensions between the desire for individual intimacy and the collective, between publically performed identity and the notion of a private, core identity, the following chapter will address the potential for expanding understandings and constructions of identity in One Direction homoerotic fan fiction. This fan fiction demonstrates the potential to generate intimacy through writing narratives that seek to uncover something beneath performative heterosexual identity but also reveals the tension inherent in the necessary publicness of this intimacy and the constructed nature of these narratives.
III. Chapter Three: Nobody Knows You the Way I Do: Authenticity, Performativity, and Homoerotic Fan Fiction

“The spaces between us hold all our secrets”— One Direction, “Spaces” (2014)

This chapter will address a shift in the rhetoric of celebrity authenticity as a result of the co-construction of celebrity between mass media and networked/social media fan production. The previous two chapters concluded that One Direction fan production shows an understanding of identity as being malleable, imitative, performative and endlessly repeatable. Imagines disregard original or core identity, and ultimately show it to be unimportant or perhaps even non-existent. Identity in One Direction fan production is malleable, but to a certain extent it still has to be representative of fans’ imaginings and desires, and one of the primary desires in the One Direction fandom is for intimacy, and intimacy to a degree relies on a sense of knowing something of the private emotional life of another person. Traditionally, celebrity relies on successfully and effortlessly presenting an “authentic” self in the mass media (Roach 2007, 2; Tolson 2001, 445). The previous chapters demonstrate, however, that One Direction fans understand identity as performative and without an essential core. Fans display this understanding by assuming and constructing a multitude of roles for both fans and celebrities through different modes of fan production. Furthermore, the previous chapters examine the relationship of intimacy and distance between One Direction and their fans.

The inhabitable/aspirational female roles written into imagines and fan fiction like “Look After You” are expressions of a collective desire for intimacy and presence in One Direction’s lives, and yet their adherence to normative (and often unattainable) standards of femininity maintains a sense of impossible distance between the fan and One Direction. Writing characters like this not only emphasises the very real distance between One Direction and their fans; it also establishes an inherent distance between the female fan character and the One Direction character in the fan fiction: she could be anyone (who meets normative standards), and he is a character. The inhabitable fan character creates space for the focus to be on the construction of a One Direction character who is a vehicle for the fantasy of intimacy. This chapter suggests that the marker of true intimacy with One Direction is the construction of a truly believable One Direction character. This construction relies on
two things: increased distance between One Direction and fans in fan fiction narratives, and a complex interplay between authenticity and performativity.

This chapter will argue that a credible narrative in the age of celebrity mass media/social media co-production relies on the interplay between authenticity and performativity. By examining homoerotic One Direction fan fiction and the mass media content that influences this fan fiction, I will uncover the tension between authenticity and performativity in these homoerotic narratives, which, though fabricated by fans, are linked to uncovering an “authentic” self beyond a heteronormative mass media celebrity image. Fan production featuring non-heteronormative identities and relationships demonstrates how notions of “authentic” identity help shape carefully constructed fan narratives regarding One Direction and celebrity and fan identity. I will address fan theories regarding intimate behaviour between One Direction in interviews and public appearances, fan manipulation of mass media representations via the production of fan videos that dissect One Direction’s relationships with one another, conspiracy theories regarding “official” information released by One Direction and the mass media, and fan fiction depicting members of the group in relationships with one another.

When celebrity construction is an interplay between mass media and fan production online the construction process shifts, at least in part, from the construction of celebrity behind the scenes by media specialists. Celebrity construction does not become completely transparent, but with celebrity and fan production taking place online, the construction process becomes more apparent. Rojek describes celebrities as “cultural skyscrapers” who are “built and maintained for public consumption by public relations and media specialists” (2012, 10). He acknowledges, however, that “over the last two decades the spread of the internet has vastly increased the opportunities for co-operative labour” with the “volume of unauthorised data about celebrities [having] increased exponentially” (2012, 10). On the internet fans can easily access both authorised and unauthorised information regarding celebrities, and they can respond to that information and share it, and, they can observe how celebrities respond to fan responses on social media. Fans are still consuming mass media-produced representations of celebrities but their capacity to instantly respond and to craft responses that might gain considerable traction online means public relations need to work more co-operatively with fans. To a certain extent, it seems that “the power has been taken from those in marketing and public
relations by the individuals and communities that create, share, and consume blogs, tweets, Facebook entries, movies, pictures, and so forth. Communication about brands happens, with or without permission of the firms in question” (Kietzman et al. 2011, 242). While it is possibly an overstatement to claim that power has been taken completely from marketing and public relations, the rise of social media has certainly altered the relationship between consumers and those selling the product. Those producing and selling are now in almost direct conversation with the consumer as both parties are able to instantly respond to each other via social media. When One Direction release music or appear in public fans are able to instantly respond. Then, whether the response is negative or positive, One Direction and their team are able to address the response either immediately on social media, and/or they are able to alter or develop future content/material in light of fan responses. While this relationship between producer and consumer has existed for some time, social media closes the gap, shortens the response time, and allows for co-operative work between fans and the mass media. Celebrity image is constantly and visibly being updated by fans producing social media content about particular celebrities and by mass media responding in turn to this social media content, as was evidenced in part by the imagines and the “Night Changes” video in the first chapter, and by Rainbow Direction in the second.

The constant flux of celebrity identity online brings us back to canonical and observer fan fiction. Canonical fan fiction, because it is concerned with the “real” lives of the celebrities it depicts, is often observer fan fiction. As observer fan fiction is about seeing and knowing the star (Busse 2006, 256), the writer cannot explicitly write any non-celebrity into the text because the presence of a fan in the text might compromise the integrity of the celebrity character, perhaps because celebrities in the presence of their fans are presenting a hyper-performative self. In this regard, these fan fictions are driven by a desire to uncover or reveal the authentic celebrity self that remains hidden in public performance. But because canon in celebrity fan fiction can never be static, writers must “attempt to construct and keep running a cogent singular narrative of the celebrity” (Arrow 2013, 328). In order to gain the insight to construct this narrative, writers work with a combination of quantifiable facts about the celebrities in question, and with fictional narratives. So, at the same time as pursuing the authentic, these fan fictions toy with overt construction. Canonical fantasies rely on the writer carefully mining mass media interviews and social networks (Twitter,
Facebook, Tumblr, YouTube) for information about their celebrity subjects because they strive for accuracy. At the same time, observer fantasies rely on keeping relationships strictly between celebrities. Carefully researched fan fiction that restricts relationships to being between celebrities is driven by the search for something more authentic, or more real, than the publicly performed identities fans have access to. For this reason, many observer fantasies focus on perceived homoerotic subtext that might reveal something more than publicly performed heterosexuality. This subtext is read from interactions between stars and helps to bind together a singular narrative of the celebrity. The homosexual relationships are as much a fiction as if the author had written heterosexual relationships into the story, but the fiction of the homosexual relationship is given as much weight in regard to authenticity as quantifiable facts about the celebrity.

