

## **‘Stop moaning. I gave you my email. Give me a solution’: Walker Stalker Con, fantagonism and fanagement on social media**

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### **Abstract:**

Previous articles on social media policing have focused on fans policing other fans (Zubernis and Larsen 2012) or fans policing celebrities (Chin 2015). As Marwick and boyd (2010) note, however, social media has enabled two-way communication between fans and celebrities, and just as fans police the behaviour of celebrities, so can celebrities use social media, and their own fanbase, to police other fans. In this article I examine the ways celebrities use social media as a form of ‘fanagement’ (Hills 2012) and by extension encourage fans to police other fans through an exploration of the relationship between fans and fanboy entrepreneur James Frazier, owner and organiser of *The Walking Dead* fan convention, Walker Stalker. I focus on the conversations taking place on Twitter around the changes implemented to the ticketing and queuing systems at the 2017 Walker Stalker London convention and the prices charged at the 2018 Walker Stalker London. I suggest that fans’ criticism of Frazier displays Derek Johnson’s concept of fantagonism (2007) but that Frazier’s response functions as a two-fold form of fanagement by both attempting to publically police inappropriate fan behaviour and encouraging other fans to utilise their own policing tactics to keep these adversarial fans in line.

**Keywords:** *The Walking Dead*, fan/producer relationships, fantagonism, intra-fandom, fanagement

### **Introduction**

In the introduction to *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, Gray, Sandvoss and Harrington suggest that we are currently in the third wave of fan studies. Describing the first wave as the ‘fandom is beautiful’ stage, in which ‘the consumption of popular mass media was a site of power struggle and fandom the guerrilla-style tactics of

those with lesser resources', they trace the development of the field through the 'replication of social and cultural hierarchies within fan [...] cultures' to an 'investigation of fandom as part of the fabric of our everyday lives' (2007, 1-2; 6; 9). They note that 'as much as fan objects are experienced in and through mediated texts, so are the very challenges of life in the twenty-first century' and suggest that 'perhaps the most important contribution of contemporary research into fan audiences thus lies in furthering our understanding of how we form emotional bonds with ourselves and others in a modern, mediated world' (2007, 10). One aspect of the third wave's analysis of fandom is its focus on anti-fandom and the 'darker' side of fan cultures.

Early work in the field focused on the positive aspects of fandom – the ways fans 'snatch[ed] back "our" popular cultural texts from the greedy global conglomerates who claim to own them' (Gwenllian-Jones 2003, 163), and the reasons why fans were not necessarily the 'geeks' living in their parents' basements that many media outlets had suggested they were. This was, as Jenkins noted, important work as much prior academic and cultural analysis of fans had focused on the negative (quoted in Harrison 1996, 274). However, much has changed since Jenkins was writing in the early 1990s; as media technologies have changed, so too have the ways fans interact with their objects of fandom as well as the ways that fandom is articulated. Zubernis and Larsen note:

The relationship between fans and the creative side, as well as the human representations of the fannish objects themselves, are increasingly reciprocal [...] Even more strikingly, the advent of Twitter, Facebook, and instant feedback ensures that the relationship between fans and creators is no longer unidirectional [...] The stars of the television have also delighted in solidifying the reciprocal relationship with fans, utilizing Facebook and Twitter to interact with fans and to publicize their own projects (2012, 14).

These interactions have the scope to be positive, negative, or somewhere in between. Increasingly, work is being done on the anti-fan 'who strongly dislike[s] a given text or genre, considering it inane, stupid, morally bankrupt and/or aesthetic drivel' (Gray 2003, 70), yet Gray's initial concept is far more nuanced than first theorised. Indeed, Gray himself accepts that the model initially proposed 'crudely lumps various practices, motivations, and affective positions into one big undifferentiated mass called the antifan' (forthcoming). The fans I examine in this article are not anti-fans in the sense that Gray initially conceived. However, they do engage in some anti-fannish, or toxic, practices in the way they engage with both subcultural celebrity on social media and other fans.

