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“GILLIAN ANDERSON MADE ME GAY:” THE CASE OF THE *X-FILES* LESBIANS

by

SAMANTHA HOWAT

Under the Direction of Wendy Simonds PhD

ABSTRACT

The “*X-Files*” lesbians are an online community of lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, and queer (LBPQ) women who attribute the science fiction show and its lead actress, Gillian Anderson, with the discovery of their sexual orientation. Despite her character Dana Scully’s heterosexuality and that the show features no LGBT+ characters, the claim that “Gillian Anderson made me gay” has been a consistent argument made by women in the broader *X-Files* fan community since the show began airing in the 1990s. I have examined this phenomenon to demonstrate how much television can influence and aid with the construction of female sexuality. Additionally, I have studied the role media plays in identity formation. I collected data via a survey distributed to LBPQ *X-Files* fans on the blogging website tumblr. I conclude that the online community, the show’s treatment of gender roles, and having a space to interact without heterosexuals all contribute to this phenomenon.

INDEX WORDS: Lesbians, Sexual identity development, *The X-Files*

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SAMANTHA HOWAT

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

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Samantha Howat
2020

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

"What is it with every single x-files fan being a lesbian?"¹ One user poses this question to another on the blogging site tumblr. The response simply reads: "Gillian Anderson blue latex catsuit 90s."² This post refers to a 1996 FHM magazine photoshoot featuring Anderson wearing, indeed, a blue latex catsuit. Unfortunately, the answer is likely not that simple. As the question states, there are indeed a great deal of lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, and queer (LBPQ) women who are fans of *The X-Files*, particularly of Anderson and her character, Dana Scully. In recent years, these women (as well as some gender non-conforming individuals) have given themselves the title of "*X-Files* lesbians," and I will use this term throughout. Many of these women credit Scully and Anderson with helping them discover their sexual orientation.

I first observed this phenomenon on the blogging website tumblr, which is home to many different fan groups, known as "fandoms." As an avid "fangirl" of the science fiction and paranormal genres, I have been very aware of *The X-Files* fandom's presence on the site for some time. Before beginning this thesis, I followed the blogs of many *X-Files* lesbians and saw posts relating to Gillian Anderson/Dana Scully and being LBPQ such as the example that became my title.³ Many of the bloggers are friends with each other and frequently interact due to their shared interests and sexual orientation, but they interact even more when it comes to their favorite show. Many of their screen names are in some way related to Anderson, *The X-Files*,

¹ All quotes from tumblr are presented as originally written for authenticity. Additionally, I will not capitalize tumblr blog names, as they are stylized in all lowercase letters on the website.

² thexfiles' tumblr page. 2015. Accessed July 25, 2017 (<http://thexfiles.tumblr.com/post/130020034240/what-is-it-with-every-single-x-files-fan-being-a>).

³ ceremonials2011's tumblr page. 2015. Accessed February 25, 2020. (<https://ceremonials2011.tumblr.com/post/122398537955/gillian-anderson-made-me-gay>)

lesbians, or a combination of the three. Posts like, "and on the eighth day god created gillian anderson and said, 'let there be gays!'"⁴ are common. Other posts reference the *X-Files* lesbians as a community, such as "anyone else love the love between the x files lesbians??"⁵ This phenomenon isn't just isolated to modern-day bloggers. Comedic actor Kate McKinnon has credited Anderson for her "lesbian awakening" on multiple occasions (Douglas 2016; Autostraddle 2009). Despite the fact that the show's lesbian following has existed since the original run, research focused on the female fans of Scully/Anderson has been sparse. However, her "sizeable LGBTQ fanbase" has been noted in passing by Geller (2016:101) and in magazine articles on Anderson (Hicklin 2012). Her connection to lesbian fans has also been a topic of interviews. In a 2014 appearance on *Alan Carr: Chatty Man*, Carr informs her that she is "turning Britain lezzie" (Howe). In 2002, Graham Norton remarked to her with surprise that, "the lesbians do love you, they just adore you" (Norton). Anderson smiles and responds: "Yes, and?"

The X-Files has continuously been a significant part of pop culture since it first hit the zeitgeist, as evidenced by numerous homage episodes and references within dialogue on current shows like *Supernatural* (Vogt 2010) and *Bones* (Roffman 2013). It is also one of the first shows to "flourish" online (Lavery et al. 1998:20), as fans "used cyberspace to create their own virtual culture" around it (Mclean 2001:3). The cult classic has had a resurgence in the public eye in recent years, with short revival seasons in 2016 and 2018 on the FOX network.

⁴ gillianlesbian's tumblr page. 2016. Accessed July 25, 2017 (<http://gillianlesbian.tumblr.com/post/150482030997/and-on-the-eighth-day-god-created-gillian-anderson>).

⁵ gillianandersunflower's tumblr page. 2016. Accessed July 25, 2017 (<http://gillianandersunflower.tumblr.com/post/150948520983/anyone-else-love-the-love-between-the-x-files>).

Of course, there is one factor that makes the lesbian following all the more surprising: the content of the show itself. For example, the plot revolves around two FBI agents investigating the paranormal and uncovering government conspiracies. Clearly, these are not the plots of shows typically aimed at an LGBT audience, such as dramas like *The L Word* or *Queer as Folk*. These shows can be expected to draw a large gay following since the plots center around the lives of LGBT characters. *The X-Files*, on the other hand, does not feature any explicitly LGBT characters, nor does it feature any characters who are not heterosexual. This fact, in particular, makes the lesbian following unusual; I aim to uncover why this following exists.

It is important to note that Anderson herself has stated that she has had relationships with women (Hicklin 2012). She was asked in 2015 if she would ever again have a same-sex relationship, to which she responded, “I wouldn’t discount it. I did it before and I’m not closed to that idea. To me a relationship is about loving another human being; their gender is irrelevant” (Woods). However, she has never officially labeled herself as LGBT in the public eye. This revelation was announced many years after *The X-Files* was off the air. Additionally, this was also revealed after Anderson had already cultivated an LGBT following during the show’s original run.

The X-Files is still an immensely popular show, with a fanbase large and vocal enough to influence a major company to revive the show. Clearly, this cult classic is still impacting society. The research on *The X-Files*’ fan communities, as well as its connection to women’s sexuality, is limited. Heterosexual women fans’ relationship to the show’s male characters has been studied (Clerc 1996; Bury 2005), but there has been no research on LBPQ women fans. The influence the show and its fandom have had on LBPQ fans needs to be examined to complete the puzzle, especially since this is not the typical kind of show that draws such a following. The results will

demonstrate how much television can influence and aid with the construction of female sexuality. It will also provide insight into how young LBPQ women in modern times are discovering and coming to terms with their sexuality, particularly within online groups. On a broader level, it will help us learn the role media plays in identity formation.