The relationship of authenticity to homosexuality in One Direction fan fiction is complex. At its heart lie tensions that are difficult, if not impossible to completely resolve. The introduction of this thesis highlights the fundamental tension between the Western societal conception of sexuality as being connected to “individual identity, truth, and knowledge” (Sedgwick 1990, 3), and the Butlerian understanding of identity as not inherently fixed, interior or essential that shapes both this thesis and these fan fictions. As I illustrated in Chapter 1, One Direction imagines perpetuate heteronormative identities and relationships at the same time as they disavow core identity. Identity politics in homoerotic One Direction fan fiction are more convoluted. Ostensibly, homoerotic One Direction fan fiction rejects heterosexuality as an inauthentic part of One Direction’s mass media influenced identity, and instead insists upon a hidden, more authentic homosexual identity. Here, it appears that homoerotic fan fiction conforms to Sedgwick’s claims about Western society conceiving of sexuality as a part of some essential, inner truth. This push towards homosexual identity as an inner truth behind the heterosexual celebrity identity is complicated, however, by structures of compulsory heterosexuality. One Direction are implicitly and explicitly coded as heterosexual: they sing about women, they talk about dating women in interviews, they publicly date women, and they are sold as heartthrobs to a majority female fan base (Redfern 2012). But, as this chapter will examine in more detail, One Direction are also openly intimate with one another in ways that have been interpreted as expressing homosexual desire. According to Butler, “coherent heterosexuality […] is an impossible ideal” (1990, 155). She
contends, “heterosexuality offers normative sexual positions that are intrinsically impossible to embody, and the persistent failure to identify fully and without incoherence with these positions reveals heterosexuality itself not only as a compulsory law, but as an inevitable comedy” (Butler 1990, 155). One Direction fans are concerned with credible performances that combine performativity and authenticity, and if authenticity is seen to lie beneath performativity, then fans watching inconsistent performances of heterosexuality might assume that these inconsistencies expose hidden homosexuality.

Fans interpret interactions between members of One Direction as performances of non-heteronormative sexuality. These interactions, however, can also be understood as homosocial behaviours that are very much a part of male heterosexual identity. Ward argues: “homosexuality is an often invisible, but nonetheless vital ingredient—a constitutive element—of heterosexual masculinity” (2015, 5) suggesting as well that “men manufacture opportunities for sexual contact with other men [...] and [...] these activities appear to thrive in hyper-heterosexual environments” (7). Perhaps, with regard to One Direction, their heterosexuality is so supported by their music and public lives there is an implicit assumption that it cannot be challenged by any homosocial bonding. But, as they are sold to fans as heartthrobs made for them and yet they are simultaneously unattainable to fans, perhaps their homosocial behaviour does in fact undermine their heterosexuality in the eyes of fans. It is also worth keeping in mind that boy bands have a complicated relationship with traditional, heteronormative masculinity. According to Leach, instruments favoured by traditional rock musicians (guitars, bass guitars) “arguably serve as surrogates for women’s bodies in static sex acts” (Leach 2001, 146). Boy bands eschew guitars and drums for singing and sometimes dancing and this places them outside of traditional rock music masculinity and heterosexuality. More than this, the “fundamental white masculinity” of rock groups relies on the “organic unity” of the group channelled through “one singer who forms the expression of a group-originated song” (Leach 2001, 147). One Direction were constructed on reality television, and rather than channelling expression through one singer, the five of them sing songs written by a song writing team. As a boy band One Direction exist outside of traditional markers of musical authenticity as well as masculinity. Intimate behaviour between members of One Direction, and the cultural baggage of being a boy band might serve to undermine assertions of their heterosexuality.
Furthermore, Sedgwick argues that in Western society, the visibility of the “continuum” between male homosocial behaviour and homosexual desire has been “radically disrupted,” so that “to draw the ‘homosocial’ back into the orbit of ‘desire’ is to hypothesize the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual” (1992, 1–2). One Direction homoerotic fan fiction relies on the assumption that there is an underlying homosexual desire beneath One Direction’s public behaviour, and so, in a sense, fans make visible the continuum between the homosocial and homosexual by reading homosocial performances as performances of non-heteronormative sexuality.

While fans might assume that beneath the heterosexual exterior One Direction might “truly” be homosexual, they are also implicitly aware that homosexuality is a narrative they are constructing for One Direction. I argue that a homosexual narrative is appealing to fans for two reasons: because it accounts for the latent homosexual desire present in heterosexual, homosocial interactions (or perhaps because it belies the heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy), and because, in constructing a narrative that displaces heterosexuality as the most socially coherent mode of intelligibility, fans assert their potential for power and influence over the construction of the celebrity. Fans essentially assert that their fabrication, despite being unsubstantiated, is the more authentic of two highly constructed narratives. One Direction fans are presented with a group of men who perform certain heterosexual norms, at the same time as their heteronormative mass media image is obviously highly constructed, and certain elements of their behaviour can be re-contextualised as being non-heteronormative. These non-heteronormative elements, however, exist in relation to and are visible because of normative heterosexual behaviour. Butler argues: “the presence of [these] [heterosexual] norms not only constitute a site of power that cannot be refused, but they can and do become the site of parodic contest and display that robs compulsory heterosexuality of its claims to naturalness and originality” (1990, 158). If One Direction and their public relations are working with the interplay of authenticity and construction in the age of social media and celebrity co-construction, then they may have miscalculated which parts of their construction would be interpreted as authentic or natural. Fans have approached One Direction’s heterosexuality as being as constructed as other parts of their public image, and as a result have turned to a different construction that feels more “authentic” or “natural” in opposition to a denaturalised heterosexual image. Here there is a tension between what fans perceive
as One Direction’s “constructed” public image and their “authentic” identities. Fan fiction is committed both to certain “canonical” representations of One Direction, that are reliant on their official, constructed mass media representations, and to writing narratives that seek to reveal the authentic self behind the mass media representations. So, at the same time as fan fiction relies on a truth-seeking impulse, it is also overtly concerned with public performances of identity.

Furthermore, and perhaps more simply, this thesis has found that fans are consistently concerned with intimacy. And, fans will never achieve the level of intimacy that exists (or seems to exist) between the members of One Direction. Fans who write homoerotic fan fiction understand that the greatest intimacy in One Direction exists within the group. In order to share in this intimacy, fans write homoerotic fan fiction, presuming to know more about the relationships between One Direction members than the media lets on, or even than One Direction know themselves. Wendy Fries, writing about Sherlock Holmes fan fiction, states: “so many fanfiction-writing Sherlockians have fallen in love with the love between these characters” (2013, 52). The same can be said about One Direction fans writing homoerotic fan fiction. Fans ultimately will not experience intimate love between themselves and One Direction, but they can find access to the intimacy between group members by constructing narratives about this intimacy, and by asserting that their narrative is the closest to the truth.

A key example of fans constructing a narrative that then bears the same weight as the “truth” is fan theories and fan fiction regarding homoerotic relationships between members of One Direction. Between 2011 and 2013, Louis Tomlinson and Harry Styles were very affectionate with each other during interviews, press conferences, and concerts/live performances. While the group as a whole were quite physically intimate, often squished up on small sofas during interviews and physically interacting during performances, it was Tomlinson and Styles’ behaviour that caught the attention of fans as they were so open with their affection for one another. In a video clip shot by the website Sugarscape, Harry Styles is asked who his first crush was and he responds, “Louis Tomlinson.” The interviewer then asks him how Louis feels about him and Harry says, “it’s mutual, we’ve discussed it” (“One Direction’s Harry Styles Talks First Snogs” 2011). In other interviews, Tomlinson and Styles make extended sexual innuendos between themselves and can be seen touching each other and pretending to kiss. Other members of One Direction and Tomlinson have
denied a secret romantic relationship between the pair (Zutter 2012), and when
rumours reached their peak there was a marked and sudden change in the boys’
behaviour toward each other. Suddenly they weren’t sitting together or interacting at
all, in photographs they were placed apart, and they kept away from each other on
stage. But these initial intimate interactions between Tomlinson and Styles sparked
fan reactions that spiralled into intense theories regarding not only the Tomlinson and
Styles relationship (Larry Stylinson), but also about the rest of the group.