Much research has focused on interactions between fans and textual producers. Milner (2010) examines the relationship between fans of the *Fallout* games and Bethesda producers in online forums; Chin (2015) looks at the boundary-keeping practices fans utilise in their relationship with actor Orlando Jones; Johnson (2007) explores the 'fantagonism' between fans and producers of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Each of these case studies have

demonstrated the antagonism, toxicity, and sometimes hate that exists between fans and those involved in creating a beloved text. In this article, however, I am interested in the relationship between fans of *The Walking Dead* and fanboy entrepreneur and paratextual producer James Frazier. Frazier is owner and CEO of Fan Fest companies, which runs the fan conventions Walker Stalker and Heroes and Villains Fan Fest, as well as the Fan Fest News website. Separate accounts exist on Twitter for each of the Fan Fest properties, but Frazier has an active personal social media presence through which he shares updates about his family and demonstrates his own fannishness, as well as sharing information about Walker Stalker conventions, hosting Q&As, and responding to fans. Frazier's online presence enables fans to engage with him directly, and his engagement with fans – replying to questions, liking tweets, and retweeting or quoting posts – as well as his proximity to the cast and crew positions him as a subcultural celebrity (Chin and Hills 2008). It also, however, opens Frazier up to receiving more, and harsher, criticism from fans who disagree with changes implemented to the Walker Stalker convention.

In this article I focus on the conversations taking place on Twitter around the 2017 Walker Stalker London convention, particularly the changes made to the ticketing and queuing systems, and the prices charged at the 2018 London Walker Stalker following the 2017 Wales Comic Con at which several *Walking Dead* stars appeared. I suggest that fans' criticism of Frazier is a form of fantagonism but that Frazier's response functions as a twofold form of fanagement (Hills 2012). Matt Hills, discussing *Torchwood*, argues that

*Torchwood's* media tie-ins act as a sort of transmedia 'fanagement': responding to, and anticipating, fan criticisms, as well as catering for specific fractions of fandom who might otherwise be at odds with the unfolding brand, and attempting to draw a line under fan resistance to diegetic and production changes. Unlike 'fan-tagonism' (Johnson 2007) which symbolically disciplines fan practices by incorporating images of fandom into the TV text's diegesis, transmedia 'fanagement' appropriates fan readings in a similarly disciplining manner, but at a niche, paratextual level (2012, 410).

I argue that Frazier's approach to fans functions as a two-fold form of fanagement, responding to fan criticism as well as modelling what 'appropriate' fan/producer interactions should look like by both attempting to publicly police inappropriate fan behaviour and encouraging other fans to utilise their own policing tactics to keep these adversarial fans in line. I suggest that that the form of fanagement Frazier utilises with *Walking Dead* fans will extend across other fandoms as the role of fan entrepreneur develops and the lines of communication between fans and producers narrow.

## **Methodology**

I undertook an analysis of tweets posted to Twitter by Frazier as well as by fans responding to his posts. Despite arguments in the field of fan studies as to the ethics of quoting fans directly (Busse 2009; Busse and Hellekson 2012; Jones 2014), I approach Twitter as a public space (Markham and Buchanan, 2012) and have thus replicated fans' tweets verbatim. Given Frazier's consistent practice of quoting fans' tweets, I have not asked fans' permission to quote them (Jones 2016a); however, I have anonymised these tweets. The only Twitter handles quoted are those belonging to Frazier: @popatic and @JamesAFrazier.

Data was gathered for ten days after the announcement made by Frazier about pre-sale autographs at the 2017 Walker Stalker, and one week following the announcement of Lauren Cohan's attendance at the 2017 convention. Additionally, data was gathered for a four week period following the announcement by the Walker Stalker Convention Twitter account on 15 October 2017 that photo opportunities for London 2018 were available to purchase. By only analysing tweets posted by Frazier, those mentioning Frazier, or those quoted by Frazier, I am excluding any fan policing taking place among fans that didn't include, or stopped including, Frazier in the conversation. Similarly, by excluding Facebook groups – including those in which Frazier is not a member – I am excluding conversations that could prove fruitful for further research in this area. In this paper, however, I am particularly interested in those conversations that Frazier was involved in. I examine the role that the producer plays in the fanagement of fans, and how Frazier's tweeting practices affect and effect fan interactions and policing among fans. To that end, excluding conversations in which Frazier wasn't involved – either directly or indirectly – allows for a more nuanced understanding of the paratextual producer's role in toxic fandom.<sup>1</sup>

