The television series, *Battlestar Galactica* (BSG), was received enthusiastically by a broad American audience when it first aired in 1978-1979. In 2003, SciFi Channel and the British channel Sky One began airing a remake of *Battlestar Galactica*. Both versions spawned loyal fan bases with some members of the fan community flocking to the new series without necessarily being devotees of the old. This divide in fan communities coupled with second generation Internet-based services (popularly dubbed "Web 2.0") has encouraged new means of communication amongst fans of the reimagined series. This paper will examine the Battlestar Wiki, exploring aspects of fan-generated community dynamics and communication.

Today, I'd like to talk about Battlestar Galactica, but not specifically the television show, the mini series, the 1978 movie or the little known comic book series. What I want to address instead is the online Battlestar Galactica as created and maintained by fans of both television series. While there are numerous sites, blogs, journals, message boards and online communities devoted to BSG, I’m going to focus on the Battlestar Galactica wiki, an ambitious effort to catalog all things Galactica for fans, by fans. Through this brief look at the Battlestar Wiki as well as a quick primer on earlier BSG fansites, I hope to illuminate not only how BSG that is not only viewed and shared, but how the show’s text is taken apart and reconstructed in an online platform, and in turn how this process elicits notions of community, culture and ownership.

In order to put what’s happening now with the new series in some sort of context, I'd like to stretch back to the first Battlestar Galactica. With roughly the same general storyline and characters as the current series, the first Galactica set out to escape the Cylons on Sunday evenings in the fall of 1978. Its family-friendly plot and out-of-this-world special effects drew...
children and adults into the series. However, the one-million-per-episode budget eventually grounded Galactica after just 17 episodes. After ABC cancelled the program due to budget constraints, BSG devotees created a series of publications, including a decade-long fanzine, *Anomaly*; sporadic conventions and an ongoing text-based MUSH (Multi-User Shared Hallucination)\(^1\) Through these fan-generated materials *Battlestar Galactica* fans remained not only long-term followers to a defunct television series, but continued to keep the concept alive, enriching the BSG universe and even bringing new fans into the fold.

SLIDE: BattlestarGalactica.com

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\(^2\) [http://www.mitiori.com/bsg/webring.html](http://www.mitiori.com/bsg/webring.html) There is also the Battlestar Network but as of Dec. 2005, I was unable to find any information on this particular webring.

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The inclusively of the webring also acts as a demarcator of exclusivity, patrolling the borders of the fan community. For every fansite brought into the fold, other online homages are left stranded in cyberspace.

In December 2003 the "reimagined" Battlestar Galactica mini-series aired on SciFi under the same title as its predecessor. For many BSG fans, the show represented a culmination of years of mail and email campaigns, attempting to bring BSG back to the televised moving image. Yet, the new version also created a sharp divide in the fan community, appearing to some as an outside threat to the BSG canon, rather than the long-anticipated revival.

Plans for a new BSG started in the late 1990s after actor Richard Hatch produced a promotional vehicle called Battlestar Galactica: The Second Coming. By 2000 Fox and Studios USA had not only shown interest in BSG but brought on Tom DeSanto and Brian Singer. However, when Singer pulled out of the project in late 2001, fans were again left without the prospect of a new television series, until almost two years later, when NBC Universal brought producer David Eick and Star Trek writer Ron Moore in to offer their perspectives on a reimagined Battlestar Galactica, and unbeknownst to the BSG community. The new BSG mini-series to air on SciFi Channel and pending television series would represent Moore’s own reimagined Battlestar Galactica, rather than that of the vocal long-term fans. Feeling betrayed and alienated, many die-hard BSG fans rallied around their disapproval, some even calling for a boycott of the new series. Michael Faries, Editor-in Chief and Site Manager of BattlestarGalactica.com and BattlestarPegasus.com (lead sites/ships of the BSG webring) wrote an open letter to Moore and Eick, displaying both the community’s personal investment in the original series, and a sentiment of betrayal by those Faris terms as “The Powers that Be.” Instead of the cooperative effort the fan community fostered in the Singer-DeSanto version, Faris and

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\[3\] It is important to note that America’s SciFi channel and Britain’s SkyOne share the series license and both air the show to their respective audiences, although not simultaneously. The first season aired finished on SkyOne before premiering on SciFi. The second season began on SciFi before airing on SkyOne.
other fans worried about their place in the new series, which they saw as taking off right out from under them.