The One Direction fandom split into supporters of two primary relationships
(and a whole lot of sub-relationships), “Larry Stylinson” and “Ziam” (Zayn and
Liam). Fans chose a relationship and then zealously set about proving its veracity.
“Proof” for these fans was organised and analysed in YouTube clips, fan blogs, and
fan fiction that explored these relationships (and others) in depth. Fans speculate over
Tomlinson and Styles’ matching or complementary tattoos. In a video titled “Larry
Stylinson proof and analysis || matching tattoos,” a YouTube user delineates all the
tattoos Tomlinson and Styles have that could be related. Tomlinson has “oops!”
tattooed on his arm and Styles has “hi,” supposedly the first words the two spoke to
one another when they met on The X-Factor. Styles has a lock, Tomlinson has a key:
Styles has a ship, Tomlinson has a compass (“Larry Stylinson Proof and Analysis||
matching tattoos” 2015). Other videos and photo sets feature countless examples of
the pair touching each other intimately during interviews, and clips of them gazing
into each other’s eyes. As a result of Tomlinson and Styles’ initial behaviour, fans
became convinced that this was not just a fantasy on their part, but a reality that was
initially performed openly and then kept hidden from them. Some fans believe that
One Direction management force Tomlinson and Styles to sit apart from each other,
and force them to “act straight,” to date women and publicly reinforce their
heterosexuality (“The Ultimate Larry Stylinson Analysis” 2014). A fan video titled
“The Ultimate Larry Stylinson Analysis” (2014) compiles video footage of
Tomlinson supposedly looking out of shot at members of the One Direction
management team after having made sexually charged comments directed at Styles,
and video footage of management supposedly telling Tomlinson he can’t sit next to
Styles during an interview. Some fans even believe that Tomlinson was pressured into
faking having a child with a woman in order to cement his status as a heterosexual
man (Woodward 2016). Members of One Direction have stated that the rumours have
impacted upon the way they interact with one another in public (Mapstone 2015),
making them feel uneasy about expressing affection among themselves, while fans believe that One Direction management reacted against rumours homosexuality because they wanted fans to continue to look at One Direction as viable heterosexual partners. Either way, One Direction’s behaviour influenced the way fans see them, and in turn fan behaviour influenced One Direction.

The fan fiction addressed in this chapter addresses “Larry Stylinson” and “Ziam,” and it is in many respects observer fan fiction, but it also inserts fan production into the narrative as the most significant and powerful element of the story. This fiction is in part about the potential power of fan production to influence the private lives of One Direction. In the first chapter I found that in imagines One Direction fans create a void of identity constructed only in terms of certain easily recognisable heteronormative traits. The characters in imagines essentially reject a core self. The previous two chapters show that these coreless fan characters act as a vehicle for the fantasy of intimacy with One Direction, while the actual intimacy they generate between fans who share the same fantasies facilitates the tangible power of the fan collective. This chapter draws together findings from the previous two in that the fan fiction addressed also plays with the distance between celebrity and fan and the desire for intimacy. In these works the fan is not individually present, but rather the fan collective exercise their power on social media to shape One Direction’s sexuality, all the while remaining a remote, abstract presence in the story. These stories enact the fantasy of intimacy by imagining the fan collective has the power to shape something so deeply personal as One Direction’s sexuality.

While the rejection of a core self seems to be jeopardised by observer fan fiction truth seeking, observer fan fiction implicitly and sometimes explicitly challenges the notion of a naturalised self by drawing attention to the performative nature of heterosexuality and homosexuality. One Direction fans writing homoerotic observer fan fiction do not assume heterosexuality to be the default. Instead, they are convinced that displays of heterosexual behaviour from One Direction are contrived and deeply performative, while underneath the heterosexual exterior is a much more complex (and subversive) self. The subversive self might appear to represent a true, or core, identity, but really it is only a focal point for fan representations and re-representations of malleable characters. If One Direction can perform heterosexual identity and homosexual identity then fans can create representations of their identity in almost any context. The previous chapter addressed Rainbow Direction. This group
are not officially concerned with writing homoerotic fan fiction, but the potential to interpret One Direction’s behaviour and music as perhaps belying the strict heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy also allows for a multiplicity of fan identities.

Obviously, not all fan fiction is self-aware. Some fan fiction, however, is extremely self-aware. I have chosen the following case study because it illustrates awareness that whatever content you are consuming, or whatever identity you are performing, is necessarily only one of many representations.\(^8\) This case study is a work of observer fan fiction, written in 2013 by dea_liberty and published on fan fiction hub An Archive of our Own.\(^9\) The work is titled “Foolishly, Completely Falling” and the blurb reads: “Now that he’s actually gone and done it, there seems to be no way of going back—no rinse and repeat, no ctrl+alt+del, no abort button, no help to be had. He’s fallen into a black hole and he cannot seem to find a way out. The black hole is also known as Tumblr. More specifically, it’s known as Tumblr’s Larry Stylinson tag. OR: The one where Louis becomes a Larry shipper\(^10\) by accident.” In this work, One Direction’s Louis Tomlinson goes online and reads fan

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\(^8\) There are plenty more examples of fan fiction concerned with representations of the self, particularly on social media. In “You You You” by isthatyoularry, Harry Styles is in a famous boy band while Louis runs a successful Twitter account. The two attempt to keep their relationship under wraps while both existing in the public eye (also features chapters from fan perspectives). “From Eight Until Late, I Think About You” by supernope is about Harry and Louis meeting through their respective YouTube channels and being afraid to meet in person in case they ruin their relationship. In “never shut us down” by togetherwecouldbealright Louis “hides behind” his Tumblr blog until he meets Harry. And, in “All the Shadows That I Walk In” by bitchcraft Louis is a pro-surfer who has to pretend to be heterosexual to maintain a certain public image despite being in love with Harry. These fan fictions are just a handful of examples from a huge pool of stories preoccupied with public/private performances of the self.

\(^9\) There are links provided for the fan fiction addressed in this chapter in the Works Cited for this thesis that lead a page where a PDF can be downloaded. The page numbers following quotation refer to PDF page numbers.

\(^10\) “Shippers” are fans who “root for or advocate […] a couple or pairing” (Jamison 2013, 118).
theories about his relationship with Harry Styles and he convinces himself that there is something to these theories, even though he knows rumours of an illicit relationship between him and Styles are untrue. Louis’s participation in the One Direction fandom has him questioning his sense of self, his sexuality, and his relationship with his friend. In the beginning of the story, Louis finds himself wooed by fan theories, he descends into a deep, dark internet hole and then he stops for a moment and “[he] reminds himself that he is Louis Tomlinson, and that ‘Larry’ is not real” (2013, 2). But the deeper he sinks into the fandom the more aware Louis becomes of the different “realities” his identity inhabits for himself and for other people. He is himself as he knows himself, he is himself as the fans know him, and he is himself as One Direction public relations want him to be. He begins to realise the multiplicity of his identity when he sees a gif of himself responding to Harry’s touch, he is struck and he “stares at it [the gif] as if he doesn’t recognise it. Because he doesn’t recognise it. He hadn’t even noticed he’d done that. It’s like watching a movie of an actor that looks scarilly like you but isn’t you because Louis doesn’t remember doing that” (2013, 2).

This story is obsessively concerned with representations of identity, and equally as obsessed with their deliberately constructed nature, especially online. After being sucked into the fandom Louis creates his own Tumblr blog where he painstakingly creates “photo sets” of himself and Harry as though they are in a relationship. He becomes extremely successful on Tumblr because he posts images that no one has seen before—private images that only he has access to. Fans become curious about who he could be, some believing he is Harry. Later, when Louis reveals to Harry that he has been using Tumblr he states: “I was helping the narrative along […] When it seemed like it needed a little… push” (2013, 12). Louis is aware of the constructed nature of his identity, he is aware that fans are constructing a version of him as much as he is constructing a version of himself. Furthermore, throughout the story, Harry and Louis are referred to as being “made for each other” over and over, drawing attention to the fact that fans and Louis are all quite literally constructing their relationship online (2013, 5).