1.2 Literature Review

Sarah Wakefield's "Your Sister in St. Scully" is the only published work featuring an in-depth look at women Scully/Anderson fans, although without a primary focus on sexual orientation. There is slightly more research on the David Duchovny Estrogen Brigade (DDEB) for women fans of Scully's FBI partner, Fox Mulder, but that line of inquiry is generally not applicable to my research, other than in terms of studying women in fandom in general (Clerc 1996; Bury 2005). I will discuss similar articles on *X-Files* fandom, as well as research on women's presence in other cult television fandoms. In this literature review, I will also touch on Scully's unique role on the show, as Wakefield's work shows that it will play a part in answering my research questions. Connections will be made to research on gay identity development and to those who credit Anderson/Scully with their lesbian awakening. Finally, I will address research on the importance of online fan communities for women and how these spaces allow for more support and freedom than are afforded to them offline.

Wakefield primarily looks at the Order of the Blessed Saint Scully the Enigmatic (OBSSE), a pseudo-religious fan group centered around Scully (Wakefield 2001). OBSSE is an offshoot of the large "X-Philes" fandom that, at the time the article was written, had over 2,000 members (Wakefield 2001). At least 73% of the members were women, and 90% of active posters were women (Wakefield 2001). Wakefield identifies three constructions of Scully: as a saint, as an everywoman, and as a sexpot. The view of Scully as a sexpot is of particular interest.

There is a great deal of discussion among fans about Scully's physical appearance. The members of OBSSE are divided into several more groups based on their kind of attraction to Scully: Straight Women in Love With Scully (SWILS), Not-so-straight Straight Women in Love With Scully (NSWILS), and Gillian Anderson Born-Again Lesbians (GABAL) (Wakefield 2001). Wakefield then poses the question of whether these women want to be Scully or be *with* Scully (2001). The women Wakefield questioned about this "wanted it both ways," and said she (Wakefield) was "thinking too hard" about it (Wakefield 2001:135). It does seem that "wanting it both ways" is the case in Wakefield's study, and perhaps among the present-day *X-Files* lesbians as well. In contrast to the responses Wakefield received when trying to evaluate the relationship between attraction and idolization, the *X-Files* lesbians I have observed are generally very active in feminist and queer discourse, which leads me to believe they would be more receptive to such questions. Wakefield states that to understand this fan group, "one must look at how women imagine themselves, both personally and communally, to relate to each other" (Wakefield 2001:131). I will utilize this framework during my research, as the term "*X-Files* lesbian" is not only a personal label of identity but also refers to the community of all women who identify as such.

The role of gender on *The X-Files* is a popular topic of discussion within the media and fan communities (Clerc 1995; Wakefield 2001). The show has often been lauded for a groundbreaking reversal in traditional gender roles, as Mulder and Scully "refused both gender and sexual expectations" (Geller 2016: 83). Indeed, creator Chris Carter states that this was his intention. Typically, the woman would play the role of the believer: rash, unpractical, emotional, and commonly marginalized, and the man would be the logical, level-headed skeptic (Hess 1997). However, in *The X-Files*, Scully is a rational medical doctor who trusts science above all

else, while Mulder uncompromisingly believes in all things paranormal. Scully provides logical explanations to Mulder's "x-files" as he whisks her across the country in his quest for the truth. This unusual gender role reversal may be relevant to the *X-Files* lesbians, as it effectively "queers" traditional archetypes and rebels against the norm from the first episode.

Even though participants of Bury's research had a community based around Mulder/Duchovny, she found that "one of the primary sources of pleasure for the DDEBRP members was the character of Dana Scully." Her participants described Scully as "the most important, competent woman I had ever seen on a television show' and a female lead who wasn't a bimbo'" (Bury 43). Wakefield shows that OBSSE also acknowledges that they are aware that Scully is working in a "boy's club" and relish scenes of what the fans refer to as "Kickass!Scully," where she continues to challenge gender expectations (Wakefield 2001). On a similar note, many members of OBSSE identify with scenes of Scully dealing with gender inequality.

The view of Scully as an "everywoman" with whom women fans can identify recurs in other academic research (Clerc 1996; Geller 2016; Scodari and Felder 2000). Scodari and Felder studied the *X-Files* online fandom's engagement in shipping, which refers to the act of supporting Mulder and Scully's romantic relationship. They found that female shippers "relate to Scully as someone whose competence and intellect bolster her attractiveness"(Scodari and Felder 2000:248). Additionally, Scully's ability to hold her ground in the boy's club of the FBI "creates a space within the series" where women are able to speak, which Clerc believes has, in turn, created the space for a large number of women to participate in online *X-Files* communities (Clerc 1996:49). It seems many women fans feel they have something in common with Scully and feel empowered watching her at work.

In addition to OBSSE, some women have been influenced by Scully in other ways. Many women claim Scully as their scientist role model and inspiration for entering the STEM field. These claims have been dubbed “the Scully Effect.” Scientists in television and movies had previously been depicted as “nerds” in an undesirable field (Landers 2016). Scully's depiction is radically different: she doesn't dress in stereotypical “nerd” attire (no glasses, no unflattering clothing); she is not made fun of for being a scientist, and she is typically held in high regard by other characters. If the previous view of scientists brought “nerd” to mind, Scully could truly be considered “cool” in comparison. Members of both the cast and crew have shared anecdotal evidence of the Scully Effect. Anne Simon, the woman who ensured the science seen on *The X-Files* was accurate, shared her experience:

“I asked my class, this was probably in 1999, if anyone was influenced to be here by *The X-Files*. Two-thirds of the hands went up. I still get email [*sic*] from people who say that they read my book (*The Real Science Behind the X-Files: Microbes, Meteorites, and Mutants*) because they liked ‘The X-Files,’ someone bought the book for them, and then they couldn't put it down. And they say ‘I want to be a scientist now!’” (Landers 2016).

Anderson has made similar remarks:

“I was told quite frequently by girls who were going into the medical world or the science world or the FBI world or other worlds that I reigned, that they were pursuing those pursuits because of the character of Scully” (Vineyard 2013).

Lisa Parks writes with a feminist perspective on Scully as a scientist and also discusses Scully's influence on women's career choices. She references a discussion in an online group

entitled "I want to be like Scully when I grow up" which included comments from women inspired by the show's depiction of a woman scientist (Parks 1996). One comment that Parks shares is from a woman who drew inspiration from Scully while taking her doctoral exam. Another more detailed comment states: "Scully is the real strong character; the one who doesn't gag at blood or bodies, who wants to do her job as well as she can, who is ambitious without being self-centered, who has her feet planted on the ground" (Parks 1996:121).

In 2018, there was a formal study of the Scully Effect in a joint effort between 21st Century Fox, the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, and J. Walter Thompson Intelligence. A survey was given to two separate groups: a sample of women working in STEM fields, and then to women who are *X-Files* fans. The results were that women who regularly watched the show were significantly more likely to study and work in STEM. 50% of women reported that Scully "increased their interest in STEM" while 63% said that the character "increased their belief in the importance of STEM" (2018). 63% of the overall sample also claimed that Scully "increased their confidence that they could excel in a male-dominated profession," and 91% said that she is "a role model for girls and women." The study concludes that their findings support past research that has shown that "entertainment media is influential in shaping life choices" (2018). Based on this, it certainly seems that there is a connection between Scully/Anderson and women fans.

