

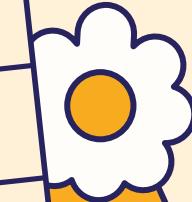


Stitch presents

Stopping Fandom Racism

MINI CHECKLIST

- ★ Introduction
- ★ Objectives
- ★ Spotting Fandom Racism
- ★ Stopping Fandom Racism
- ★ Conclusion



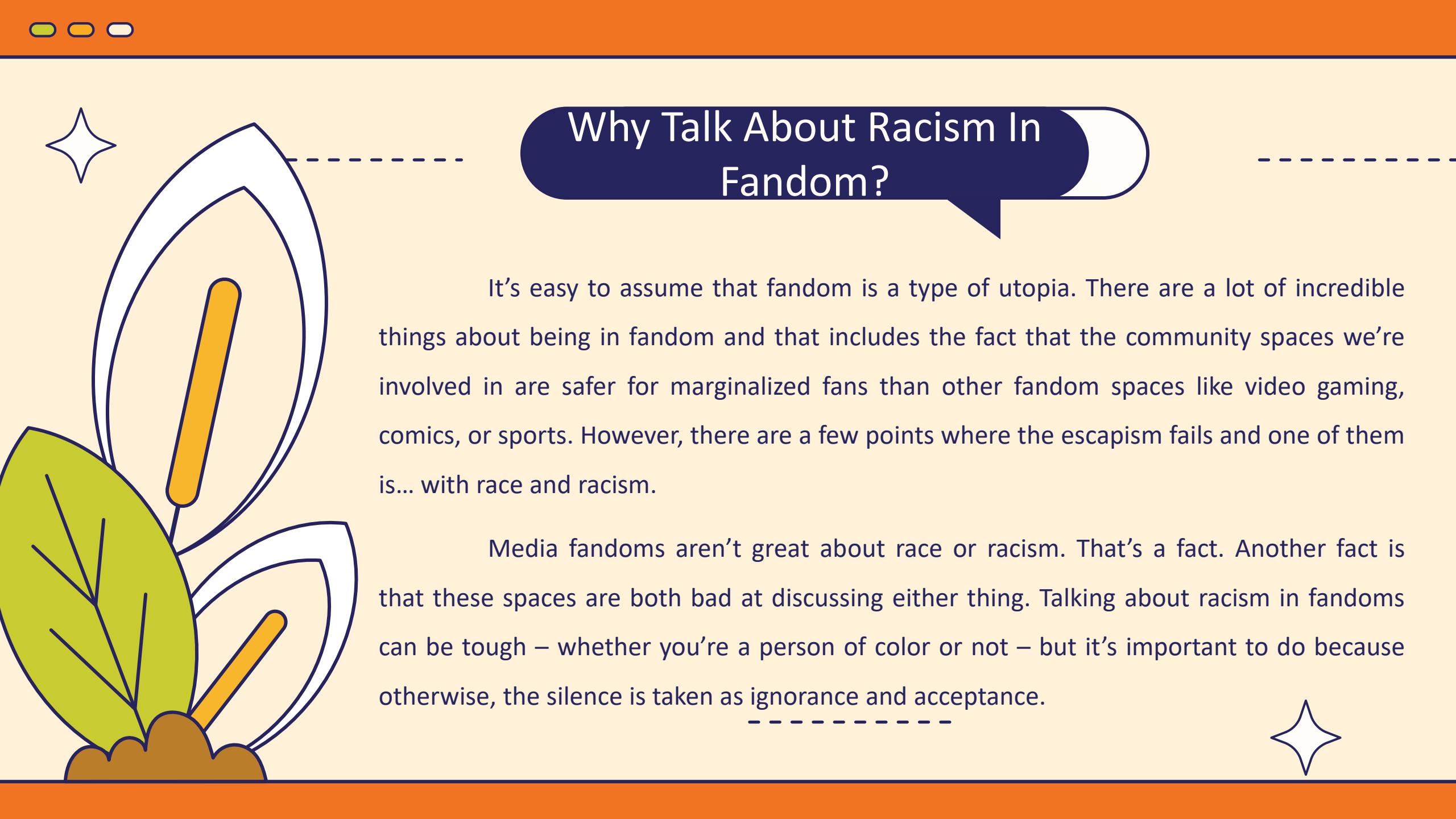
hello!