The story comments on how Louis achieves online success and fame by presenting carefully constructed images of his “relationship” with Harry, and at the same time, this is exactly what the story itself is doing. “Foolishly, Completely Falling” has been read more than eighty thousand times (82, 511 at the time of
writing). Another work, “And Then a Bit” (2014), by infinitelymint, features Tomlinson and Styles faking a relationship for publicity and has been read over two hundred and eighty thousand times. Both works rely simultaneously on perceived authenticity and an awareness of carefully constructed online public narratives. In “Foolishly, Completely Falling” the fans perceive some greater truth to Tomlinson and Styles’ relationship because their behaviour betrayed the narrative the mass media was spinning regarding their heterosexuality. In “And Then a Bit,” the media narrative is that they are in a relationship because it gives the fans what they always assumed to be true, and although it is not initially a real relationship it does become one.

In both instances the “authenticity” is very carefully constructed: in “Foolishly, Completely Falling” it is the fans (and Louis) who construct the relationship that becomes the authentic truth, and in “And Then a Bit” fans construct the relationship between Tomlinson and Styles and it is co-opted by the mass media in order to boost the fame of the group. Social media success relies on well-constructed, believable narratives, but at the same time, those consuming these narratives understand to a certain degree that they are constructed. Hearn explains the believable yet overtly constructed nature of social media success in her writing on the branded online self. She states: “the branded self is a commodity sign; it is an entity that works and at the same time, points to itself working, striving to embody the values of its working environment” (Hearn 2008, 201). Social media is concerned with presenting the self, and even with “selling” the self. If your “self-brand” is convincing enough then you will gather social capital, to further your social media presence and/or to produce actual capital. Hearn continues: “ultimately your personal brand is not only a pretty veneer; it is intended to be a rhetorically persuasive version of yourself” (2008, 206). On social media, people take a morsel of themselves, or something they are interested in and they spin it into a cohesive, complete narrative, while at the same time those consuming said narratives understand they are only viewing part of the whole, the “persuasive version.” The rhetorically persuasive version is not the same as the “authentic,” but rather a combination of the authentic and the performative.

In “Foolishly, Completely Falling” fans like Louis’s blog so much because it is so well put together; it is rhetorically persuasive because the photos he posts are intimate pictures of himself and of Harry (2013, 7). While these pictures on their own
are not indicative of a homoerotic relationship between the two, when posted online in certain ways and in certain contexts they form a persuasive narrative regarding a relationship between Harry and Louis. When he puts groups of photos together to build an image of his and Harry’s supposed relationship fans understand that building is exactly what he is doing, but the relationship is being constructed before them in a believable manner because it is built around a marker of “authenticity:” homosexual desire as it exists in opposition to a heteronormative mass media narrative. Furthermore, the story plays on Louis adding to the narrative of his and Harry’s supposed relationship by posting private and personal photos to his blog, adding an element of “authenticity” to an otherwise totally constructed relationship. At the same time, this is exactly what this fan fiction is doing: it is popular and widely read because it openly constructs a relationship narrative that is believable or at least plausible to fans. Additionally, mass media representations of celebrities traditionally rely on performing the self in a way that is “authentic.” Tolson states: “[being yourself] must be understood as a type of public performance which, crucially, is not perceived as ‘acting.’ For this to be brought off successfully, the public persona of the celebrity needs to project an aura of ‘authenticity’” (2001, 445). But, in light of celebrity co-construction, in order for fans to believe that a celebrity is an authentic person they must also understand that celebrities are projecting a certain persona, a persona that has perhaps been constructed for favourable representations in the mass media. An understanding of performance is necessary in order to understand authenticity. This combination of performance and authenticity is what fans are responding to when they write stories like “Foolishly, Completely Falling” and “And Then a Bit.”

“Foolishly, Completely Falling” also addresses the rumour that One Direction’s management forced Louis and Harry to stop interacting with each other in public in the hope that rumours of their being not-straight would abate. In this story, however, when One Direction’s public relations people tell Harry and Louis to “tone [it] down” there is no secret relationship to hide (2013, 4). Louis is distraught because the fiction of their relationship has become more appealing to him than “the real truth” (2013, 5). But then, of course, the truth changes. Harry, upset that public relations are trying so hard to deny that he is gay, confesses his love to Louis, and Louis, having realised his “true” feelings via his exploration of fandom, admits that the feeling is mutual. Near the end of the story, when they have decided to be
together, Louis thinks to himself, “he’d never actually dared to really imagine what it would be like; he’d just lived vicariously through other people’s faith and other people’s imaginings” (2013, 15).

Again, we are drawn back to the song “Olivia,” addressed in Chapter 1, and the notion that any narrative involving One Direction “lives” very much in the realm of imagination. Louis is drawn into realising his feelings for Harry thanks to other people’s fantasies and his own active imagination, and, at the same time, this Louis is a figment of the author’s imagination, a character in her reimagining of the impact of other people’s imaginings. Throughout the story, Louis is fascinated by belief in Larry Stylinson. He knows that belief in his and Harry’s love for each other brings people joy. By the close of the story, however, while there is now something to believe in, public relations have done their best to diminish people’s faith in Larry Stylinson. But Louis, like any true fan, realises “it doesn’t matter what anyone else believes. He knows for a fact that this is real. […], Larry Stylinson—whatever name you want to give to this thing between them—is love. And love is real” (2013, 16). It might appear at this point that Louis/the author is making a declarative, definitive statement about Larry Stylinson, insisting that the relationship is real, but the statement is much more malleable than that. The story has consistently undermined any single representation being the truth. Fries, writing on fan fiction, emphatically states: “it’s always about love” (Fries 2013, 52). “Love,” in the end, can easily represent the love fans feel for Louis and Harry, the love Louis and Harry feel for each other as friends, the love of an illicit relationship, or the love of reading stories and theories about illicit love like “Larry Stylinson.” The story as a whole essentially undermines the idea of there being a single “core” truth to anything, let alone identity or representations of identity.

Keeping in mind the lack of “core” identity or truth in One Direction fan fiction, I will now address a less popular but conceptually intriguing branch of fan fiction; gender-swapped fan fiction. This fan fiction is significant because it operates on the understanding that gendered bodies and identities are not inherently fixed and are ultimately malleable and interchangeable at the same time as it writes within the confines of particular canonical identity constructs for One Direction, and toys with the interplay of authenticity and performativity inherent in celebrity and in fan production. Furthermore, gender-swapped fan fiction takes eroticism as one of its primary markers of authenticity. In this instance perhaps because the stories are
focussed so much on eroticism, the markers of authenticity are pushed closer to being about what fans want. Gender-swapped fan fiction is fan fiction where the gender of primary characters has been changed. For example, the members of One Direction, who are men, are instead written as women. Gender-swapped fan fiction is not always homoerotic, but I will first address two examples of homoerotic gender-swapped fan fiction because they lay the conceptual groundwork for examining my third example: a piece of gender-swapped fan fiction that is built primarily using images and gifs and features a heterosexual relationship.