Marusia Bociurkiw provides insight into the construction of lesbian culture. She explains that, at the time of writing (1998:27), "lesbian culture remained almost underground" and that content was spread "by word of mouth." She references Claude Levi-Strauss' idea of "*bricolage*," defined as "the piecing-together of shreds of reflection and identity from scant sources available; the bending of meaning to her purpose" (Bociurkiw 1998:28). It seems that this might be just

what the *X-Files* lesbians have done. Despite there being a more accessible lesbian culture in present times, they have built a community based on their sexuality and have assigned their own meanings to the show to support their narrative. As Andrea MacDonald states, women-dominated groups within fandoms "take that popular culture and use it as their starting point for their community of and for women" (MacDonald 1998). Using bricolage, meanings were created through pop culture and forged a group of lesbian-identifying individuals.

Research on gay identity development is also important to consider here. Westrate and McLean examine how cultural-historical factors within the recent past have shaped gay identities. They found that participants either reported, "a memory of a cultural event relevant to their sexuality" or "a self-defining memory of their sexuality" (Westrate and McLean 2010:225). Younger participants were more likely to reference a self-defining memory and to cite some form of media as their catalyzing cultural event (Westrate and McLean 2010). When self-defining memories and cultural events are combined, younger generations of LGBT individuals may be citing television shows as a contributing factor to the development of their gay identity. As their data came from an online survey, further specifics about the participants' defining memories are not available. In a more theoretical vein, Vivienne Cass provides a theory of identity development among gay adolescents, known as the "Cass model of homosexual identity formation" (1979). There are six stages in this model: identity awareness, identity comparison, identity tolerance, identity acceptance, identity pride, and identity synthesis. While this model has become the standard, Rich Savin-Williams identifies the many critiques of sexual identity development models in *The New Gay Teenager* (2005). He states that these models "have proven to be incapable of adequately characterizing the dynamic lives of contemporary young people" (2005:81). Instead, he feels it is "irresponsible to propose a comprehensive theory" of the

development of same-sex attracted individuals (2005:82). While I feel it is important to note the Cass model, I agree with Savin-Williams and will not be using it. Savin-Williams also introduces a "differential developmental trajectories" framework (2005:82). One of the tenets for this framework is that "the developmental trajectory of a given person is similar to that of no other person who has ever lived" (2005:84). I feel this is a better mindset to take regarding my research. However, despite each person's unique experience, we are also socialized in patterned ways.

Rachel Karinol's research on heterosexual adolescent girls and male celebrities may provide some insight into the credit Gillian Anderson receives for fans' sexual discoveries. Karinol finds that the girls in her study select "love objects" that they deem "safe" targets of romantic love" to project their feelings onto before they are able to begin dating (2001:61-62). The "safety" comes from the celebrities' physical inaccessibility. Thus, the girls can freely project their "newly awakened feelings" from afar while consuming the star's media (Karinol 2001:62). Karinol concludes that as this is a normal stage of heterosexual development, non-heterosexual individuals likely share this experience (2001). I agree with this assertion, and believe it is possible that Anderson's inaccessibility might allow her to be one of these safe targets for some non-heterosexual girls. Much as the online communities provide room for exploration of sexuality, idolization of same-gender celebrities allows for low-risk exploration of romantic and sexual feelings.

In explaining how fans of Mulder's and Scully's relationship (shippers) have come to "reclaim" (2000:244) the romance of the show, Scodari and Felder reference a quote from an article by Celeste Condit: "meanings are produced in particular social formations through situated human discourse" (1997:198). This idea essentially describes the fandom as

participating in social construction. Together, they have formed a community that assigns its own meanings to every interaction between Scully and Mulder. As a community, the *X-Files* lesbians seem to have done the same with Dana Scully and Gillian Anderson in making both the character and the actress their own lesbian icons.

A 2008 article also considers the role of social construction in LGBT fans' interpretations of television shows and connects queer theory to these interpretations (Dhaenens et al. 2008). The authors conclude that through queer readings, fans resist "hegemonic ideological production" (Dhaenens et al. 2008:344). Although the *X-Files* lesbians are not all necessarily arguing that Scully is a lesbian, they are, nevertheless, resisting the hegemonic ideals of the show. Utilizing a show with only heterosexual characters, they are forming their own queer communities, identities, and icons.

According to John Fiske, fandom is associated with groups that are "disempowered by any of gender, age, class, and race" (Fiske 1992:30). Not surprisingly then, it has often been stated that the majority of online fans are women (Harris 1998; Jenkins 1992), particularly within genres that make up telefantasy: horror, sci-fi, and fantasy (Jenkins 1992). Several scholars have also stated that most members of online X-Files fan communities were women (Clerc 1996; Geller 2016).

Building on this establishment of women's presence in fandom, research on fan culture often emphasizes online fandom as providing a safe space for girls and women (Clerc 1996; MacDonald 1998; Mazzarella 2005; Warburton 2010). Therefore, it is unsurprising that it has been well established that online fan communities can provide a support system (Clerc 1996; Duffett 2013; Kirby-Diaz 2009; Warburton 2010). Obviously, safe spaces for girls and women allow for support systems to flourish. Jacqueline Vickery noted that the support of online

communities might be especially significant for adolescent girls, as they can serve needs not fulfilled off-screen (Vickery 2010). Additionally, this feeling of safety allows young girls to feel free to "construct their identities and express feelings about issues of greatest importance to them" (Grisso and Weiss 2005:32). This safety comes in great contrast to online communities such as those for gaming, which are often hotbeds for misogyny.

Several different studies of online communities provide evidence that they can be safe spaces for girls and women. Jamie Warburton studied a community of girls who read and write fanfiction. She found that participants often shared that they felt supported and never judged within the community (Warburton 2010). The girls felt they were free to "let loose" while talking to their online friends, allowing them the possibility of developing more confidence (Warburton 2010:127). One participant from Warburton's study said that her fanfiction community could "get [her] through anything," and provides mental illness as an example (Warburton 2010:125). Warburton concludes that by joining one of these communities, girls can expect some level of support and friendship (2010).

Susan Clerc reports similar findings in her study of *X-Files* online communities for women. The women in her study branched off from a larger community to create a safer space. Rather than be part of large, public newsgroups, they began to create mailing lists. Clerc explains that mailing lists must be sought out and joined rather than being available for public viewing, often making membership smaller. This guards against "clueless" new fans, as well as trolls, who post with the intention of inciting arguments (Clerc 1996:42). These factors allow for a greater sense of community, as well as safety. Again, many members of the mailing lists see the group as a support system and a place where they can "unwind and share personal information" (Clerc 1996:44).

