ABSTRACT

TIYA BOLTON. Fandom for Black Girls: Black Panther and Digital Fandom. (Under the direction of Professor Andrew Johnston.)

Focused attention on the relationship between black women, media texts, and digital fan practice has long been a necessary step in media and fan studies. Scholarship on the reception of media products and subsequent fan activity has struggled to account for the influence of racial and gender identity in viewership and fan appropriation of media. Similarly, in seeking to understand fans’ movement between consumer and producer, there remains a need for more precise examinations of the moment—or moments—of reception and the fan activity that follows.

This becomes particularly salient as we consider the relationship between fan and source material more recognize the shifting racial landscape of media. Taking Black Panther and black female fans on Tumblr as its site of inquiry, this project considers the following questions: How does the initial moment of reception motivate digital fan activity? How does a text’s “blackness” shape the way black women signal and index race in their online fan activity? Finally, how might online fandom politics shift in response to a mainstream “black” media product? Using textual analysis, this project examines fan texts and blog posts from the Black Panther fandom on Tumblr in order to illuminate black women’s initial reception of the text and black women’s unique remediation of the source material. This project concludes that the visibility and success of Black Panther and black women’s identification with the film empowers black female fans to produce and circulate fan texts that resist anti-black fandom practices. These fan texts centralize representations of blackness that, like the original source material, resist the mechanics of code-switching and cultural translation.