**A SCIENCE FICTION SERIES UNLIKE ANY BEFORE OR SINCE—**

The alienation tear a sharp 

**BSG, finding**

Led and protected by the last remaining starship of their defense force, the survivors embarked on a journey in search of their only possible salvation—a colony long ago established by their race on a distant planet called "EARTH". They never made it. Their journey was cut short when BATTLESTAR GALACTICA was cancelled after a single television season.

For over two decades fans have urged the show's owners to revive the franchise.

**Galactica mini**

Not openly acknowledging impressive ground-laying revival efforts by cast member Richard Hatch (no—NOT the guy from SURVIVOR), UNIVERSAL, the show's owners, recently agreed to allow Tom DeSanto (known for his work on the movie X-MEN) to work on a new version of GALACTICA that would continue the original story with at least some of the original actors and characters. Fans' hopes were high that the series would finally be continued, until work suddenly came to a halt when filming had barely begun.

Fans' protests and comparisons with STAR TREK's needing to use the original actors and characters at first to revive that franchise have been ignored.

The restoration and continuation of the original BATTLESTAR GALACTICA is doomed unless we, the fans of science fiction and fantasy, raise our voices together and make it clear to UNIVERSAL and the SciFiChannel that their new GALACTICA mini-series (and any ongoing series it might spawn) will FAIL because it is NOT the real BATTLESTAR GALACTICA, and will be utterly rejected by all fans.

We urge you to flood SciFiChannel and Universal with RESPECTFUL snail-mail messages that will plainly tell them "We want the REAL Galactica, and will accept nothing else."

Thank you,
the online fans of battlestar galactica

**PLEASE VISIT BATTLESTARGALACTICA.COM FOR FURTHER INFORMATION**

**fan community**

Not only did fans in the original series. Gone w

in their place w. In addition,

Moore change

ranks the same and he obscured the iconic Centurion soldiers by upstaging them with twelve models of Cylons built to resemble humans.

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4 Flyer created by “the online fans of battlestar galactica” in 2003 to protest NBC’s new series. Excerpt: “UNIVERSAL’s “SciFiChannel” announced that THEY would use the preliminary work done [in the Singer/DeSanto version] for a DIFFERENT version which would not continue the original series or use the original actors, but would simply use the GALACTICA name and “reinvent” the entire franchise.”

Nonetheless, if *BSG* fans experienced over twenty years of mainstream unpopularity, there has been a popular renaissance for the past few years. Moore’s vision of a more complex, brutal *BSG* has received marked attention and praise from within the sci-fi community and mainstream alike. A January 2006 article in the *New Yorker* called the series one of the best on television and one of the best sci-fi series ever.6 This attention by the mainstream press further opened the divide between old and new, as fans flock to the new series without necessarily being devotees or even knowing about the original series. Without existing online sites for series discussion, new fans created their own channels of communication and community. Although it’s noteworthy to mention the SciFi Channel message board for *BSG* fans, I believe that creating an online, generative *BSG* community has happened off the SciFi servers.7

So, as Moore endeavored into uncharted BSG territory with the new series, nascent BSG fans charted the course. Through the reappropriation of images and an almost encyclopedic understanding the new text, fans of the reimagined *Battlestar Galactica* gain ownership over the storyline by unhinging parts, rebuilding texts and re-exhibiting the series online. While this has occurred in numerous other fan communities, I’d like to focus the rest of this talk on a BSG fan community that is born-digital, the Battlestar Wiki,

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7 See *We the Media: Grassroots Journalism by the People, for the People* by Dan Gillmor to talk about grassroots level movements.
which was started in early 2005 by fans of the current series.

Although “Battlestar Wiki” works within a fictive universe, the wiki’s accuracy standards are exceptionally high, pages not only go through the stub and draft phases, but the Wiki has sought out to translate “All Things Galactica” into Spanish, French, German, Turkish, Japanese, Chinese and Malay.

