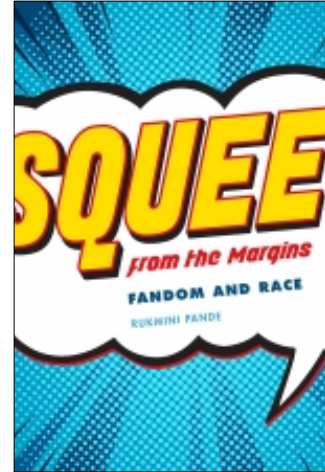


Rukmini Pande, ***Squee from the Margins: Fandom and Race***, Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 2018, 256 pp., \$67.50 (paperback).

Reviewed by
Jacqueline Johnson
University of Southern California, USA

In 1992, the year that many scholars in fan studies regard as the birth of the discipline, John Fiske framed his elision of race as a critical access of inquiry in media fandom as an unfortunate byproduct of circumstances outside of his control, stating that he regretted “being unable to devote the attention to race which it deserves, but [he] ha[d] not found studies of non-white fandom” (p. 32). Over 25 years after the publication of Fiske’s research, as well as foundational scholarship by Camille Bacon-Smith (1992) and Henry Jenkins (1992), fan studies scholars are still having difficulty producing work attentive to the ways that race structures participation in media fandom. In her book, ***Squee from the Margins: Fandom and Race***, Rukmini Pande tackles what she terms the “glaring absence” of race in fan studies (p. xii). To do so, Pande adopts the position of the “fandom killjoy.” Building on the pivotal work of Sara Ahmed (2010) and her theorization of the “feminist killjoy,” Pande positions herself as a figure that ruptures the joyful table of fan studies. At the core of Pande’s text is her desire to trouble the very foundation of fan studies; rather than understand Whiteness as incidental, Pande positions it as a primary structuring force within both media fandom spaces and the field of fan studies itself. Further, she articulates that by identifying Whiteness’s primary role in fandom, we disrupt many of the underlying logics of the field, especially those that define fandom spaces as inherently progressive and resistant to dominant cultural formations.



Pande structures *Squee from the Margins* into five chapters that each demonstrate how race has always been a part of fandom and the ways that fans of color have participated throughout its history. In addition to conducting close analysis of many online fandom spaces, Pande conducts interviews with fans of color about their experiences in a variety of media fandoms from *Smallville* (WB, 2001–2006; CW, 2006–2011) to *Glee* (FOX, 2009–2015). In her first chapter, Pande rehistoricizes moments in fandom’s (recent) history to illustrate the ways in which overtly racialized events, like Race Fail ’09, could and should be understood as critical points in media fandom’s history. Notably, Pande also discusses that many of her respondents cited anime and manga fandoms as being crucial introductory sites to their broader participation in fan communities (pp. 37–38). If fan studies had started with manga as its source text as opposed to *Star Trek*, how might the field’s engagement with race differ? Pande pushes us to consider again that Whiteness can only remain central and understated when scholars and fans continue to let it structure both communities and research about said communities. Pande’s first chapter is likely of interest to media historians as well as fan studies scholars and fans themselves. Chapter 2 of this book introduces readers to Pande’s core theoretical framework. Building on a range of scholars across disciplines, especially postcolonial theory and cybercultural theory, Pande pushes for us to consider media fandom as a “postcolonial cyberspace” (p. 57–58). This formulation allows for attentiveness to the

diversity of fan communities, the use of fannish platforms, and perhaps most critically, dislocates the West (or more aptly the United States and the United Kingdom) as the center of all fan activity.

Next, in her third chapter, Pande looks at multiple fan practices that productively demonstrate the contours of race and fandom. First, Pande discusses fan activism around race and casting beginning with the contentious casting of White actors to play the roles of the protagonists in M. Night Shyamalan's 2010 adaptation of the popular cartoon *Avatar: the Last Airbender* (Nickelodeon, 2005–2008). She then moves to what she positions as undertheorized fan works, meta and headcanons, and illustrates how fans of color have used these spaces to make race and ethnicity more central parts of fandom.

Chapter 4 takes the time to tease out Pande's core argument that a focus on race troubles the underlying assumptions that construct both the governing logics of media fandom spaces as well as fan studies scholarship. Using Lisa Nakamura's (2013) idea of "glitch racism," which articulates that racism online is largely seen as a glitch or malfunction in a system rather than a defining feature, Pande constructs her own theorization of the "fandom algorithm." The fandom algorithm refers to "the structures that are seen to order the working of media fandom, both in terms of communitarian etiquettes and technical strategies that involve fannish digital infrastructure" (p. 116). Pande identifies five fandom algorithms in total, the fourth of which, "Fandom and Escapism," I would like to explore a bit more in depth. Pande argues that fandom is frequently seen as a "safe space" where fans whose involvement in a media text deemed to have little cultural value have the opportunity to create community. However, as Pande points out, since these spaces are seen as escapist, when issues of race, ethnicity, and discrimination are brought to the fore, critics are often charged with ruining everyone's fun (p. 136). I think Pande's insight here identifies one of the myriad places that fan studies can more productively speak to scholarship on fandom in music and sports. As it currently stands, media fandom studies (that grew out of scholarship on *Star Trek*) has arguably missed opportunities to integrate research on music and sports fans, which are both areas in which research has historically been much more attentive to issues of race, ethnicity, and nation, as well as gender. Pande closes her book with a productive case study that ties together earlier threads of her analysis.

Pande's final chapter is centrally concerned with fandom and pleasure through an analysis of the fanfiction kink meme. Pande turns to the kink meme because it provides a productive site to analyze how women understand and approach pleasure, which has long been the purview of fan studies scholarship. However, an analysis of the kink meme also illustrates the ways in which a focus on race exposes some of the frictions endemic to this space, and further, how notions of pleasure and sexiness are raced as well as gendered (p. 184). Pande pushes readers to consider the urgency of using intersectional approaches to studying media fandom.

Throughout the book, Pande shows a clear command of the foundational and recent scholarship in the field of fan studies and deftly weaves in literature from other areas of media studies where critical race scholarship has been more present. Her writing style is informative and clear, with appropriate explanations for events specific to certain fan communities. This makes the text accessible to both fans and scholars of not only media fandom, but also scholars doing work in gender and sexuality, critical race theory, and media history. While the breadth of literature Pande draws on for her own research is helpful

in orienting the reader and makes the case for the urgency of her intervention, the amount of space dedicated to this endeavor left less room for key insights from Pande's ethnographic work. The interview data from Pande's research participants provides readers with a more robust understanding about how Whiteness has structured fandom and affected individual fan's participation in ways that really animate the importance of her work. In her conclusion, Pande discusses the concept of the "aca-fan" (academic and fan), and discusses how much of her own journey in having to be the "killjoy" who brought up race structured her experience as both a fan and as an academic. Truly, Pande's book could not have come at a better time. As the field of fan studies currently grapples with its persistent omissions and silences, Pande shows us how to position race as foundational at the outset.

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