Introduction

My name is Stitch (she/they) and I'm a pop culture and fandom writer with a background in media and fandom studies and an MA in Literature. I have been running **Stitch's Media Mix**, a digital culture and arts publication focusing on representation and identity, since March 2015. Currently, I also write for **Teen Vogue** in a twice-monthly column on fandom called **Fan Service** as well as other media-focused pieces.

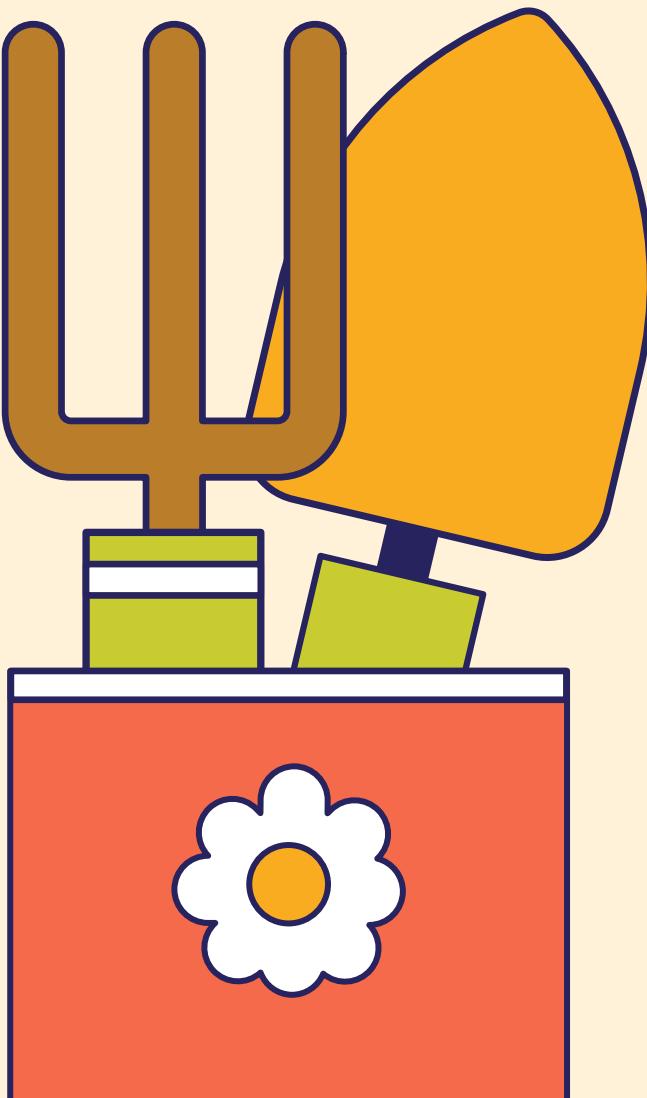
Since February 2018, I've run a series on my website called **What Fandom Racism Looks Like** that focuses on how racism in fanwork creating and consuming fandoms (largely populated by marginalized people who are queer and/or disabled. This presentation will focus on observations and tactics to spot and shut down racism in those fandom spaces.



Why Talk About Racism In Fandom?

It's easy to assume that fandom is a type of utopia. There are a lot of incredible things about being in fandom and that includes the fact that the community spaces we're involved in are safer for marginalized fans than other fandom spaces like video gaming, comics, or sports. However, there are a few points where the escapism fails and one of them is... with race and racism.

Media fandoms aren't great about race or racism. That's a fact. Another fact is that these spaces are both bad at discussing either thing. Talking about racism in fandoms can be tough – whether you're a person of color or not – but it's important to do because otherwise, the silence is taken as ignorance and acceptance.