At first glance, gender swapped One Direction fan fiction seems to disavow authenticity altogether. Changing the gender of One Direction precludes canonical writing, and so gender-swapped fan fiction features characters with the same names as One Direction, and who are described as having similar physical and personality traits as One Direction, but who are imagined in scenarios far removed from the “reality” of a famous boy band, and they are women. I would argue, however, that it is not One Direction’s gender or even their personalities or physical descriptions that act as the primary markers of authenticity in gender-swapped fan fiction; it is their homoerotic relationships with one another that provide the building blocks for a believable narrative. It is the homoerotic relationships that link back to One Direction (as they replicate the affection the group show one another in the mass media). Furthermore, homoerotic gender-swapped fan fiction is connected to fans who do not identify with the heteronormative mass media image of One Direction, perhaps because they themselves are not heterosexual or cis men or women, or because they prefer to read about homosexual/erotic relationships between women. We are presented with fan fiction ostensibly about celebrity men who are heteronormatively-coded sex symbols, but these men are being written as (homosexual) women.

Butler provides an interesting context for how we might interpret gender-swapped fan fiction. Writing about butch lesbian identities, she states: “as one lesbian femme explained, she likes her boys to be girls, meaning that ‘being a girl’ contextualizes and resignifies ‘masculinity’ in a butch identity” and, she continues, “as a result, that masculinity […] is always brought into relief against a culturally intelligible ‘female body’” (Butler 1990, 156). While gender swapped One Direction

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11 Generally this fan fiction is cis-normative, representing One Direction as cis-gender women instead of as transgender women.
fan fiction is somewhat removed from butch/femme identifying lesbians, it can still be understood through this lens. If gender-swapped fan fiction correlates more closely with what it is fans want (homoerotic fan fiction between women for queer fans, or a less binary vision of gender for trans people, for example), then the mass media narrative that depicts One Direction as highly desirable (masculine) figures is subverted and re-contextualised by fans writing “culturally intelligible ‘female bod[ies].’” In rewriting One Direction as women “the very notion of an original or natural identity is put into question” and “it is precisely that question as it is embodied in these identities that becomes one source of their erotic significance” (Butler 1990, 157). One Direction imagines show fans working on an understanding that One Direction and fan identities are malleable, and homoerotic fan fiction operates on an understanding that convincing identity narratives can be constructed around fictions that might appear more “authentic” than the “truth.” Gender-swapped fan fiction simply pushes malleable, constructed identity even further by suggesting that if you keep eroticism at the core of the narrative then the constructed identity will be believable.

“The Beautiful Game” (2014) is a homoerotic, gender swapped story by An Archive of Our Own user called sunshiner. In the story, Louis is a successful YouTuber whose YouTube channel about football has so many millions of followers she has been picked up by a publicist and has published a book. Harry, on the other hand, is an up and coming food blogger who is in negotiations with Louis’s publicist. The two discover each other online, Harry is a fan of Louis’s videos and Louis follows Harry’s blog. Louis contacts Harry through her blog but uses a different username and doesn’t identify herself as the YouTuber she knows Harry is a fan of, even after they begin regularly emailing each other. Eventually, they meet in person, but while Louis knows they have already been communicating, Harry does not. The story, much like “Foolishly, Completely Falling,” is fixated on social media and how self-representation online shapes the lives and relationships of the characters, and on how we can perform multiple roles and identities in online spaces.

In “The Beautiful Game” it is homoeroticism and (relative) celebrity that propel the narrative and link it back to the Harry and Louis of One Direction. Harry and Louis in the story are far removed from One Direction: they are women, they aren’t musicians, and their celebrity comes exclusively from social media success. In order to link the story back to the real Harry and Louis, the story pays close attention
to the intimate and erotic nature of their relationship by focussing on physical detail and by quoting things said by One Direction during interviews. For example, when Louis and Harry first meet in person Louis isn’t sure Harry is who she thinks she is because Harry doesn’t post pictures of her face on her blog. Louis is attracted to Harry the moment she sees her, noting her “luscious chocolate brown curls,” “fullest cherry red lips,” “leopard print shirt balanced on a good handful of boobs,” and skinny jeans hugging legs for kilometres” (2014, 9). As well as emphasising the erotic attraction between Louis and Harry, these traits are also physical traits embodied by the male Harry Styles so they alert the reader to this character being Harry at the same time as they re-contextualise the heteronormative mass media image of Harry Styles as a desirable man. Additionally, Louis identifies Harry by the “black cross tattooed on the tender flesh between thumb and forefinger” (2014, 9). Louis noticing the tattoo on Harry’s hand links back to a moment earlier in the story where Louis, despite never having seen Harry’s face, explains her already blossoming attraction to Harry by describing a photo she has seen on Harry’s blog featuring her hands: “Harry has really, really long fingers. Long enough to… Ugh” (2014, 2). Furthermore, when Harry is describing her first interaction with Louis she says: “she’s a great person to just like, sit and kind of just admire what she’s like” (2014, 24), echoing what Harry Styles says about Louis in the One Direction film This Is Us (2012). In highlighting the physical connection between Harry and Louis and linking it back to the connection between the real Harry and Louis, the story builds a convincing narrative off the perceived homoerotic tension in One Direction.

As in “Foolishly, Completely Falling” and “And Then A Bit,” Harry and Louis’s relationship in the story is initially developed online via blog comments and emails, then it is constructed publicly online to tease fans of Louis’s YouTube channel, and later it becomes genuine. As previously stated, although Harry and Louis have been communicating online, Harry does not know it is Louis she has been emailing when she meets Louis in person. Louis justifies her secretive behaviour by stating: “she’s seen my videos [but] that doesn’t mean she likes me” (sunshiner 2014, 5). As a result, when Louis and Harry go home together Harry stops and tells Louis she can’t have sex with her because she has feelings for someone else, someone she

12 In This Is Us (2012) Harry says, “Louis is a great person to like sit and just admire what he’s like” (at 53 minute mark).
has been emailing. Of course, this person is Louis but Louis does not say anything but she realises she is “being cockblocked by herself” (2014, 16). As in “Foolishly, Completely Falling,” Louis begins to realise the impact of the different manifestations of herself, online and offline, on her life and on the lives of those around her. Furthermore, even though Harry initially establishes with Louis that she has feelings for “someone else,” she begins to encourage and even start rumours online that the two are in a relationship, knowing that her fans and Louis’s fans would latch onto them (sunshiner 2014, 16). She is talking to Louis about Louis’s “Tumblr fans” when she says, “would it be a problem if a rumour about us came out?” and later, she “tweets her [Louis] […] and, judging by the message, she must have liked the idea of giving some meat to the Tumblr shippers” (2014, 21–23). Harry’s desire to be publicly intimate with Louis in order to bait fans soon turns into a genuine desire for a relationship with Louis. Here there seems to be a tension between her feelings for the Louis she is emailing and her desire for some form of public intimacy. Her feelings for the Louis she is emailing cannot be convincing if they are not to some degree publicly performed. In order to build a convincing relationship between Harry and Louis, this story refers back to fan construction and production. The fans build a lesbian relationship between gender swapped Harry and Louis in the same way that they would construct a relationship between Harry and Louis as men. And, like other fan fiction addressed in this chapter, this story refers to a multiplicity of selves that are both privately and publicly constructed and further emphasises the construction of identity by recasting Harry and Louis as homosexual women. “The Beautiful Game” emphasises that identity is performative in that the fan fiction writer can change something some might consider essential to an individual’s identity, such as gender, but the characters and their relationships remain rhetorically persuasive because they still embody particular physical and personality traits and perform certain behaviours that point to an element of “authenticity.” And, a convincing performance in fan fiction includes having multiple online and offline identities. In this instance, Harry

13 The idea of Louis’s multiple identities in the story (the person Harry emails, the person Harry knows in real life, the person she presents online in her YouTube videos) is amplified by this being a gender-swapped story. Louis as a woman highlights the potential for different versions of the self to co-exist at the same time as it emphasizes the malleability of personal gender and sexual identity.
and Louis are described as physically resembling their male counterparts, their relationship is homoerotic/sexual, and it is constructed online. Even though they are written as women, this is enough to form a credible narrative that incorporates both elements of authenticity and performativity.