## **Consumer/Brand Interaction, Fantagonism and Celebrity Policing**

The first London Walker Stalker convention took place in 2016. Fans could buy tickets in advance at four levels, each with their own levels of access: General Admission, which provided admission to the convention; VIP, which gave attendees early admission to the con, a dedicated VIP celebrity and photo op line, and priority seating behind Gold and Platinum level ticketholders in panels; Gold, which included early admission to the con, a dedicated Gold celebrity and photo op line, two individual autographs and two individual photos, and priority seating in panels; and Platinum, which provided early admission to the con, a dedicated Platinum celebrity and photo op line, four individual autographs and four individual photos, premium seating in panels, and access to the green room for lunch. Fans could also buy photo opportunities with guests in advance, with autographs being bought at the convention itself. Fans queued to obtain autographs from stars, including Melissa McBride, Josh McDermitt, Michael Cudlitz, and Norman Reedus, with waiting times anywhere from fifteen minutes to over eight hours, depending on the type of ticket bought.

At other conventions, such as London Film and Comic Con, a virtual ticket system is in place. This allows fans to take a numbered ticket for the celebrity they wish to meet and

spend time visiting the convention rather than waiting in line. Periodic checks back to the celebrity's table allows fans to see what numbers the celebrity is currently meeting, and if the fan's number is displayed in the range, they can then queue. This enables fans to experience the convention rather than spending hours waiting to meet one person.

This process was not in place at Walker Stalker, and as a result some fans who had queued on Saturday to meet the in-demand guests were given priority on Sunday, and fans who were attending on Sunday were turned away from those celebrities' tables as a result. The queueing system was one of the key concerns for fans attending the 2017 convention and was the subject of numerous tweets to Frazier. Initially Frazier responded to fans, stating that the 2017 con would work on a virtual ticket system but later confirmed that autographs would be pre-sold prior to the convention, in a similar way to photo opportunities. This announcement resulted in numerous tweets to Frazier, with many fans adopting a fantagonistic approach. Johnson defines fantagonism as 'ongoing, competitive struggles between the both internal factions and external institutions to discursively codify the fan-text-producer relationship according to their respective interests' (2007, 287). As I have already suggested, Frazier, as owner and organiser of fan conventions that exist in a paratextual relationship with *The Walking Dead*, is a paratextual producer. I use this phrase in contrast to that of a textual producer, such as *Buffy's* Marti Noxon, whom Johnson identifies as subject to much fan hate. Yet the attitudes which many fans expressed were an attempt to alter the fan-event-producer relationship according to their interests. In the case of pre-selling autographs, many fans commented that they had bought VIP tickets purely in order to gain access to the priority queueing, which would allow them to, hopefully, meet the big name celebrities:

@popatic I bought VIP for a better chance of highly sought after autos. Not fair if these are now pre-sold and we're not fast enough to buy!

@popatic Im all for presale autos but I paid extra for vip to get closer in auto queues. Maybe let people know b4 they choose the tickets

These tweets can, of course, be read simply as consumer/business interactions, with fans approaching Frazier's personal Twitter account because he is the prominent CEO of the convention, rather than tweeting the Walker Stalker convention account. These tweets are also not unusual in the context of a convention gone wrong. Wales Comic Con, which took place at Glyndŵr University in December 2017, saw fans complain on Facebook and Twitter about hour-long delays on Saturday; Fyre Festival, a music festival, which was due to take place in the Bahamas in April 2017 but was cancelled after guests had begun to arrive, saw several million dollar lawsuits served, and one of its organisers arrested for fraud; and DashCon, a convention for Tumblr users, saw a multitude of social media posts and memes circulated after allegations of mismanagement by the organisers and a last-minute demand for additional payment by the hotel in 2014. Each of these examples illustrates the role that

social media plays in consumer/business interactions. Tripp and Grégoire (2011) note that the emergence of social media has empowered many customers, who may not have complained prior to social media, to complain online in order to receive compensation or vent their frustration, and Ibrahim et al. point out that '[c]ustomers' dissatisfaction, unhappy experiences and venting frustrations discussed on the social media can spread much faster and wider than other media platforms, which may seriously damage the brand image' (2017, 332). Furthermore, Eric D. Boyd et al. (2014) introduce consumer brand empowerment as a critical factor which mediates the relationship between a consumer's 'social network participation and their desired brand experience. Consumer brand empowerment is a consumer's perceived influence over the brand attitudes of other consumers in an online social network resulting from the consumer's exchange of brand information in the network' (2014, 518). The influence of consumers in relation to Walker Stalker is complicated by Frazier's involvement in the brand and indeed the development of his own personal brand.