Several scholars have discovered that the safe spaces and support systems of online communities allow for freedom when it comes to matters of sexuality (Grisso and Weiss 2005; Meggers 2012; Warburton 2010). This is possibly in part due to girls easily being able to find others more like themselves, who have the potential to "accept parts of them that their other acquaintances cannot, or they can discuss topics that other friends and family avoid" (Stern 2002:228). The gender composition of these communities also appears significant. Warburton contends that the communities being almost exclusively for women "may contribute to creating a safe space for sexuality play" (Warburton 2010:125). Grisso and Weiss also discuss the significance of the construction of girls' sexual identities occurring in an all-female space (2005). Larsen and Zubernis refer to fandom as an antidote to persistent female shame about sexuality and a means of validation and identity exploration for women (2012:10).

As previously mentioned, the girls Warburton studied felt that they were free to speak without judgment, and they could "let loose" within the fanfiction community (Warburton 2010:127). She finds that this freedom extends to matters of sexuality. Interestingly, 84% of the 51 girls in Warburton's study identified as being "not heterosexual" (2010:129), with 17.6% also reporting that they were "unsure about their sexuality" (2010:129). Warburton states that these results show that fanfiction communities might be considered "safe havens" for sexual minorities (2010:129). The communities provide a safe space for the exploration of sexuality through discussion and writing. Fanfiction allows the girls to experiment and freely "try on" different sexual orientations and genders (Warburton 2010:29).

Heather Meggers's study of female online fandoms had similar findings and is particularly relevant to my research. Meggers found that 55.7% of the fans in her study "believed that participation in online fandom had played a role in changing their own attitudes about

sexuality" (Meggers 2012:60). Fans also felt that their online communities provided a space for them to openly acknowledge their sexual identities, with multiple fans "coming out to their fan community first" (Meggers 2012:67). Some fans felt that within the online communities, they discovered their sexual identity or enhanced their comfort with their attraction to women (Meggers 2012). The participants explain that this is due to being exposed to LGBT fans as well as the "community aspects" of online fandoms, such as support. Clearly, safe spaces and support are essential to the development of women's and girls' sexual identities. It is likely that the *X-Files* lesbians have a similarly safe community where they are free to discuss and construct their sexual feelings and identities.

2 EXPERIMENT

2.1 Methods

As there is no existing data relevant to this research, I collected my own data. I used an online questionnaire consisting of both multiple choice and open-ended questions. This is a convenience sample made up of LBPQ women who are fans of the *X-Files* and who volunteered to participate. My first research question was: What is the appeal of Gillian Anderson/Dana Scully for lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, and queer (LBPQ) *X-Files* fans? Next: How/do Gillian Anderson and/or Dana Scully influence women's sexual orientation? Finally: What is the role of the online community of *X-Files* lesbians in constructing fans' sexuality?

2.1.1 Participants

The population I was interested in is the online community of fans of *The X-Files* who are primarily active on the blogging website tumblr, particularly the members of this community who identify as *X-Files* lesbians. This definition of the population will constitute the sampling frame. To study this population, I used a volunteer sample and also engaged in snowball sampling. Due to the nature of snowball sampling, it was possible individuals who are no longer on tumblr or joined the community on other social media platforms have taken part in the questionnaire. As of November 2018, tumblr hosted 449.9 billion blogs (tumblr). However, it is unclear how many users of the website are actually active.

Unlike Facebook or Twitter, tumblr has features, such as a tagging system, that make it more convenient and conducive for approaching members of this population. Tumblr mainly consists of a feed of posts made by bloggers an individual user chooses to follow. These posts can be original or "reblogged," which occurs when another user shares an original post. A reblogged post can be reblogged once again by another user, and so on. Posts can be tagged with

certain keywords or phrases so that the post can be found by users using the search function. Direct messages can also be sent from user to user. I utilized all of these functions during the recruitment process. I made a post with a brief overview discussing how I am interested in studying the sexual orientations of LBPQ *X-Files* fans and what participation in the questionnaire required (this post is included in Appendix A). The post was then tagged with various keywords and phrases related to show (#x files, #the x files, #scully, #dana scully, #x files lesbian). I ended the post by encouraging others to reblog it to spread the word, as a form of snowball sampling. The direct messaging system on tumblr serves as an easy way for people to reach out to each other and offers an alternative other than emailing directly. There is even an option for messages to be anonymous, so questions regarding the research and interview could be answered without the need for a participant's identity to be revealed.

There are several advantages I had when it came to recruiting and conducting research within this population, despite it being a fairly hidden group. As I am a tumblr user, a fan of *The X-Files*, and a bisexual woman, I did not have much difficulty in reaching out to or gaining trust from potential participants. Additionally, I was already friendly with many *X-Files* lesbians and as previously stated engaged in snowball sampling to further increase the volunteer pool. Finally, many of these fans are also highly active in social justice and activism, so I believe they were especially likely to be interested in participating in research that focuses on sexuality.

I originally aimed to recruit 50 participants. However, when responses started coming in much more quickly than anticipated, I changed this number to 250. Responses were removed if participants indicated that they were heterosexual, cisgender men, or did not answer the open-ended questions. There was no incentive to participate.

2.1.2 Design and Procedure

The questionnaire was conducted using the Qualtrics website. A link was provided to the Qualtrics questionnaire on the recruitment post for the participants to follow. The questionnaire consisted of 28 multiple choice and open-ended questions. Multiple choice questions primarily asked respondents to rate activity and participation in the online community, as well as ask about possible contributing factors to their gay identity development. Open-ended questions asked for more detail on these possible contributing factors, their experience in the online community, and their thoughts on the concept of *X-Files* lesbians. Data collection occurred August 9-August 25, 2019. The research was approved by the Georgia State University Institutional Review Board.

2.1.3 Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to study the data. This method was chosen because I felt it was the best way to analyze a large amount of qualitative data in order to find common themes. Additionally, it is the method I am most experience with and felt most comfortable using. The answers to open-ended questions were analyzed question by question. Data was then coded using Microsoft Word to find patterns and themes.

2.2 Data

2.2.1 Being a fan of the show

Naturally, participants must be fans to take part in this research. Participants could self-define being a fan of the show and not adhere to a strict definition (such as having watched every episode). However, I still asked participants if they are fans, when they began watching the show, and how much of the show they have seen.

2.2.2 Engagement with/sense of online community

As previously stated, a large number of lesbian *X-Files* fans credit Gillian Anderson with their gay awakening. However, I believe the online community for the show may be a mediating factor here. A tight network of people with shared common ground who are also largely supportive and accepting of all sexualities could possibly contribute to the gay awakening. A 2015 article on gay men defines "sense of community" as "a sense of belonging to and being able to rely on a particular community for support" (Davids et al. 2015). I used this definition and extended it to specifically feeling like a part of a particular fandom and participating in it to some degree, as well as interacting with other *X-Files* fans on at least a semi-regular basis. Close-ended questions were used to see how active respondents are in the online community, followed by open-ended questions, where they were given the option to elaborate on their answers.