My second example of gender-swapped One Direction fan fiction is “Who Run The World (Girls!)” (2016) by An Archive of Our Own user dolce_piccante. This story is a rewrite of another story by the same author called “Relief Next to Me” (2014). “Relief Next to Me” is a piece of homoerotic fan fiction about Harry and Louis, who meet after Louis posts an advertisement on Craigslist looking for someone who he can practice oral sex with. The original story is incredibly long, with multiple detailed chapters. “Who Run The World (Girls!)” is much shorter, but it is the same story line, only adapted so that Harry and Louis are both women. In the space of two chapters, Harry and Louis meet via Craigslist, have sex, and end up in a relationship. The truncated length of this story alongside the fact that it is a gender-swapped version of another piece of One Direction fan fiction written by the same author indicate that the change in gender relates more to what particular fans want from a piece of fan fiction. The original story was believable because it effectively built a narrative around the attraction between Harry and Louis. The alternate, lesbian version of the story is believable because it incorporates that same attraction but alters the circumstances so that it is appealing to fans who want to read homoerotic stories about women. This alteration shifts the marker of authenticity slightly. The story is almost guaranteed to be a credible narrative about Harry and Louis because all it changes is their gender, leaving intact the narrative that has already been successfully produced (the original story has been read over forty-six thousand times) (dolce_piccante 2014).
“The Beautiful Game” and “Who Run The World (Girls!)” are both gender swapped stories about homosexual desire, but desire in gender-swapped fan fiction is not always homosexual, and, furthermore, desire is not always easily categorised as homosexual or heterosexual. Butler writes: “there are structures of psychic homosexuality within heterosexual relationships and structures of psychic heterosexuality within gay and lesbian relationships” (1990, 155). Examples of psychic heterosexuality might, for instance, be found in stories like those mentioned...
above, stories that are ostensibly about women but feature characters based on highly desirable men. Examples of psychic homosexuality, on the other hand, can be found in gender-swapped fan fiction that features ostensibly heterosexual relationships.

Tumblr user Sashayed has written a piece of gender-swapped One Direction fan fiction that features primarily heterosexual relationships. Her fan fiction is published on her blog and is a non-linear narrative about a blossoming relationship between Liam Payne and Zayn Malik. Only, in this story, Liam remains a man while Zayn is a woman whose name is Zayna. Liam and Zayna both run video blogs or vlogs, and this is how they meet. Sashayed calls the piece “Vlog Direction” (2013). This piece of fan fiction is interesting, however, because instead of being written in a traditional long form/chapter format it is mostly written in short fragments in a blog post while the body of the post is taken up by a picture or gif. Furthermore, Zayn, Niall, Harry and Louis are all represented by photographs and gifs of other female celebrities. Zayn, for example, is represented by the actress Shay Mitchell, and Niall is represented by actress Ashley Benson (fig. 3). Both actresses star on the television show Pretty Little Liars (2010) and so there are plenty of photographs and gifs of the two interacting with each other, which makes it easy to write fan fiction in which they are best friends, as they are in “Vlog Direction.”

In “Vlog Direction” Liam and Zayna are the primary pairing. To begin with, they are just friends who interact online, but eventually, they become more than that. Although the pairing has become a heterosexual pairing, the relationship is still based very much off what fans perceive as the homoerotic tension between Liam Payne and Zayn Malik. A relationship between a male Liam and female Zayna is believable because of the existing relationship (erotic or otherwise) between the real Liam and Zayn, and the fandom’s interpretation of this relationship. Here, we see an example of psychic homosexuality in a heterosexual relationship because one of the characters in this story is a woman, but she is based on a man who is read by fans as having feelings for the male partner in this particular story. Furthermore, this story is written by a woman who is evidently intrigued by the relationship Zayn and Liam have with each other, and this relationship serves as the foundation on which her story is built. But, instead of a homosexual relationship, she has written a heterosexual relationship that potentially reflects her own fantasies and desires and, as the story grows, increasingly reflects the fantasies and desires of those following her blog.
As soon as Sashayed began writing “Vlog Direction,” people following her blog began to write in with their own thoughts and questions about the story. Almost immediately, the story was shaped by these contributions from readers (Sashayed 2013). For example, when Sahsayed wrote that Zayna’s terrible, villainous boyfriend was going to be represented by images of music producer Naughty Boy (a producer who was at the time working with Zayn Malik), fans wrote in to Sashayed suggesting that it wasn’t appropriate to demonise a South Asian man who was working on Zayn’s team. Sashayed responded to criticism and altered the story so that Zayna’s boyfriend was no longer represented by Naughty Boy (Sashayed 2015). At another point in the story, readers were asking about Harry’s character and describing how they imagined him/her. Sashayed posted some of the messages from readers, stating: “I’d like to use the opportunity to share a few of the Community’s amazing and correct thoughts about Vlog Harry. Each of these suggestions is completely true and correct in its own universe” (Sashayed 2014). She then goes on to paint an image of Harry that incorporates the different ways readers have imagined her. Harry is a “sweet weirdo Instagram celeb/nanny/catsitter/fro-yo salesperson/coat checker at hipster indie dive bar/part-time Free People model,” (Sashayed 2014). This image of her covers readers’ questions about her internet presence and personality, which was widely imagined as flaky and left field, with fans imagining him/her as running a farming advice YouTube channel with a sock puppet named “Sir Plantsalot,” or as running a blog featuring design aesthetics inspired by Joni Mitchell songs. These imaginings of Harry are in turn influenced by the way the mass media has sold Harry’s personality, one of his defining characteristics as set by Sony being that he is “adorably ‘slow’” (O’Connor 2015). At the same time as allowing significant co-constructive opportunities for fans, this fan narrative incorporates multiple representations of characters. And due to its being a series of non-linear blog posts, all of the different representations can be read and viewed as you follow the story, thus allowing for multiple versions of characters to exist simultaneously even as they shift and change throughout the story and in the reader’s mind.

Ultimately, Sashayed is writing something that appeals to One Direction fans because it features a relationship between two members of One Direction. But, fans are not simply invested in the story because of this, but also because it actively incorporates what they want into the narrative. Sashayed writes whole chunks of text based on reader questions and suggestions, and she even states that the story is driven
by her being reminded of it, “the only reason I write about [Zayna] is when I am reminded of her” (Sashayed 2015). Additionally, she frequently makes references to the reader’s position in relation to the narrative, for example, at the end of a passage about Liam and Zayna’s future engagement she writes: “this is what you, the viewer of imaginary youtube in 2016, are privileged to witness,” (Sashayed 2014) and in an earlier episode she writes: “of course we as the audience of this internet real person romance are losing it constantly. ‘Why aren’t you guys together!!!!!!!’ We scream in the youtube comments” (Sashayed 2013). “Vlog Direction” in this way can be linked back to some of what is happening in One Direction imagines and in the One Direction fan collectives’ actions described in the previous chapter. Through working with certain established identity or personality traits (in this instance the relationship between Liam and Zayn and the personality traits established for One Direction by the mass media), Sashayed has created a fan narrative that fans can not only insert themselves into but also help to shape. Sashayed is writing a story in which the characters’ lives are unfolding online and fictional fans are watching Zayna and Liam slowly build their relationship via YouTube videos at the same time as real life fans are watching the story unfold via Sashayed’s blog. Sashayed refers to the fictional fans contributing to the narrative (as evidenced by above quotation), and she reposts comments sent to her by real fans (verifiable by following their usernames to their blogs) and writes more of the story based upon their questions and suggestions.