In an interview with Henry Jenkins for her book *Squee From The Margins: Fandom and Race*, Dr. Rukmini Pande said, in part, that:

I think the question of escapism is a really interesting one for fans of color and one that I took up specifically in my research for *Squee From The Margins*. I wanted to hear about what kinds of escapism were available to fans of color in white-focused fandoms, especially in light of repeated claims by white fans that they come to fandom spaces to enjoy themselves and escape from having to consider “serious” issues (like racism) that they encounter in their daily lives.

I found that while it is certainly possible for fans of color to “pass” within online fan spaces, their modes of escapism are mostly contingent – I can enjoy a source or fan text until it gets racist. Other fans articulated the importance of finding networks of fellow non-white fans so that they could curate their experiences to be safer. In all cases, fandom certainly isn’t a space where these fans can escape from race/racism even if it is not something that is engaged with publicly or vocally.



Objectives

1

Provide the basics of how to recognize some types of racism in fandom.

2

Provide tactics for how to combat racism in your fandom spaces as a fan creating content.

3

Provide tactics for how to combat racism in your fandom spaces as a fan that creates or organizes events.

Spotting Fandom Racism

Here are three spaces where you can expect to find some form of racism in fandom and where we'll explore how racism in fandom doesn't always look like racism elsewhere.

1 In Fanworks

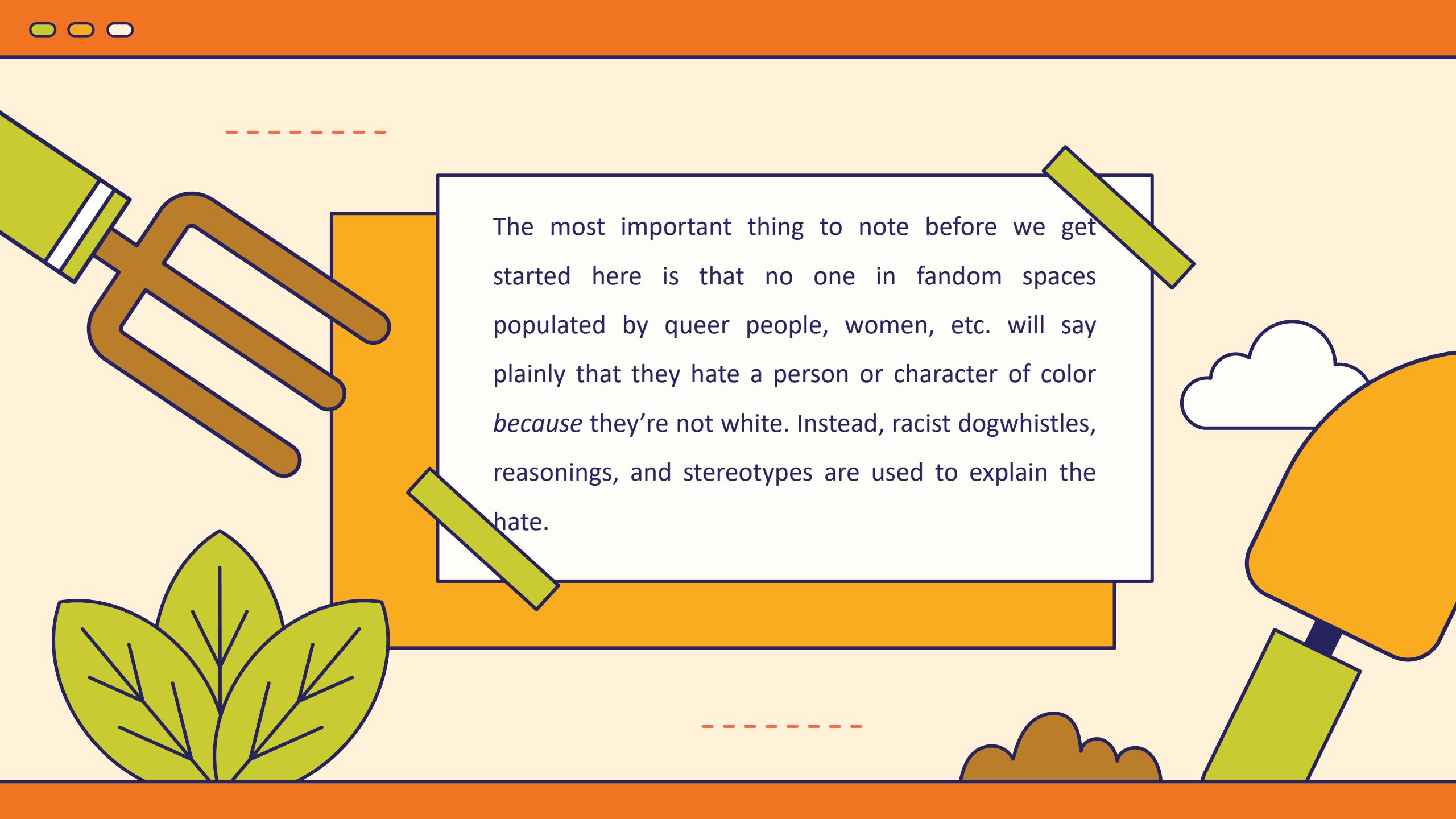
Racism features heavily (accidentally and purposefully) in many forms of fanworks.