While the wiki’s open-post format marks a difference from the more regulated BSG webring of original fans, another difference comes in the ages of the wiki posters, who tend to be much younger than the webring operators, most falling in the advertiser sweet-spot, the 18-35 demographic. The Wiki founder Joe Beaudoin, is himself in his early twenties. In addition, most of the 1200 wiki collaborators with profiles identify themselves as in their teens, twenties or thirties and male. Although this may seem like a forgone conclusion based on the stereotype of the sci-fi fanboy, it’s important to realize the new BSG series has a very large female online community sites such as livejournal. So the question I want to turn to is what makes the wiki community skew male and does the platform influence group construction.

Now I’m going to review a couple authors as they relate to community boundaries along gendered lines:

Media theorist, Elizabeth Reid (1995) briefly discusses gender while looking at online identity and virtual worlds. She notes that although the presence of male and female characters in

8 A wiki is a type of website that allows users to add and edit information in a collaborative model of constructing, updating and maintaining content. While this “democratic” method of creating and sharing data removes the status of the lone author and compiler, like dictionary editors Noah Webster or James Murray or fansite editor Michael Faries, accountability also remains an important concern. In late 2005, John Seigenthaler, a one-time assistant to Robert Kennedy, complained in a USA Today op-ed piece that a Wikipedia biography of him wrongly claimed he had been suspected in the assassinations of both Robert and President John F. Kennedy. The Wikipedia post went on to also suggest Seigenthaler’s affiliation with the Communist party by falsely stating he had lived in the U.S.S.R from 1971-1984. The case caused Wikipedia and likely other publicly available wikis to question their standards of letting anyone post, often “anonymously,” and the social and economic implications of false facts on their website.
an online MUD is roughly equal, “it is common lore among MUD users that most of their number are in fact male.” 9 She contributes this male majority to access to technology: “Although the gap is slowly closing, the majority of people employed as or studying to be computer programmers and computer engineers are male.”10 This similar sentiment is reflected in Unlocking the Clubhouse, Jane Margolis and Allan Fisher’s 2001 study of lopsided gender dynamics at Carnegie Mellon. Here Margolis and Fisher note that geek culture, gendered social values and limited exposure to computers leads many prospective women away from tracks in computer science and information technology. In turn, games and other entertainment software is written largely by males and often is dominated by a heterosexual male perspective.

In addition to multimedia literacy, identity and “belonging” also likely play an important role in online community construction. In Suki Ali’s study of children’s social networks and fandom in southeast England (2002), Ali looks at how reading strategies are used by friends in the process of formulating ethnic and gendered identities and identifications. She finds that the notion of “belonging” to a particular social circle influences tastes and media consumption. Rather than thinking about group organization as “like finds like,” Ali suggest that children in the 8-11 age range become like and “like like” because of the pressure to belong to a specific group. Although this conclusion based on the notion of peer-pressure is hardly a revolutionary theory, if we take her notions into adult fandom it may point to a process of media consumption based not only on personal tastes but the tastes and suggestions of online friends or prospective online friends. Therefore, television fan communities could be formed partially on the basis of a sort of proselytization process where one “converts” or “is converted” into both a fan and a member of a fan community. However, members may be taken with a technology just as much as they’re taken with a text or an online buddy.

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10 Reid, 180. This theory is also available in texts like Virtual Gender and From Barbie to Mortal Kombat, both published around the turn of the millennium.
Suki’s concept fits nicely with the cross over between Wikipedia and the Battlestar Wiki. Once one learns a particular platform for example, it becomes easy to participate in other incarnations. Those wikipedians who so assiduously filled out the original Battlestar Galactica entry in 2003, likely went on to participate in the Battlestar Wiki and other wiki communities.

In short, in order to contribute to the wiki, one at least must have knowledge of not only *Battlestar Galactica* the series but also wiki operation and wiki edit culture. In addition, knowledge of other sci-fi series as well as the genre through multiple mediums is also helpful as users construct complex cross-listings for characters and terms.

SLIDE: “Toaster”
The entry for "toaster" not only has definition and etymology as well but even has a "user profile" for a toaster drawing on BSG reference as well as present America. Unlike many forays into fan lit in Galactica fandom, BSG wiki users seek to cast nets wide rather than deep, their work resembling less the creative process of an MFA graduate and more the indexical aim of librarian. It is worth noting, that while eagle-eyed wiki users spotted the IKEA "frak" mirror in Adama's living quarters not one person speculates on a potential homosexual relationship in the series. Despite their being room on the wiki for queer discourse, when you type in "queer" the wiki says "Man created the Cylons, but man has yet to create the page titled "queer."