In this sense, “Vlog Direction” mirrors small scale the co-constructive relationship between One Direction and their fans. It also provides a kind of solution to the problem of simultaneous intimacy and collective that the previous chapters address. The previous chapters suggest that fans can only fantasise about individual intimacy with One Direction, and only as a collective can they have a tangible presence in One Direction’s lives. Earlier this chapter suggested that one way of achieving greater intimacy with One Direction was to write homoerotic fan fiction where individual fan characters are replaced by an invisible but powerful fan collective. “Vlog Direction,” however, allows for individual fans to imagine themselves as both a part of the narrative and as shaping the narrative. Sashayed has produced a narrative that is credible not only because it plays on the observed intimacy between Zayn Malik and Liam Payne, but also because it acknowledges the role of fans in co-constructing One Direction’s identity both self-reflexively within
the narrative of the story, and by incorporating suggestions and answering questions from real fans reading the story.

To conclude, this chapter discussed methods used by fans in homoerotic fan fiction to construct believable narratives that still emphasise the performative nature of identity. In the context of social media, fans understand that any public image is carefully cultivated based on some small element of truth. They perceive One Direction’s mass media image to be a construct with some inconsistent elements, in particular, One Direction’s performance of heterosexuality is inconsistent with their heteronormative public image (in part because any consistent performance of heterosexuality is impossible). In response to these inconsistencies, fans write their own narratives that are focussed on how identity is constructed around elements of “authenticity” that may in fact be as much fiction as anything else. In so doing fans establish that convincing performances in the age of celebrity co-construction rely on an interplay between authenticity and performativity, intimacy and publicity, individual and collective. Furthermore, homoerotic fan fiction establishes narratives that are constructed in part out of pieces of the subjects’ real lives (for example known facts about their family lives, things they have said publicly), and in part out of the imaginings of fans. In this regard, One Direction homoerotic fan fiction is co-constructed by the mass media image of One Direction and by fans and their fantasies.
Conclusion

“Let’s have another toast to the girl almighty”—One Direction, “Girl Almighty” (2014)

In their 2013 single “You & I,” One Direction emphatically insist, “not even the gods above can separate the two of us.” Although ostensibly about two lovers, the lyric sentiment in “You & I” rings true for the relationship between One Direction and their fans. The relationship between celebrity and fan identity in One Direction is an endless feedback loop, with both parties constantly engaged in a process of co-construction. Celebrity identity in One Direction cannot be separated from fan identity and vice versa. This thesis has sought to examine the processes of identity co-construction in One Direction songs and music videos, and in imagines, long form fan fiction, and fan collectives. One Direction, in their official mass media content, provide a framework through which fans are able to construct their own identities as well as identities for One Direction. This framework is made up of certain normative narratives regarding relationships, sexuality, and gender. These normative narratives are easily recognisable and for that reason, it is easy for fans to insert themselves into them. Fans are encouraged to assume that One Direction could be singing about them—that if they simply meet these normative standards, they can be a part of the narrative. In inserting themselves into the narrative, however, fans become aware to a certain extent that these normative standards are merely external constructs and signifiers with no essential core. Because normative standards have no essential core they are inherently malleable, and fans are able to shift and reposition narratives surrounding identity in their personal fantasies, fan fiction, and social media presence. As fans shift the parameters of identity within One Direction and the fandom, One Direction must in turn respond and move with or against these shifting parameters. Ultimately, fan identities are always bound up with fiction and fantasy. These fantasies in turn influence what One Direction become because their commercial and

14 Interestingly, the music video for “You & I” features One Direction walking down a pier one at a time, all wearing the same outfit, and as they change verses their faces morph into the next member singing. This video is playing, perhaps, on the idea of a connection that cannot be broken.
critical success relies upon supporting fans’ fantasies. So, as an entity, One Direction is bound up in fantasy too.

The first chapter of this thesis establishes that identities in One Direction songs and imagines are largely normative, relying on external performances of hegemonic gender roles and heteronormative sexuality. One Direction songs follow an easily recognisable pop structure, addressing a simultaneously present and absent love interest, who in turn fits easily recognisable standards of normative femininity. In response to these songs, fans write imagines that follow a similar structure. The active voice in the imagine is that of a One Direction member, while the present/absent and usually silent female figure is represented only by “you” or “Y/N.” The present/absent structure of the lyric “you” and the imagine “you” is crucial to the interrelationship between One Direction and fan identity co-construction and fan production as they both rely on an imagined intimacy and an equally important distance.

The imagines depict a heteronormative romantic situation, and in assuming the normative female role, fans are able to insert themselves into the narrative, imagining that they are present in these scenarios with One Direction. Fans are able to imagine that they are in the narrative because the woman in the imagines has no discernible features aside from very basic standards of femininity and heterosexuality; she is easily recognisable as being simultaneously no one and everyone. To a degree, fans understand that in inserting themselves into the narrative they are adopting elements of identity that are purely externally performed and regulated because the only thing that is required of them to be a part of the narrative is to perform “socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility” (Butler 1990, 23). Furthermore, imagines are repeated over and over on the internet as they are shared and as more imagines are written and posted. Imagines then become a shared public performance of identity endlessly repeated online and with each repetition, the identities represented in the imagines get further away from any sense of an original or core identity. The distance from an original identity allows for increased opportunities for imagined intimacy as more fans enjoy and share the imagines online. It is through this process of repetition that subversion of hegemonic identity becomes possible because if (theoretically) anyone can insert themselves into the imagine, and the same faceless, self-insert figure is repeated over and over, then the idea of there ever having been an “original” or essential figure is effectively displaced. In this light, identity in imagines becomes
malleable. Because the identities in pop songs are so non-specific and easily recognisable, fans repeating them in imagines show some awareness of how hegemony influences identity performance. One Direction, however, are not quite as good as their fans at using identity signifiers to create malleable narratives and identities. The “Night Changes” music video fails because it shows the girl on the date as being white. But, in spite of its failure, the video is still responding to the fans’ compulsion to insert themselves into the narrative, and it prompts fans to demand more malleability from One Direction (Jenkins 2014).

So, this chapter finds that identity established in One Direction songs is formulaic, but ultimately malleable when fans endlessly repeat and rework it to their own ends. Imagines unsettle the notion of an individual subject: there is no individual if the fan figure is merely a set of hegemonic standards of femininity meant to be put on and adopted and endlessly repeated by fans reading the imagines. Fans writing imagines forgo the individual subject and instead write characters that many fans relate to, understanding that these characters have nothing essentially individual about them.

The loss of the individual subject, however, is complicated in the second chapter of this thesis as it investigates fan identity at an individual and collective level, as well as the relationship and impact the individual and the collective have on One Direction. This chapter suggests that the potential for the co-construction of celebrity and fan identity between One Direction and their fans relies simultaneously on One Direction nurturing an intense individual connection between fans and the group and encouraging a massive fan collective. Here individuality is subsumed by the collective—just as normative formulaic identity allows an individual fan to insert herself into the imagine fantasy only at the price of negating her individuality.