2 At Creators/Celebrities

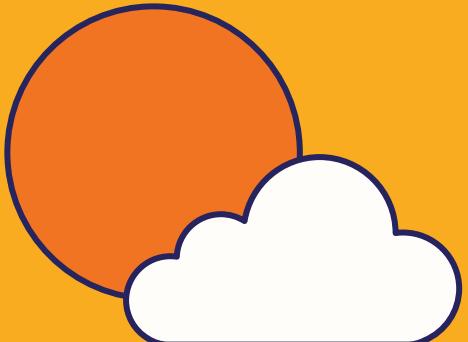
While access to all celebrities and creators has changed how we interact, there are multiple cases of creators and celebrities of color being attacked by fans.

3 At fans

Fandom should be an escapist space. However, fans of color are frequently subject to racism from their fellow fans at different levels.



The most important thing to note before we get started here is that no one in fandom spaces populated by queer people, women, etc. will say plainly that they hate a person or character of color *because* they're not white. Instead, racist dogwhistles, reasonings, and stereotypes are used to explain the hate.



Racism In Fanworks



One of the most present forms of racism is in the content fans create and consume. Unfortunately, because of the way that we create content for free in fandom, criticism is NEVER wanted/accepted.



We're going to cover some of the ways that racism in fanworks shows up. There are other racist things and there are things here that some other fans of color don't recognize. Your mileage may vary.

- Whitewashing/lightening characters of color in art (or the extra racist, purposeful counterpoint: darkening characters once called out for whitewashing)
- Leaving out/erasing a character of color who's in the main series/work (ex: Boastful Loki being left out of "Loki Family" art while President Loki and *Mobius* – who is not a Loki at all – are included).
- Casually racist jokes that aren't called out/shut down in the fanwork (ex: a "joke" about Black characters loving fried chicken made by white characters)
- Racist stereotypes for characters of color (ex: giving Black American characters "gang" backgrounds, East Asian characters as martial artists, etc.)