2.2.3 Sexual Orientation/Sexuality

I defined sexual orientation as sexual identity based on what gender(s) one is attracted to. However, defining sexual orientation beyond that requires great care for this particular study. While one would assume "X-Files lesbian" refers to women who are only attracted to other women, that is not the case. There are people who primarily identify as bisexual, pansexual, queer, etc, who will also use "lesbian" or "gay" to describe themselves. In these cases, it is somewhat of an umbrella term that simply means "not straight." These women were also included in the research.

2.3 Sample

A total of 135 individuals participated in this study. The genders of participants were 121 (90%) females/women, 11 non-binary (8%), and 3 other (2%). The ethnicities of participants were 3 (2%) white/Hispanic or Latino, 3 (2%) white/Asian, 5 (4%) Hispanic or Latino, 3 (2%)

Asian, 1 (.74%) other, 1 (.74%) Hispanic or Latino/other, 1 (.74%) black or African American, and 118 (87%) white. For sexual orientation, 62 (46%) were gay/lesbian, 57 (42%) were bisexuals, 8 (6%) were queer, 3 (2%) were pansexual, and 6 (4%) were other. Ages ranged from 18 to 54, with most participants being between the ages of 18 and 25.

Participants were asked about the frequency on their tumblr usage, as well as their frequency of making posts related to *The X-Files*. The results can be seen in Table 1. Additionally, participants were asked how many episodes of the show's original run and revival they had seen. The results are pictured in Table 2.

Table 1: Frequency of Site Usage and Posting Related to The X-Files

Variables	Multiple times a day	Once a day	Few times a week	Few times a month	Once a month or less	Not sure/declined to answer
Frequency of site usage	85 (63%)	24 (17%)	21 (15%)	2 (1%)	1 (.7%)	1 (.7%)
Frequency of making posts related to <i>The X-Files</i>	11 (8%)	12 (9%)	45 (33%)	11 (8%)	19 (14%)	12 (9%)

N=135.

Table 2: Amount of episodes of The X-Files watched

Variables	All	Most	Some	A few
Original Run	96 (71%)	38 (28%)	1 (.7%)	0 (0%)
Revival	58 (43%)	30 (22%)	16 (12%)	31 (23%)

N=135.

The majority of respondents also considered themselves part of the online *X-Files* fandom: 70 (52%) said yes, 54 (40%) said somewhat, 3 (2%) said they were not sure, and 8 (6%) said no. I also asked about the *X-Files* lesbians themselves. Many identified with the “*X-Files* lesbian” label, but some were less sure about it: 52 (39%) participants identified as *X-Files* lesbians, 57

(41%) somewhat/maybe identified, 13 (10%) were not sure, and 12 (8%) said no. Additionally, I asked about character preference to see how popular the character of Scully is among the *X-Files* lesbians. 97 (72%) people chose Scully as their favorite character and 18 (13%) chose Mulder, with 9 (7%) saying it was a tie. 11 (8%) participants chose another character or said they had no favorite.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Results

As previously stated, 135 respondents filled out the questionnaire. Of the 135, almost all open-ended questions were answered: 4 people skipped one question each. The response length varied from a few short words to full paragraphs. Several themes came up, such as the importance of social media and fandom, community, validation, and gender roles.

3.2 Social Media's Influence

The majority of respondents felt that social media, or the internet in general, had an influence on discovering and/or identifying with their sexual orientation. Many said they grew up sheltered from the LGBT+ community and had little to no exposure to different sexual orientations. Amy, 19, “didn’t know gay people existed”⁶ until she had access to the internet, while Jamie, 18, discovered bisexuality and recalls thinking “oh that’s allowed?? I can be attracted to more than one gender?” Lily, 18, says the internet “had everything to do with” discovering her sexual orientation. She elaborates that “growing up I was not exposed to even the idea of lesbianism or anything besides heterosexuality. My world opened up once I got online and was able to see and identify with people like me.” Many respondents echoed similar sentiments.

The ideas of validation, comfort, and acceptance also came up frequently. Julie, 24, states reading stories from other gay women “provided me with validation and a sense of community.” Likewise, Sherri, 38, says hearing about others’ experiences “helped me to understand and accept my own sexual orientation.” Whitney, 32, explains that she “discovered that not only

⁶ Quotes from questionnaire respondents have been slightly edited in some cases for readability purposes (such as corrections to grammar or spelling) with an effort to not distort the original meaning.

were people happy about being gay, they were also posting gay content and talking about it. This helped, and even comforted me with the feelings I had at that time.”

Additionally, 41 respondents cited tumblr specifically as a site that helped to expose them to the LGBT community or helped them to identify with their sexual orientation. Rebecca, 20, credited tumblr with “helping me to find words to my experiences.” Violet, 21, also heavily credits tumblr with her identity discovery: “I believe it would have taken me much longer to identify as a lesbian without consuming social media, specifically tumblr.”

On the other end of the spectrum, a handful of people did not feel social media had an influence on their sexual orientation. These individuals either simply answered “no” or explained that the internet was not around at the time they first identified as LBPG.

3.3 Fandom’s Influence

Many respondents felt the fandom had an important influence on their sexual identity development. Gina, 21, says being in the fandom “was the first time I could openly admit I was attracted to women.” Jacqui, 19, stated that being part of the fandom “felt like finding a community.” Lily explains that “interacting with other lesbians my age through *X-Files* fandom allowed me to begin to strongly identify as a lesbian and develop positive attitudes towards being a lesbian.”

Within the responses, there was an emphasis on the importance of seeing other women who were attracted to their own gender; and there was especially an emphasis on being open about this attraction. Christine, 18, found that “seeing other women love Scully made me realize what I felt.” Georgia, 31, states that it was “like it was normal that I was very attracted to Scully because everyone else was too.” Jamie adds that “it was really nice to see a fandom where tons of women were very open about being attracted to a female lead.” Sarah, 32, sums up the general

consensus that “seeing young women especially talk openly about their sexuality, as is the case in the *X-Files* fandom especially, definitely made me feel less ostracized by the world, and gave me hope that there was a community out there for me.”

3.4 Dana Scully’s Influence

Most respondents credited Scully as having a large influence on their sexual orientation. Many identified her as one of their first women crushes, or the very first. Andi, 22, demonstrates this with her response: “Scully was also one of the first female characters I remember having an intense crush on.” Similarly, Elizabeth says “so I found myself staring at Scully all the time and thinking about how pretty she was and one day I was just like OH. OH THAT’S WHY. And it’s ABSOLUTELY related to my ‘sexual awakening.’ In fact, Scully probably WAS my sexual awakening.” Many participants also made it clear that the attraction went beyond the actress and was truly due to Scully. Victoria, 18, explains that “Dana Scully had a huge impact on my discovery of my sexual orientation. This character was beautiful, smart, and strong, and I remember being very attracted to all of these qualities that she possessed. Her character is unlike any character I had seen before, in that she was outspoken and held her ground in her beliefs.” Others realized their feelings towards Scully were different from their feelings towards men. Pru, 38, says that “Scully made me a lesbian because I realized I could never feel the same way about a man as I feel about her.”