Frazier's self-positioning is a marked contrast to other convention owners. While the owners of Wales Comic Con, for example, provide their affiliation to the organisation in their Twitter profiles, they rarely share information about the convention on their personal accounts. Frazier, by contrast, positions himself as what I refer to as a fanboy entrepreneur. I take this term from Scott's notion of the fanboy auteur who, she argues, is 'a creator/figurehead of a transmedia franchise who attempts to navigate and break the conventional boundaries between producers and consumers' (2012, 44). Van de Goor elaborates on this, noting that the role of the fanboy auteur is to '[guide] the audience through the right steps of engaging with and consuming a particular media text. In other words, the fanboy auteur engages with the fans and establishes boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable practice and meaning' (2015, 290). While Frazier does not lead fans through the right steps of engaging with a text, as such, he does articulate the ways in which fans should respond to him as a *Walking Dead* fan and owner of Walker Stalker and to the convention itself. The tagline of the Walker Stalker convention is 'by fans, for fans', and Frazier identifies as a fan of *The Walking Dead* as well as other media properties. He also repeatedly points out that Walker Stalker was created because he was a fan of the show and that fans should let him know if they feel that ethos changes (**Figure 1**).



**Figure 1:** Tweet from Frazier expressing his fandom

By declaring his fandom as well as highlighting the ways Walker Stalker has enabled him to become a well-known convention organiser (hosting panels at other conventions and spending time with *The Walking Dead* stars, Frazier is positioned as a 'Big Name Fan', that is a fan 'who [has] attained a wide degree of recognition in the community, and so who [is] known to others via subcultural mediation without personally knowing all those other subcultural participants' (Hills 2006, 104). Andrea MacDonald (1998) suggests that the subcultural status of the Big Name Fan can be achieved through hierarchies of knowledge, fandom level/quality, access, leaders, and venue (137-138).

Frazier is at the top of the hierarchy in three out of these five areas: he takes part in 'socially organized subcultural activities' (Hills 2006, 105); has 'direct access to actors, producers of the show, production personnel, and in some rare cases, actual shooting of episodes' (MacDonald 1998, 137); and owns a large organisation focussed on running conventions around the world.<sup>2</sup> Hills points out that the hierarchy of venue 'regards who has gate-keeping control over a venue of discussion, whether this is a face-to-face meeting at a fans' home, or an online discussion group' (2006, 105). Frazier certainly maintains control over Walker Stalker, which functions as a venue of discussion, and while it is difficult to control fans on Twitter, he does attempt gate-keeping in different forms on the platform. Frazier has attained a position near the top of the fandom hierarchy, given his ownership of Walker Stalker and involvement in the show (as an extra) and various podcasts. The convention's tagline – and Frazier's assertions of fandom – does, however, become the focal point for fans angry at the changes made to the convention.

Among the four categories of posts that Milner (2010) identified in his analysis of fan/producer relationships in *Fallout* forums were those he termed 'antagonistic/adversarial' and 'cynical/jaded':



**Figure 2:** adversarial tweets directed at Frazier

*Antagonistic/adversarial* posts set Bethesda and fans in opposition, with fans disparaging Bethesda’s ability to produce a quality game. *Cynical/jaded* posters were evidently so discouraged about the possibility of *Fallout 3* having any integrity that they saw no hope for the situation at all (733).

Although Milner examines textual integrity and describes the tactics that fans used to advocate text integrity, these responses can be mapped onto fan reactions to Frazier’s tweets. Antagonistic or adversarial tweets were heavily critical of Frazier’s handling of the changes as well as the changes themselves (**Figure 2**). Frazier responded to one of these by stating that as a fan he would not want to stand in line all day and miss the rest of the convention, thus drawing on his own fandom to support to changes made to the organisation of the convention.



**Figure 3:** tweets to Frazier regarding price increases



These adversarial posts became more common following Wales Comic Con, which took place in December 2017. Several of *The Walking Dead* stars, including Michael Cudlitz, Ross Marquand, and Steven Ogg, appeared at Wales Comic Con, with autograph, selfie, and photo op prices significantly cheaper than at Walker Stalker. Fans on Twitter circulated price comparisons demonstrating that a photo opportunity with Michael Cudlitz at Walker Stalker 2018 would cost £91.89 it cost £37.80 at Wales Comic Con. Fans took to Twitter to question Frazier about the difference in price, with tensions running higher when photo opportunity prices for Walker Stalker London 2018 were announced and were higher than previous years (**Figure 3**).