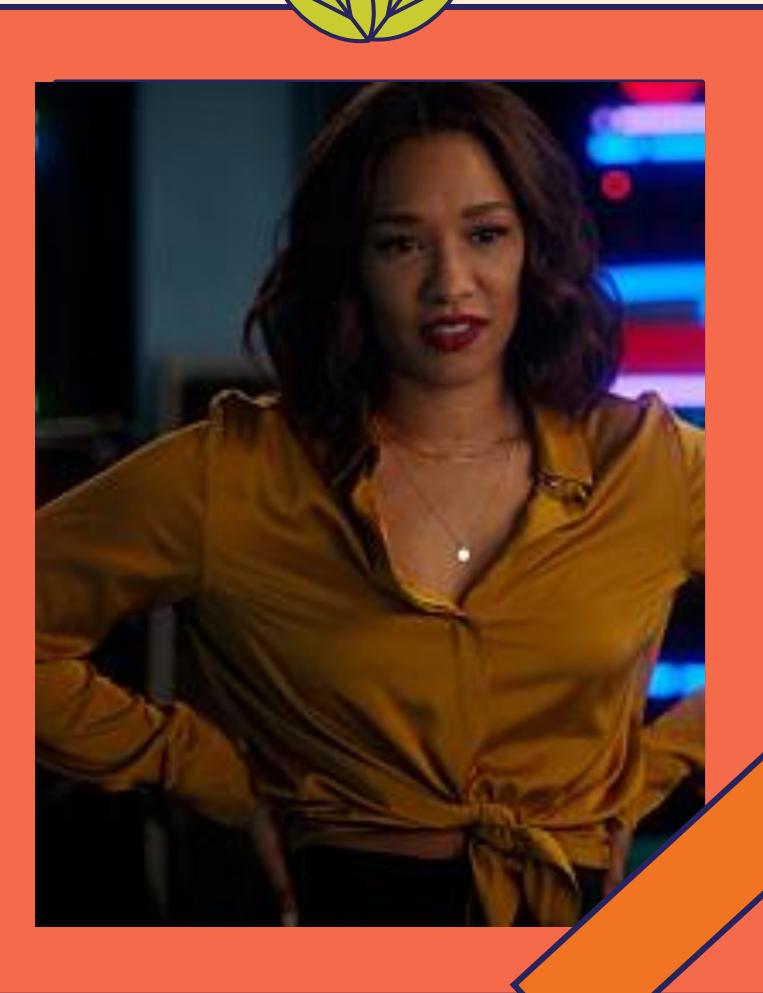
Racism Against Creators/Performers



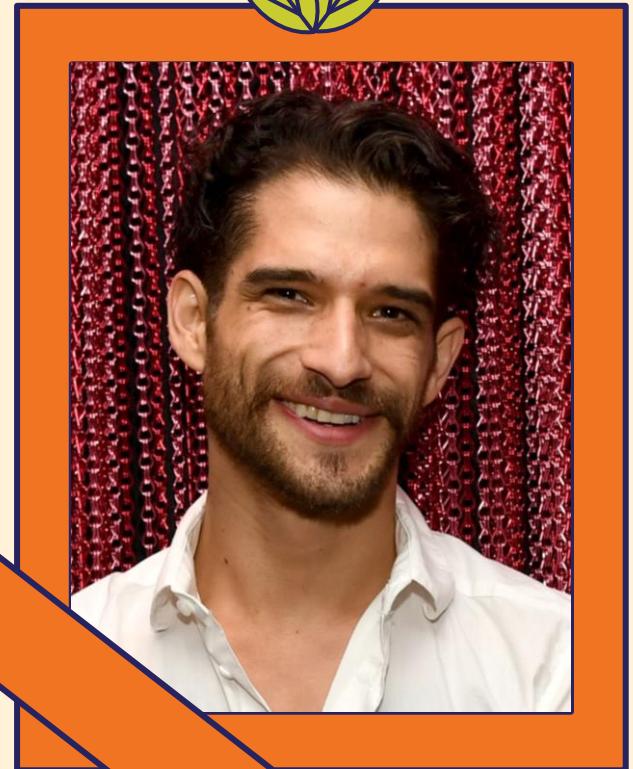
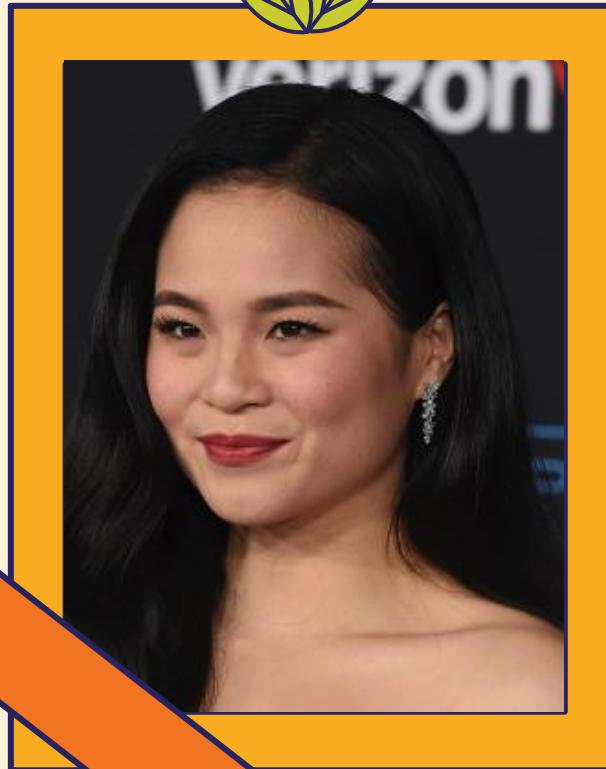
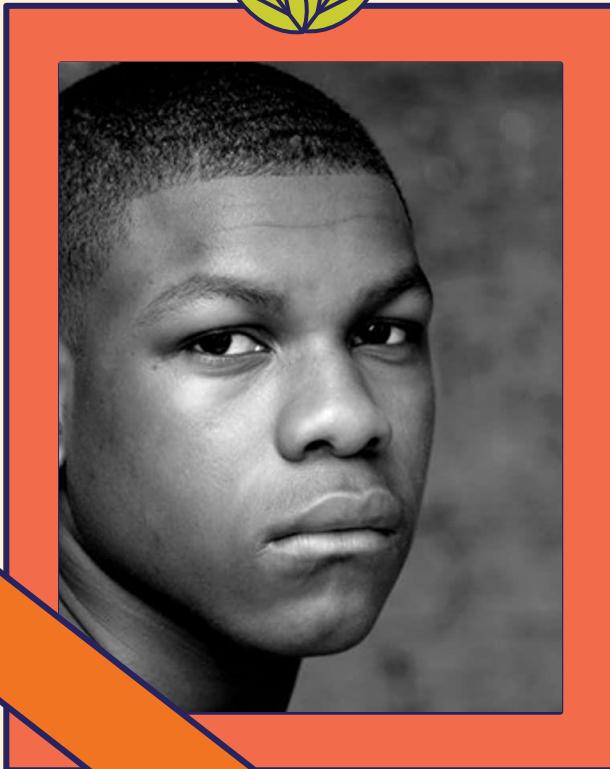
In my observations, Black creators (authors, writers, journalists, etc.) and performers (live action actors and voice actors, musical artists) get the most amount of pushback from fandoms.

Take ***The Flash's* Candice Patton**: since 2014 she's been subject to misogynoir – misogyny + antiblackness, term coined by **Moya Bailey** – because she was cast as **Iris West**. It isn't just that her character is mistreated or erased in fanworks, but that *she* has been subject to antiblackness for the entire time her show has been on the air including slurs, threats, people wishing violence on her, etc.

Candice puts up with it because she believes in the power of representation. But she shouldn't have to. No one should.



"If I had to deal with harassment online so a girl that looks like me 10 years from now can successfully be on these shows without any of that, then well worth it. I can take it." — [Candice Patton \(June 16, 2020\)](#)