Several bisexuals noted the importance of both Dana Scully and Fox Mulder. Heather, 20, says that “the attraction I felt towards both Scully and Mulder did impact my decision to finally ID as bisexual.” Jamie feels that “*The X Files* is like quintessential bisexual culture. Like it's not about having to choose, you can be attracted to both.” Indeed, when I asked participants

about their favorite character, many chose Scully, but 13% chose Mulder, while 7% said it was a tie between the two.

Lesbians also noted the importance of Mulder, albeit in a different way from bisexuals: they did *not* find him attractive, despite heterosexual women fans feeling differently. Mulder's physical description in the pilot touted his "boyish good looks," (Carter 1993: 36) while Duchovny had a following in his own right, demonstrated with the classic fandom song featuring a chorus of "David Duchovny, why won't you love me?" (Austin and Sharp 1999.) This distinction of attraction between Scully and Mulder proved to be key for some. Laura, 25, says "Scully is the first character I remember being more interested in, in spite of the fact that my female friends were all about Mulder. I liked Mulder well enough, but I was there for Scully." Similarly, Piper, 38, "I started to realize when watching X-Files that I was paying WAY more attention to Scully than Mulder when it came to considering attractiveness." Jacqui also felt the same way: "everyone I knew had a crush on David Duchovny, but I was just so entranced by Gillian Anderson. I chalked it up to liking 'strong female characters' but obviously looking back that's not what it was." Additionally, Jennifer, 22, made an interesting point about Mulder/Duchovny's importance in relation to Scully/Anderson: "she was always accompanied by Mulder (and Gillian Anderson was frequently photographed with David Duchovny), it was safe to plaster my binder/locker/bedroom with pictures of them because he provided the cover of heterosexuality." Jennifer's experience gives credence to the idea of Scully/ Anderson as a "safe" target for non-heterosexual desire.

The dynamic between Scully and Mulder was also referenced by several respondents. They echoed the importance of the gender roles in the show, something that many writers and researchers have been discussing since the show's beginning. Beth, 18, notes that "they don't fit

into their standard gender roles, and the exploration of that definitely impacted my own sexuality exploration. Scully doesn't wear sexy clothes; she often wears t-shirts and plaid or flannel. She is deliberately not for the male gaze. Mulder never looks at her with the male gaze.” This difference between the characters on *The X-Files* and other shows was also crucial to Phoebe, 34:

Also, I think that both Scully and Mulder are atypical representations of women and men on TV, respectively. Their characters do not seem to fit the typical Straight Characters That Quickly Fall In Love mold, and I felt more comfortable identifying with both of them because they were more ambiguous and unique. I have always read both of them as ambiguous in their sexuality (and, sometimes, in their gender expression). All of these factors definitely helped me in the year that I was navigating my own orientation.

Willow, 22, felt that the relationship between Mulder and Scully was more than platonic, but in a way that appealed to women and lesbians:

And I have to say, the way Mulder pines for Scully is just so relatable. He loves her so much! I think a lot of women can relate to feeling that about their own romantic interests in real life, or wanting that sort of love. It's not every day someone goes to Antarctica for you. That is dedication. Lesbians love that over the top stuff. Secondly - have you ever seen Scully high kick or fight a Bad Guy? Or that one scene where she's done beating someone up and blows her hair out of her face? That's a sexual awakening right there.

Finally, there were several participants who did not feel Scully had a huge influence on their sexual orientation. However, Scully may have influenced some in different ways. Sarah explains that Scully "was a big part of me accepting that I am allowed to take up space in the world as a woman, and as a gay woman. Scully works in a male-dominated field and most women, myself included, grow up in what feels like a male-dominated world, but Scully never apologized for who she was. She gave me the courage to be who I am." Others felt unsure, as did Rachel, 23: "I had a fixation on Dana Scully as a child, and looking back I genuinely can't discern whether it was attraction to her or the desire to be her or to be like her."

3.5 Gillian Anderson's Influence

Again, many respondents gave Gillian credit as having an influence on their sexual orientation. As in the section above, she often came up as being one of the participants' first crushes or the catalyst for the discovery of their sexual orientation. Flo, 21, says "Gillian was definitely my first proper girl crush that I actually acknowledged, while Jacqui remarks, "I think just looking back, I realized that straight girls weren't just staring at pictures of Gillian Anderson in their spare time." On a similar note, Anya, 22, says, "Gillian Anderson made me think, 'Huh, she's pretty. What if I wasn't straight?'" Victoria explicitly says Anderson was her awakening: "I always tell people that Gillian Anderson was my bisexual awakening. The first time I saw her validated and solidified my attraction to women." Mary, 26, felt similarly to Victoria and says that "Gillian Anderson actually made me realize I am a lesbian. I was 12/13 and looking around the posters on my bedroom wall. All I could see was Gillian. And I remember thinking: "Well, seems you like girls. Okay then." Finally, Vanessa, 22, declares that "saying you fancy Gillian Anderson is also part of lesbian culture now."

Anderson's support of the LGBT+ community was a factor that was mentioned by several participants. Loren, 18, says "Gillian Anderson is so open and supportive of the LGBT community and finding out she is also gay really helped me accept myself." Victoria also stated, "not only was she beautiful, but I admired her intelligence and strong beliefs. She has advocated for LGBTQ+ rights since the 90s." Many also referenced the interview where Anderson says she has been with women as being important to them. Courtney, 22, says, "the fact that Gillian Anderson has stated that she's been with both women and men was comforting to me."

3.6 Being an *X-Files* lesbian

Participants who identify as specifically *X-Files* lesbians rather than just LBPQ fans of the show were asked to share their experiences within the fan community and what influence it may have had on their sexual orientation. Some feel comfort in knowing the *X-Files* lesbians are out there. Jacqui says, "I like peripherally knowing that there is a group of women like me and that everything I felt isn't weird or extremely niche." Andi feels similarly: "the knowledge that there are many other people out there who had a similar experience watching Scully's character was a relief. My child self thought I was a big weirdo, and that put those feelings to rest." Others felt validated by their connection to the group. Tracy, 21, states that "seeing other women loving women & talk about their experiences growing up realizing they liked girls, it made/makes me feel much more seen." Vivian, 26, says, "meeting these people made me feel connected and like I wasn't alone in my experience."

The importance of having a supportive community came up often. Claire, 26, "the *X-Files* lesbians were some of the most inclusive, accepting lesbians I'd ever encountered, offline or online." Fallon, 18, echoes this sentiment: "I do think it fostered an environment where I could do some self-examination and not feel judged or pressured." Courtney also feels it is a

“community of people who I can reach out to at any time, even though I may only know them through the internet.” Lily says:

It was such an incredible experience for me to go through that period of excitement and very rapidly make connections with tons of people who were, for the most part, lesbians around my age. Before then I had few, if any, lesbian friends, and suddenly there were many. We talked a ton about *The X-Files*, yes, but we also shared our experiences that came with being a lesbian, and were able to be understanding and supportive of each other. There was something so warming about being a part of that community, which felt as tight-knit as it was vast.