In addition to the antagonistic tweets, however, the cynical or jaded responses that Milner refers to also became more common but typically referred to how much money Frazier was making from Walker Stalker (**Figure 4**). Several explicitly referred to the 'for fans, by fans' motto and argued that Walker Stalker could no longer claim such a tagline.

For these fans, it was clear that Frazier was exploiting *The Walking Dead* fanbase in order to ensure that Walker Stalker would continue to bring in profits. Despite Frazier's assertion that it was the guest and their agents who set the prices, not Walker Stalker or Frazier himself, fans continued to criticise him for the disparity. Tensions rose within the fandom between Frazier and the fans who were critical of him, as well as between fans criticising Frazier and fans who supported him and Walker Stalker. These were sometimes fuelled by Frazier responding to critical fans by quoting their tweet, making it visible for the fandom to see.

### **Fanagement and Intra-Fandom Policing**

The practice of quoting a tweet in order to respond is not new nor is it limited to Frazier himself. Van de Goor notes:

Knowledge of acceptable practice in a specific, digital community is in the first place structured by the technical and administrative rules and regulations of the website, which provide a relatively measurable way of maintaining order [...] Additionally, there are unwritten rules of conventional practice that help set and guard the imagined boundaries of a community. (2015, 276)

The practice of responding to a tweet by quoting it in the body of a new tweet is an acceptable practice on Twitter and is a process that Frazier uses to respond to a multitude of questions and comments, including questions on convention announcements, how his day has been, and what he thinks of *The Walking Dead*. Jenkins (1992) outlines three tactics that producers use to respond to fans: producers can offer support to fans, show them contempt, or supervise them. Much like the tactics Milner outlined, each can be mapped on to Frazier's tweets. Jenkins uses these three tactics in relation to productive fans – that is, fans creating transformative works. But they can also be applied to a range of fans



**Figure 4:** tweets expressly referring to the 'for fans, by fans' tagline in response to Wales Comic Con prices

undertaking different fan practices. As Milner notes, these three tactics ‘are worth renewed consideration in an age of increased communication between fans and producers – communication that comes with increased consequences for both parties’ (2010, 725).

The support tactic ‘seems to be increasingly popular as producers realize the enormous market potential of fans. There is something symbiotic in producers supporting fans, so that fans can support producers’ (Milner 2010, 725). Frazier demonstrates support through responding to fans’ comments and questions about his day, as well as occasionally offering fans free tickets to conventions and other perks. He does this often by following and direct-messaging fans, and mentioning them in public tweets with the exhortation to keep the contents of the DM a secret. I discussed the contempt tactic earlier in this article and suggested that Frazier rarely demonstrates outright contempt for fans. Milner suggests that ‘[p]roducers who respond to fans with contempt are not concerned about a damaged status-relationship between the two parties, or at least see a reason to justify such damages’ (2010, 726). The occasions during which Frazier appears to show contempt, while few and far between, appear to receive support from other fans. One such example came when a fan criticised the line-up of guests for Walker Stalker Atlanta 2017, arguing that there were too few *Walking Dead* guests while other cities got many more. Frazier’s response to this tweet was supported by other fans (**Figure 5**).



**Figure 5:** fan support for Frazier in response to ‘contemptuous’ fan tweets

This demonstrates that Frazier maintains a positive relationship with most fans. Those who are overly critical of the convention have, from Frazier’s point of view, already damaged their relationship with him; thus, he is not concerned about a damaged status-relationship.