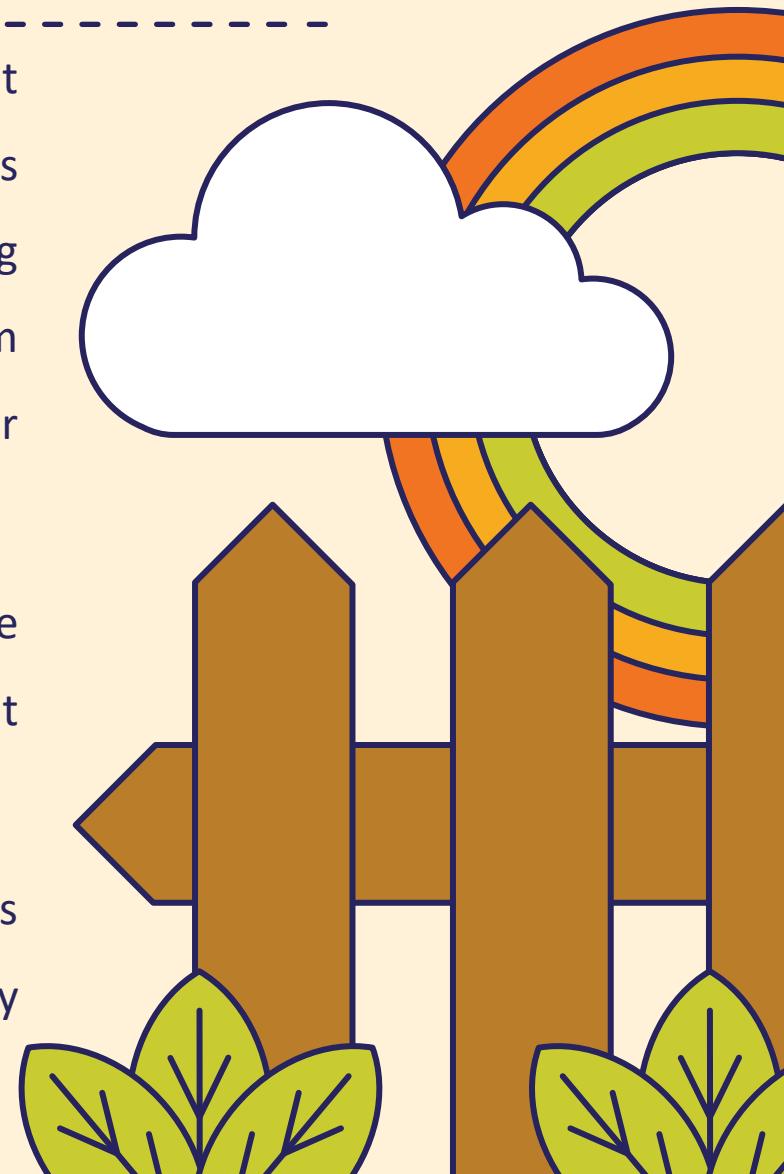


John Boyega. Kelly Marie Tran. Tyler Posey.

These three actors are very good examples of how long-term harassment from fandoms can impact a celebrity's mental health and career trajectory. John has been harassed by pretty much every single faction of the *Star Wars* fandom (including queer/women fandom spaces), Kelly was harassed by people linked with "The Fandom Menace", and Tyler Posey continues to be harassed by "shippers" and Stiles and/or Derek fans four years after *Teen Wolf* ended.

All three of these actors have spoken about how harassment from fans have led to them having mental health issues, second guessing career moves, and feeling at risk or in fear from what they were subject to.

The thing that marks long-term harassment of performers of color as racist is that it keeps going. People hold grudges against people of color in fandom that they simply do *not* for white people who do the same... or worse things.



Racism Against Fans



Racism against fans functions similarly to racism in fanworks... as in people write it off/frame it as something else (an accident, an interpersonal issue, bullying) unconnected to racism or the fan of color being punished for talking about racism in fandom.

As with the racism in fanworks slide, this will show a non-exhaustive list of examples of racism aimed at fans.

- Harassment campaigns within fandom (telling people not to interact with a specific fan of color who talks about racism... but calling them toxic/abusive)
- Harassment campaigns *outside* of fandom (doxing, contacting employers or family members)
- Threats and racist slurs aimed at fans of color (including coming from *other* fans of color who just... really like racism)
- Rumors being spread about fans of color (about their fandom behaviors or work, relationships, etc.)





OH NO THEY DIDN'T!

The celebrities are disposable. The gossip is priceless.

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June 1st, 2021, 09:53 pm

Reylo fans attempt to get black writer fired from Teen Vogue

Background information:

- Stitch is a black writer that has written extensively about fandom racism.
- During the hey days of the Star Wars sequels fandom, she wrote frequently about the harassment and racism directed at John Boyega from Reylo fans, including from beloved blue checkmarks like Jenny Nicholson.
- She also wrote critically about the treatment of Boyega's character, Finn, by Disney
- Stitch recently had the opportunity to interview Kelly Marie Tran for Teen Vogue. They spoke candidly about racism and bullying within fandom. Interview is shared below (featuring a note added by Teen Vogue after the harassment commenced):



AANGORITHM

Stopping Fandom Racism

It's a big task, but someone's got to do it.