Lily's quote highlights how important online communities can be in terms of exposure to different groups of people. She started without any lesbian friends, and then ended up with a whole community of them.

Rose, 21, also shares

“I think the *X-Files* lesbians did the most for me in accepting that lesbianism is not only ok but something beautiful. Within a few months of being in this community, I was able to call myself a lesbian without feeling dirty or like it was something I deserved to be punished for. By the end of 2016 I not only was completely comfortable calling myself a lesbian and existing as a lesbian and talking about lesbian-specific experiences with other lesbians, but I was able to comfortably come out to my family. I really owe a small handful of women in *The X-Files* fandom the credit for that growth.”

Rose's personal journey with the *X-Files* fandom was so key to her sexual orientation development that she completely went from feeling that a lesbian identity was something bad to being comfortable coming out. Amanda concludes, "undoubtedly I was born queer, but my

confidence about it, as with my confidence in so many facets of my identity, I owe in part to *XF* fandom.”

Some respondents specified that they had been around since the 90’s and shared some insight to the fandom at that time. Gina says, "I have been online friends with a faction of x-files fans who I met at the official x-files forum over 20 years ago. They have had a profound effect on my life and I am better for knowing them.” Additionally, Mary shares that “way back when, about 18-20 years ago, this fandom was the first I got engaged in through a forum. I met a lot of women who identified as lesbians and it showed me that it was normal and okay.”

4 CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Discussion

Many of the responses show that LBPQ fans felt that the fandom and fan communities had an influence on their growth and development into identifying with their sexual orientations. The answer to my research question about the role of community in constructing fans' sexuality is that the community of LBPQ fans play a crucial role in this process. Within the fandom, members receive support they might not otherwise receive. They are easily and quickly connecting with others like themselves who are fans of the same things; this produces a safe and comfortable environment where LBPQ fans are free to be themselves. These findings all echo and build upon what previous researchers in the literature review had found (Clerc 1996; Grisso and Weiss 2005; Meggers 2012; Warburton 2010). Additionally, this safe space allowed for a support system to be created (Clerc 1996; Duffett 2013; Kirby-Diaz 2009; Warburton 2010). As in Warburton, the participants felt unjudged and even supported by their online community (2010). This allowed participants to create an environment where they were able to eventually identify with their sexual orientation. My findings here particularly echo Megger's study of female fandom where the majority of her participants identified fandom as having an influence on their feelings and identification with their sexual identity (2012).

Additionally, it appears important to the *X-Files* lesbians that they are able to interact without heterosexual interference. It seems unlikely that this sexual identity development would have occurred in a co-ed environment with the interference of heterosexual fans. The importance of being around other women who were LBPQ was highlighted throughout the responses to my questionnaire. This was also found in Clerc's study of the OBSSE and Bury's study of the DDEB; albeit in that case, women wanted a space away from men. In both studies, this was in

order to create a safer space. As Bury says, women-centered communities “challenge the normative order simply by refusing to accept the fan practices engaged in by men and gathering in spaces of their own (17).”

Even more of the LBPQ fans here explicitly stated that Dana Scully and Gillian Anderson had a role in their identification with their sexual orientation. This pertains to one of my research questions, which examines the appeal of Gillian Anderson for LBPQ fans. First, it is possible that other fandoms have their own gay/lesbian icons and Anderson has gained traction through the following: the show’s lasting popularity, famous fans like Kate McKinnon, and Anderson revealing her own same-sex relationships in recent years. Additionally, Anderson being a supporter of the LGBT+ community during the show’s original run helped make her a gay icon in many LGBT+ fans’ eyes. Even though she had not yet revealed her same-sex relationships during the show’s original run, it is well documented that many LGBT+ people view straight celebrities as “gay icons” (Martin 2013). Anderson’s support of the LGBT+ community and past relationships with women came up frequently when participants were asked about her influence on their sexual orientation. This goes back to Karinol’s work on “love objects” that girls deem “safe” targets to project their romantic feelings on (2001). Anderson’s inaccessibility in addition to her having ties to the LGBT+ community make her an especially safe target for non-heterosexual women to project feelings onto as they begin to identify with their sexual identity.

The show’s character dynamics and treatment of gender roles also plays a part in LBPQ fans finding a home in *The X-Files* and Dana Scully. This relates to my research question regarding if and how Dana Scully influences women's sexual orientation. For most of the women in my study, the answer to if Scully influence their sexual orientation is a resounding “yes.” The treatment of gender roles on the show seem to play a part in this influence. As Amanda puts it “I

do think there was something remarkable, almost wondrous, about the way TXF created a relationship that existed outside of centuries upon centuries of toxically gendered behavioral norms. The '90s was not too long ago, but somehow that kind of relationship felt revolutionary.” The subversion of traditional gender roles was uncommon back in the 1990s, and while more common now, it is still not prevalent. Even when characters like Scully exist now, they often draw inspiration from her (Bastián 2016). Clerc, Wakefield, and Bury (1996; 2001; 2005) all found that gender as it pertains to the show to be a popular topic among the fan communities. The topic of gender was one that came up in my research as well. As Beth noted, Mulder and Scully’s lack of traditional gender roles “definitely impacted her own sexuality exploration.” The additional lack of blatant romance and a stereotypical male gaze from Mulder may have made the show a safe space for women to interpret their own meanings from the show.

Finally, there are several limitations to this study. One limitation is that there was little access to LBPQ fans of the show who participated in online communities during the show’s original run. There were several respondents who identified themselves as being active online during that time, but the results did skew towards the newer generations of fans. This was to be expected, as tumblr is most popular with young adults (DeSilver 2013). Another limitation is that the participants were primarily white. The sample population could simply be predominantly white, but in future research I would recommend considering ways to reach other ethnicities as well.

4.2 Conclusion

The primary focus in much of the existing research on women’s online behaviors concentrates on media's influence on women/teen sexuality, such as their behaviors and attitudes towards sex, rather than sexual orientation. Other research on the role of television in

sexuality/sexual orientation has primarily focused on shows that feature actual LGBT+ representation, which is not the case with *The X-Files*. Additionally, there was previously limited data on lesbian fandom communities. I have aimed to change that and fill gaps in the literature. This research project has provided more insight on the development of LBPQ women's sexuality and the influence of television and online communities on sexual orientation. I have demonstrated that fandom and television played a role in the construction of participants' sexual orientation. This project has shown how a group of LBPQ in modern times are utilizing fan communities to discover and come to terms with their sexual identity.