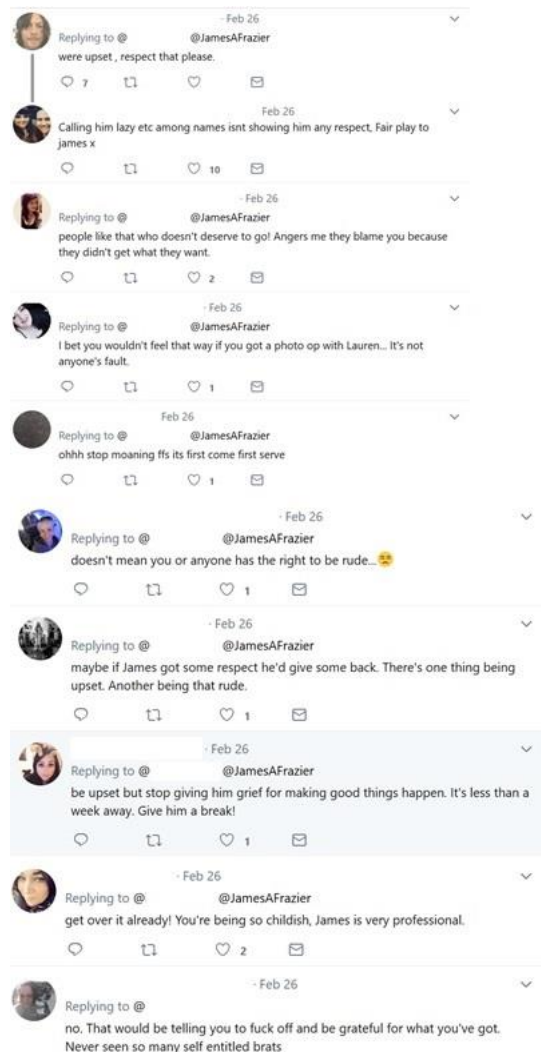
The responses that I am most interested in, however, are those that Jenkins terms supervision. He argues, ‘In extreme cases, producers try to bring fan activities under their supervision’ and cites the example of Lucasfilm, who ‘threatened to prosecute editors who published works that violated the “family values” associated with the original films’ (1992, 31). Supervisory tactics have become more common with the advent of Web 2.0 and social media, and Milner notes how these tactics appear to be ‘a common middle ground, acknowledging and enlisting the support of productive consumers, while attempting to maintain legal and cultural ownership of official texts, or even sometimes fan-produced ones. This can create a cooperative, yet hegemonic, fan-producer status-relationship’ (2010, 726). Supervision, as previously referred to, relates to fannish transformative works, but I

argue that Frazier's quoting of fan tweets also functions to supervise fans, reinforce 'good' fan behaviour while criticising 'bad' fans, and recruit 'good' fans into the policing process.

As I have done with other theories utilised in this paper, I am applying the concept to a paratextual producer and his social media presence, rather than any sort of textual property. Thus I argue that Frazier does not appropriate fan readings, as much as pinpoint particularities of fan behaviour and highlight them to other fans in a disciplinary manner. Fans should treat Frazier, the convention, and the guests, with respect. Those who do not are admonished publicly. Van de Goor draws parallels between Scott's fanboy auteur and 'the reinforcing practices within fan communities as led by dominant fans, admins, mods and anonymous comments' (2015, 290), arguing that this is used to establish boundaries such as knowledge, morality, and aesthetics. This creates a community that operates, according to Sandvoss, 'in terms of a "policed set of beliefs"' (2011, 60) or, in van de Goor's concept, according to 'shared assumptions visible through practice' (2015, 291).

Discussion of 'good' and 'bad' fan behaviour has been theorised in academia predominantly through a gendered lens. Bury (2005) discusses the ways in which fans distinguished themselves from undesired behaviour by displaying calm, rational behaviour. Bennett (2013) analyses R.E.M. fans who are thought by other members of the fandom incapable of 'rational' and 'respectful' discussion. Hills (2012) examines the dismissal of female *Twilight* fans by a predominantly male comic convention audience. How different are these emotionally charged, gendered responses to the criticisms of Frazier's changes to Walker Stalker? And how different are these 'bad' fan practices to those of fans criticising Frazier? Busse notes that underlying the analysis of 'negatively connoted fannish activities [as] specifically female [...] is a gender binary that identifies certain behaviors as masculine or feminine, with the former usually connoting active, intellectual, aggressive, and objective, and the latter, passive, emotional, sensitive, and subjective' (2013, 74). Emotion is acceptable for Frazier – he does, after all, identify as a fanboy – provided it is a specific kind of emotion. Aggression aimed at him or convention guests is 'bad' behaviour; subjective statements are allowed as long as they are positive. Frazier thus models the kind of behaviour he expects from fans and the interactions he values in the fandom. Acting as a 'moderator' within the Walker Stalker fandom (Scott 2016), Frazier oversees communication models the kinds of communication that are acceptable. To that end, the argument could be made that he 'abus[es his] empowered status' to police fans that he 'determine[s] violate community standards and norms' (Scott 2016, np).