Chapter 2 shows how the individual relies on the collective to reinforce the intensity of their individual connection to One Direction, and the collective relies on the intensity of the individual to strengthen the collective. In turn, the collective has enormous power when it comes to shaping narratives surrounding One Direction. One Direction appeal to the individual by playing to their fantasies, by suggesting a selection of roles they can inhabit as fans of the group. These roles are not inherently fixed identities, although they do exist within a framework of hegemonic gender roles and heteronormativity. The roles are: the individual fan with an intimate connection to One Direction (the intimate connection having been nurtured by the group’s time on
reality television and exposure to their rise to fame and private emotional moments), and, the individual fan as a powerful player in the continuation of One Direction’s critical and commercial success (a role that relies on fan community). The sense of intimacy experienced by the individual fan is fostered by normative sexuality and gender roles because conforming to normative standards seemingly opens up the potential for achieving intimacy with One Direction. The shared aspiration to meet normative standards and achieve intimacy with One Direction, in turn, binds together fan communities.

Because one of the only ways One Direction can communicate with their fans is by either thanking them en masse or writing pop songs with generalised female love interests in them, these roles then manifest in fans identifying with the “every girl:” the girl in One Direction’s songs who achieves personal, individual intimacy with One Direction and is a significant part of their lives. The “every girl” meets certain standards of hegemonic femininity, but, as is evidenced by the Billboard campaign and Rainbow Direction, she is a starting point for fan identity, not the “final destination.” The Billboard magazine campaign shows that in identifying with the “every girl” figure fans are able to form strong connections with one another based on a mutual desire to be close to One Direction and to have some influence over their lives. The strength of collective fan intimacy is able to have a tangible impact on One Direction in a way that the individual fan cannot. The fan collective has the power to impact One Direction because the malleable identities suggested by One Direction and replicated in fan fiction provide a common ground for fans to connect and form intimate relationships with one another. The ability of the collective to influence One Direction then provides fans with an awareness of the power they have over identity narratives in One Direction. The “every girl” ultimately has to be malleable because she does not accurately represent every One Direction fan: she represents the desire for intimacy and influence. Rainbow Direction is a manifestation of the collective desire for intimacy and influence. Queer One Direction fans connect with the group and with other fans, but they do not necessarily identify with the “every girl.” In shifting the parameters of what the “every girl” means and interpreting the identity she represents as being inherently malleable, Rainbow Direction make space in the One Direction fandom for a multiplicity of identities. So, while the collective overwhelms the individual fan, there is still room in the collective for individual identities. These individual identities, however, do not receive their own distinct
narratives within official One Direction content and so any subversive identity narratives are left in the hands of the fans. Subversive identity narratives often take the form of homoerotic One Direction fan fiction, which is explored in Chapter 3.

The combined awareness of the power of the fan collective and the desire for intimacy and for representation of “subversive” identities results in the construction of alternative identity narratives in homoerotic fan fiction. The impulse to write homosexual identities into the One Direction narrative is perhaps also due to the fact that imagines, long form self-insert fan fiction, and fan collective campaigns overwhelm individual identities and disregard the notion of there being any core identity. The absence of any core identity means that identity is constantly in the process of being constructed by fans and by One Direction. Fan identity becomes largely amorphous and so in order to explore identity in depth fans turn to observer fan fiction to work with the largely established identities/personas of individual One Direction members.

In the homoerotic fan fiction examined in Chapter 3, social media and fans are ever-present as a latent power influencing the identities and narrative arcs of the members of One Direction. These stories are overtly concerned with performativity and the construction of credible identity narratives via mass media and social media. Credible narratives in these stories rely upon the interplay of authenticity and performativity, and intimacy and distance, and the narratives are focussed on how identity might be constructed around “authenticity” signifiers that are really fiction. In imagines and in long form insertion fan fiction such as the story examined in Chapter 2, fans seem to understand that hegemonic gender roles assigned to the “every girl” fan figure are not an essential part of a person’s identity, but rather a series of external performances and thus a construct. If malleable identities can be built around hegemonic constructs, it then follows that identities in homoerotic fan fiction can be built around an assumption of core identity that is based on a fiction. When One Direction publicly show one another affection some fans interpret this behaviour as performances of homosexuality. In turn, they build complex identity narratives around these displays, taking external performances as a sign of something essential to identity at the same time as they are aware that what they are constructing is a fiction based on a fiction.

In imagines, long form insertion fan fiction, and in the campaigns organised by the fan collective, fans understand that One Direction are idealised characters that
are very much out of reach. For that reason, fans write themselves as idealised versions of women that are equally as impossible as a relationship with a member of One Direction. In homoerotic fan fiction, fans do not generally write themselves into the narrative. Instead, fans writing homoerotic fan fiction extend the distance between celebrity and fan by removing the fan from the story altogether. Fans are not often present as characters in homoerotic fan fiction but in the examples examined in this chapter, they are present in the story as an amorphous, faceless collective influencing the narrative from afar. Rather than focusing on intimacy between celebrities and individual fans, this fan fiction focuses on creating a narrative that understands and shapes the private lives of the celebrities featured. This fan fiction is an accumulation of small truths gathered from the mass media and from social media and cultivated into a complex identity narrative that is as much constructed as it is based in reality. It is an extended fantasy on the part of the fan that they play a significant role in the construction of One Direction.

One Direction and their fans are caught up in an ever shifting and developing identity narrative. This narrative is a process of co-construction, with One Direction’s songs and heteronormativity providing certain roles and identities for fans that are then ultimately proven to be malleable and endlessly repeatable. Malleable fan identity then destabilizes identity in general throughout the One Direction fandom, meaning that fans are able to constantly rewrite and repurpose existing identity narratives to be more inclusive and more subversive. One Direction rely on catering sufficiently to their fans’ fantasies and desires and fan identity is shaped in response to these desires being met. At the same time, as fans’ desires and identities develop, One Direction’s continued success depends upon shifting their narratives to coincide with the fans.’ As a result of this call and response relationship, One Direction, celebrity and fan identity are in a constant state of co-construction.

The co-construction that I have mapped in this thesis both builds on and augments recent scholarship on the impact of the internet on fan fiction. It builds on work that acknowledges how the advent of the internet allowed fans “the option of anonymity,” and this option “gave people the opportunity to try on new styles, genders, sexualities, and appearances” (Jamison 2013, 112). The ability to explore identity in online spaces is crucial to the co-construction of fan and celebrity identity in fan fiction. Trying on different, perhaps more radical identities online not only leads to fan fiction that features characters and narratives that do not necessarily
conform to normative standards; but has also led to fan production by fans whose identities have been shaped in online spaces in the years since social media has become commonplace. The One Direction fan fiction examined in this thesis is written by fans who are used to navigating public online spaces and the writers are preoccupied with how identity is constructed online, and how social media can allow for multiple representations of the self.

In arguing for the co-construction of fan and celebrity identity, however, this thesis goes further than previous scholarship in pinpointing how “fan fiction […] responds to—and even helps bring about—very specific shifts in technology and culture” over the past decade (Jamison 2013, 4). The internet has not only generated new opportunities for trying on styles and identities and increased access to fan fiction archives and contact between fans. The interplay between mass and social media has also fundamentally altered the relationship between fan and celebrity. Celebrity fan fiction today is concerned with the impression of direct contact with the celebrity that social media encourages. The potential for fans to have what appears to be direct access to celebrities online means that fans are able to play more of a role in shaping the identity that the celebrity presents to the public. Aware of this potential, One Direction fan production is concerned with not only the identity of the celebrity but also the way fan presence online shapes that identity. Implicit in this attention to the way fan presence shapes celebrity identity is an understanding that celebrity and fan identities—and with them mass and social media—are interconnected and co-constructed. To study the co-construction of One Direction fan fiction and celebrity, then, is to imagine a new world beyond the old dichotomies between mass popular culture and its consumers, celebrity and fan, intimacy and public performance.
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