This has implications for sociological and queer studies regarding how sexual identity is constructed; and there is still much more research to be done on these issues. *The X-Files* is but one fandom in a sea of fandoms, each potentially with their own gay icons and gay followings. It is possible other fandoms are fostering their own safe spaces for fans to construct and identify with their sexual orientation. Online fan culture continues to grow, and it is important we study the sociological effects it has on participants. More research on this is necessary in order to make broader conclusions and better understand the importance of television and online fandoms in relation to sexual orientation. In order to do this, I recommend other popular online fandoms be examined for their own gay icons and "love objects" (Karinol 2001), so studies similar to mine can be conducted. I would also recommend special attention be paid to recruiting more diverse ages and ethnicities in future research.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Questionnaire

1. What is your age?
 - a. _____
2. What ethnicity do you identify as? Check all that apply.
 - a. White
 - b. Hispanic or Latino
 - c. Black or African American
 - d. Native American or Alaskan native
 - e. Asian
 - f. Pacific Islander
 - g. other
3. What is your gender?
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
4. What is your sexual orientation?
 - a. _____
5. At what age did you begin to identify with your current sexual orientation?
 - a. _____
 - b. don't know
6. How much of original *The X-Files* (1993-2002) have you watched?
 - a. A few episodes
 - b. some of the episodes

- c. most of the episodes
 - d. all of the episodes
7. How much of *The X-Files* reboot (2016-2018) have you watched?
- a. A few episodes
 - b. some of the episodes
 - c. most of the episodes
 - d. all of the episodes
8. At what age did you start watching *The X-Files*?
- a. ____
9. Do you consider yourself to be a fan of *The X-Files*?
- a. Yes
 - b. Somewhat
 - c. no
 - d. not sure
10. Do you have a favorite episode of the show?
- a. ____
11. Do you have a favorite character on the show?
- a. ____
12. Do you identify as an *X-Files* lesbian?
- a. Yes
 - b. somewhat/maybe
 - c. no
 - d. Not sure

13. Do you consider yourself a part of online *X-Files* fandom?

- a. Yes
- b. Somewhat
- c. no
- d. not sure

14. Are you a tumblr user?

- a. Yes
 - i. If yes, how often you use the site:
 - 1. multiple times a day
 - 2. once a day
 - 3. a few times a week
 - 4. once a week
 - 5. a few times a month
 - 6. once a month or less
- b. no (skip to question 18)

15. How often do you make or reblog posts related to *The X-Files* on tumblr?

- a. multiple times a day
- b. once a day
- c. a few times a week
- d. once a week
- e. a few times a month,
- f. once a month or less
- g. Not sure

16. How often do you interact with other *X-Files* fans on tumblr?
- a. multiple times a day
 - b. once a day
 - c. a few times a week
 - d. once a week
 - e. a few times a month
 - f. once a month or less
 - g. Not sure
17. How often do you interact specifically with *X-Files* lesbians on tumblr?
- a. multiple times a day
 - b. once a day
 - c. a few times a week
 - d. once a week
 - e. a few times a month
 - f. once a month or less
 - g. Not sure
18. Are there any other social media platforms where you interact with other *X-Files* fans?
- a. Yes
 - i. If yes, which platforms?
 - b. No (skip to question 22)
 - c. Not sure
19. How often do you interact with other *X-Files* fans on other social media platforms?
- a. multiple times a day

- b. once a day
- c. a few times a week
- d. once a week
- e. a few times a month,
- f. once a month or less
- g. Not sure

20. How often do you interact specifically with *X-Files* lesbians on other social media platforms?

- a. multiple times a day
- b. once a day
- c. a few times a week
- d. once a week
- e. a few times a month
- f. once a month or less
- g. Not sure

21. How often do you make posts related to *The X-Files* on other social media platforms?

- a. multiple times a day
- b. once a day
- c. a few times a week
- d. once a week
- e. a few times a month
- f. once a month or less
- g. Not sure

22. Do you feel social media or the internet in general had any impact on you discovering and/or identifying with your sexual orientation? Please elaborate as much as possible.

a. _____

23. Do you feel the *X-Files* fandom as a whole had any impact on you discovering and/or identifying with your sexual orientation? Please elaborate as much as possible.

a. _____

24. Do you feel the *X-Files* and its characters had any impact on you discovering and/or identifying with your sexual orientation? Please elaborate as much as possible.

a. _____

25. Do you feel any of the actors/actresses on the show had any impact on you discovering and/or identifying with your sexual orientation? Please elaborate as much as possible.

a. _____

26. If you consider yourself an *X-Files* lesbian or interact with those who are, please write about your experiences with that community: how you got involved, what it's been like, any influence this has had on you, how it may have impacted you as an LGBT+ individual, etc.

27. Why do you think there is a large LGBT+ fanbase for this show, as well as Gillian Anderson? What do you think about the people who credit the show for their "gay awakening?"

28. Please feel free to add comments or anything else you like us to know.

Appendix B: Informed Consent

Informed Consent Form

Georgia State University

Department of Sociology

Title: "Gillian Anderson Made Me Gay": The Case of the *X-Files* Lesbians

Principal Investigator: Wendy Simonds

Student Principal Investigator: Samantha Howat

Purpose:

You are invited to take part in this research study because you identify with one of these sexual orientations and are a fan of *The X-Files*. A total of at least 30 participants will be recruited for this study.

Procedures:

If you decide to participate, you will fill out an anonymous questionnaire online. The questionnaire includes open-ended and close-ended questions, and will take about half an hour.

Risks:

In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life.

Benefits:

This study is not designed to benefit you personally, though you may enjoy participating. Overall, we hope to gain information about LGBT identity development and the influence of online communities and television on these identities.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

You do not have to be in this study. You may skip any questions you don't want to answer.

If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to stop participating at any time.

Confidentiality

We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. The following people and entities will have access to the information you provide:

- Wendy Simonds and Samantha Howat
- GSU Institutional Review Board
- Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP)

We will use a fake name rather than your real name on study records. The information you provide will be stored on a password- and firewall-protected computer. The key of initials will be stored on a separate flash drive from the data to protect privacy. The key as well as any audio recordings will be destroyed after five years. When we present or publish the results of this study, we will not use your name or other information that may identify you.

We cannot guarantee that data sent over the Internet will be secure. We are not collecting IP addresses.

Contact Information

Contact Samantha Howat at showat1@student.gsu.edu or 337-501-7585, or Wendy Simonds at wsimonds@gsu.edu or 404-413-6512.

- If you have questions about the study or your part in it
- If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the study
Contact the GSU Office of Human Research Protections at 404-413-3500 or irb@gsu.edu
- if you have questions about your rights as a research participant
- if you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the research

Consent

Please print a copy of this consent form to keep for your records.

If you agree to participate in this research, please click the continue button.

Appendix C: Recruitment Post

So I'm finally able to reveal that I'm doing my thesis on the *X-Files* lesbians and I need your help! My goal is to try to find out why so many of us say that Gillian Anderson/Scully made us gay, and to find out how online communities help construct sexual orientation.

Here is a link (insert link) to the survey I've created. There's multiple choice and some short answer questions. If you're a lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, or queer woman and consider yourself to be an *X-Files* lesbian, this survey is for you! If you're nonbinary but still consider yourself to be an *X-Files* lesbian, this survey is still for you!

I would be super grateful if you could participate, or at least reblog/share this post so I can get more people to participate. Thanks y'all!!!!