A further policing takes place intra-fandom between the factions of Walker Stalker attendees who support Frazier and those who criticise him. Using Frazier's tweets as a springboard, a sizeable proportion of fans responded to the tweeters he quoted. These responses ranged from aggressive to admonishing, but each was designed to police fans who stepped beyond the community norms expressed and approved by Frazier (**Figure 6**).



**Figure 6:** a range of tweets from fans to those who criticised Frazier

These intra-fandom tensions were created, and fuelled, by the policing tweets that Frazier posted. By highlighting the tweets he felt were disrespectful or rude, Frazier was able to mobilise fans into responding and policing the behaviour, some of which was simply fans expressing disappointment with changes implemented to the convention rather than criticising Frazier himself. This policing resulted in some fans apologising to Frazier (**Figure 7**). Not only did fans admonish those who evidenced the ‘wrong’ reaction; they also congratulated those who got it right (**Figure 8**).

**Figure 7:** a fan apologises to Frazier for being rude. **Figure 8:** a tweet congratulating a fan for the ‘right’ response



Stanfill notes that “[i]nternalized stereotypes about bad fans and the need to define oneself as appropriate leads to the production and maintenance of boundaries” (2013, 122). The responses to Frazier outlined above functioned as a form of ‘border-policing’ (Busse 2013) as fans attempted to distinguish themselves from those criticising Frazier and Walker Stalker. Busse argues that fans ‘border police on two fronts, excluding both those not enough and those too much invested in the fannish object or practices’ (2013, 84). For those tweeting about Walker Stalker, the border was drawn between fans who were critical of Frazier and those who supported him. Frazier’s practice of quoting fans, as I have outlined, served as a form of fanagement through encouraging fans to police other fannish behaviour. Although it is difficult to determine why Frazier chose to quote some tweets over others without speaking to him, he is a savvy user of social media and some of the tweets he quoted, which led fans to criticise others, appear to have been quoted out of context (figure 9).

This fan was not accusing Frazier of sending her hate; her earlier tweet is aimed at fans of Frazier who have been sending accusatory tweets. The tweet is a plea to those fans to stop that behaviour, not a comment at Frazier himself. However, of the two tweets posted, Frazier chose to quote the one that suggested he had been sending hate her way. For someone as aware of their social media presence as James, it is difficult to read this as anything other than an attempt fanagement and the encouragement of a toxic fan practice.

It is not just Walker Stalker fans whom Frazier singles out, however. Scott, talking about *The Talking Dead* and host Chris Hardwick, points out, ‘Though Hardwick and the panels of “celebrity superfan” guests do indulge in fannish responses to the text (expressing shock or dismay around particular plot developments, giddily discussing favorite characters, and so on), this vision of “fan talk” is one that is designed to model reverence for the text, creators, and performers, and stress affirmational, rather than transformative, modes of fan engagement’ (2014, np). Similarly, Frazier engages in this affirmational mode of fannish engagement, to the point where he publicly calls out fan group The Spoiling Dead for sharing a leaked script (Figure 10).



Figure 9: a fan's tweet taken out of context and quoted by Frazier



Figure 10: Frazier criticising *The Spoiling Dead* on Twitter

Frazier's tweets also functioned to encourage other *Walking Dead* fans to criticise The Spoiling Dead not only by responding to Frazier but by including The Spoiling Dead Fans' Twitter handle in their tweets (Figure 11).

Frazier thus performs a form of fanagement both against fans who gave the 'wrong' reaction to his tweets and the changes implemented to Walker Stalker and to other creators who perform the 'wrong' kind of fandom.