11 "Toaster" Entry (http://www.battlestarwiki.org/wiki/Toaster)
Another argument for the divide of fandoms into gendered camps stems from the notion of
gendered readings: men and women read texts differently. Based on a survey by male and female
students to canonical literary texts, reader-response critic David Blich (1986), concluded that
men tend to read for authorial meaning, noting a “strong narrational voice” shaping the text,
whereas women “experienced the narrative as a world, without a particularly strong sense that
this world was narrated into existence.” Blich also observes that female readers saw their own
“tacit inferences” as part of the story, whereas men disregarded such inferences and focused
more on textual “accuracy.” Henry Jenkins (1992) adopts Blich’s conclusions, translating them
from the literary world to the televised through his comparison of female Star Trek fans with
male Twin Peaks fans. Jenkins suggests that while the two community’s activities parallel one
another as each engages in repeated rereadings of common narratives and drawing on secondary
texts for added information, differences still appear.

The female fans of Star Trek focus their interests on the elaboration of paradigmatic
psychology and motivations; the largely male fans in the Twin Peaks computer group
focus on moments of character interaction as clues for resolving syntagmatic
questions.”

Here, Jenkins presents a seductively simple argument regarding how gender may contribute to
reading practices. Through his studies of two gendered fan communities he finds a conclusion
similar to Blich: women fans tend to insert themselves and personal experiences into the
storyline, identifying with characters and finding relationships between the fictive universe and
their own lives, men parse through a text like a puzzle, giving great weight to authorial intent and
working through details within the text in order to gain some sort of ownership.

While this is a very generalistic reading of gendered interaction with particular texts and
tricky on that basis alone, I think it’s also important again to complicate not only the different
types of “gendered readings” but to bring in the fandom of different mediums as well. In the
case of the Wiki however, we must consider not only the devotion to particular texts but also

12Flynn and Schewickert, Gender and Reading; 239. also cited in Jenkins 108.
devotion to particular publishing/communication platforms. Not only do fans become like and “like like,” in Ali’s terms, but like’s platform becomes like’s platform in the process.

In closing I’d like to talk a bit about creativity and wikis, since I equated them earlier in this presentation to library science – a profession, however noble, that isn’t often associated with the term “creative.” While BSG wiki users are not engaged in fan vid creation, icon production or fan fic drabbling, they are still writing about beloved characters, items and practices. In fact, they are interacting the text not just though what one Blich or Jenkins might call “collecting, “mastering” or “conquering,” but are engaging in a creative process requiring an intimacy with the text and a creative outlet. In his talk yesterday, Cristobal Garcia mentions myths of creativity, listing three fallacies “1. Creativity cannot be managed, 2. is only in the arts, 3. Is a lonely process,” he notes instead that “creativity” is a social and group phenomenon, that can be stimulated and fostered through virtual, physical and psychological space. I’d like to take this a step further and suggest that the Wiki, while upon first glance appears quite standardized and unmovable, is actually a discursive space for posting and sharing not only facts and images but ideas and perspectives. As contemporary cultural theorist Allen Liu notes, the wiki, specifically Wikipedia “is the world’s blog.” A space for sharing content and opinion. It should come as no surprise that in October 2006, Beaudoin and the BSG Wikipedians launched their own BSG wiki blog,
SLIDE: BSG BLOG (April 27, 2007)

which, while mainly discussing BSG Wiki-specific practices and maintenance policies, also posts the BSG rally cry “So Say We All” and even stretches into the real BSG universe, found in the far off land of the middle east, calling for the freedom of captured BBC reporter Alan Johnston. Thinking about the Wiki as a cooperative blog brings the BSG Wiki community a bit closer what we traditionally see as creative literary endeavors and what some theorists term female-centric creative outlets. Still, while the BSG wiki is platform for possible creative subversive narratives the community tends to adhere to “just the facts.” So to close, I’d like to launch my own reimagination of Battlestar Galactica and call for those of you here to check out the Battlestar Wiki, and if motivated consider the space as a site for building creative interpretations stemming from your personal BSG observations. The platform and the community are there, waiting for new entries and new stories to be added.