## Conclusion

I began this paper by suggesting that much scholarship has focused on the increasingly complex interactions between fans and textual producers, specifically fans and producers,

and fans and other fans. While work on anti-fandom has been increasing, given the realisation that the way we interact has, and will continue, to change dramatically, I suggested that this focus on fans and actors, showrunners, writers, and producers



**Figure 11:** Fan responses to Frazier’s tweets about *The Spoiling Dead*

nevertheless fails to account for interactions with others involved in cultural production. By analysing the interaction between fanboy entrepreneur and paratextual producer, James Frazier, I have demonstrated that fan/producer interactions, while involving ‘fantagonism’, are more complex than has hitherto been theorised, with multiple levels of toxic fan practices at work in fan/producer, producer/fan, and fan/fan interactions. Indeed, these interactions become more and more complex as Big Name Fans become semi-professional, operating at the border of fans and production. Frazier’s self-positioning as a fan and his performance as a fan in relation to criticisms of Walker Stalker further complicate the dynamic. Walker Stalker, because of Frazier’s prominence, is not simply a faceless organisation taking fans’ money and providing nothing beyond an experience in return. Frazier identifies as part of the fandom, and the perceived poor treatment of fellow fans by someone in the same fan community, who has the same emotional engagement with the object of fandom, causes wider issues. Fans, with the increasing affordances of social media, are able to interact with and send feedback to producers in multiple ways. Fans who were displeased with changes implemented to the 2017 Walker Stalker London convention and the difference in price between Walker Stalker and Wales Comic Con used the tools at their disposal to criticise Frazier and express their displeasure. These tweets, although not toxic per se, used a range of tactics to criticise, police, or support Frazier. Among those showing



support, however, were simultaneous expressions of anger towards fans whom Frazier – and the fandom – perceived to have broken the rules of ‘good’ fannish behaviour.

Had fans taken umbrage with an organisation which had little emotional engagement with *The Walking Dead*, it is highly unlikely that intra-fandom disagreements would have broken out. Milner asks if ‘in an era where direct communication between fans and producers is possible, *how* fans are communicated with might alter how *they* communicate themselves’ (2010, 736, italics in original). While Milner talks about fans communicating with producers, I argue that this also applies to fans communicating with and policing other fans, particularly where the producer is a Big Name Fan. If producers communicate with fans by holding specific tweets up as examples of how not to engage, then is it more likely that these fans will subsequently turn on fans acting in ‘inappropriate’ ways? Are fans more likely to police themselves when faced with examples of the kind of behaviour the fannish celebrity abhors? In some ways, the case study I have discussed suggests that the answer to both questions is yes. Fans, motivated by Frazier’s quoted tweets, criticised fans whom they perceived as being toxic and posted scores of tweets criticising that behaviour, at times enacting their own toxic behaviours back in the process. Some of the criticised fans responded by deleting their initial tweets while others apologised to Frazier. The tactics that Frazier used to manage these fans’ behaviour involved support, contempt, and supervision, at times using each on the same fan. As Milner notes of the Bethesda employees encountered in his research on *Fallout* fans, ‘This furthered ambiguities in the relationship between producers and fans. Exploring the multiplicity of unique (and often contradictory) types of interaction *Fallout* producers demonstrated on the forum may give us a more nuanced understanding of fan–producer interaction in an era of digital-connectivity’ (Milner 2010, 736). In his study, Milner notes:

It is interesting, though, that the most contemptuous of producer posts were at worst similar to some of the more hostile communication styles fans adopted themselves. This may speak to the higher stakes and standards producers were required to have when relating to the public that consumed their product (2010, 736).

The same is true of Frazier’s interactions. Although none of the fan tweets analysed in the course of this research was overly aggressive or toxic, Frazier’s responses to these were on a par with some of the more hostile fan tweets. Unlike Bethesda employees, however, Frazier is his own boss and thus not beholden to specific guidelines on fan interactions or necessarily higher stakes or standards. Toxic fandom, in the case of the Walker Stalker convention, thus worked in three separate ways, between fan and (paratextual) producer, producer and fan, and fan and fan, and in some ways was emboldened by Frazier’s fanagement practices. In particular, through his fanagement practices, Frazier was able to shift the focus of the consumer/business dynamic away from criticisms of Walker Stalker and towards the expectations, negotiations, and good policing of fans.

### **Biographical note:**

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## Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> As a member of a Walker Stalker London Facebook group, I was privy to conversations taking place about the pre-sales, Lauren Cohan's attendance, and Wales Comic Con prices. Anecdotally, I witnessed fan policing taking place within the group and on Twitter, as fans on both platforms

shared their responses to Frazier and to fans criticising him. These conversations have not been included in this article but would make for an interesting addition to future research.

<sup>2</sup> As host of The Walker Stalkers podcast Frazier is undoubtedly knowledgeable about the show; however, he rarely evidences his knowledge of the series on Twitter, hence the exclusion of this category.