1 Do Research

When creating fanworks about characters of color, do your homework so you present the best possible version of the characters.

2 Call-In Friends/Cut Out Racists

If you know someone who's made an accidental misstep in how they write characters of color, communicate with them. If you know a whole racist in fandom... cut them out.

3 Anti Racist Policies

If you run, moderate, have created a fandom space, what do its policies look like? Create and enforce policies that protect fans of color, not racists, without stifling free speech or privacy.

Resources



Squee From The Margins

Writing The Other

Race and Popular Fantasy Literature:
Habits of Whiteness

WOC in Romance

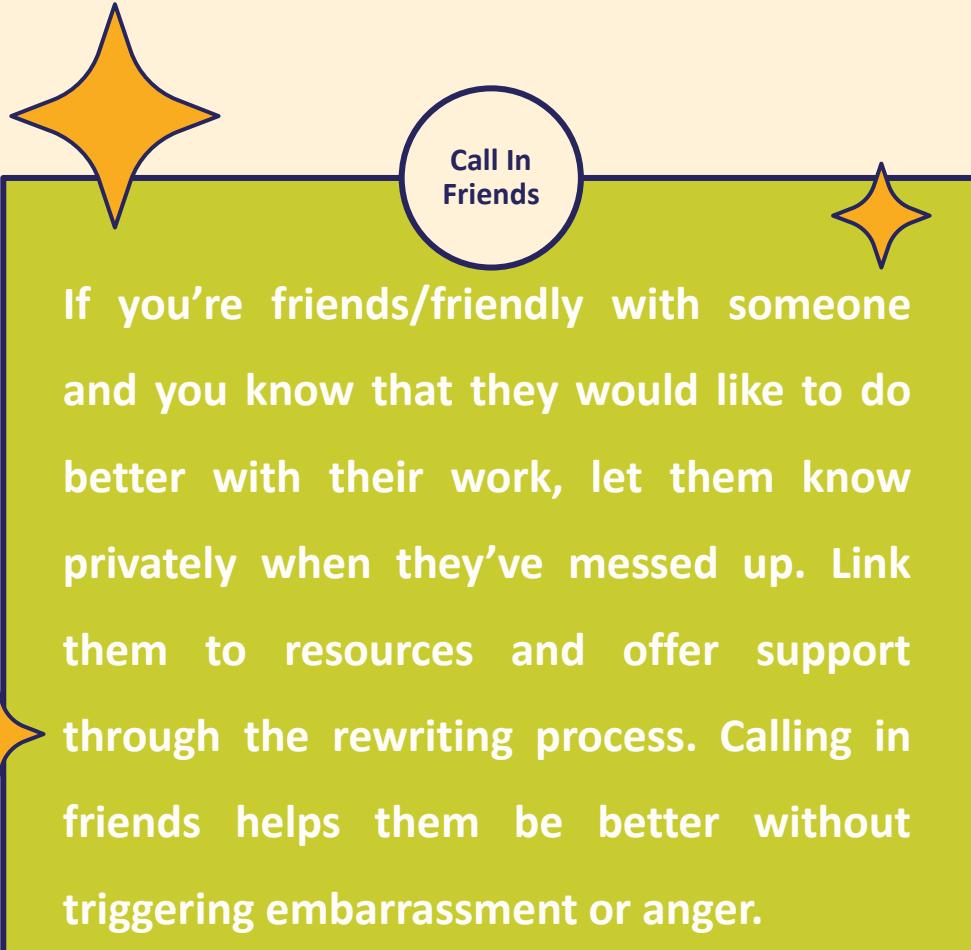
Writing With Color

Melina Pendulum on YouTube



These are just some of the resources I use to be a better writer and person when creating content in my own down-time.

I'll put up a list linking to these resources and some others on my website by the end of the day!



Call In Friends

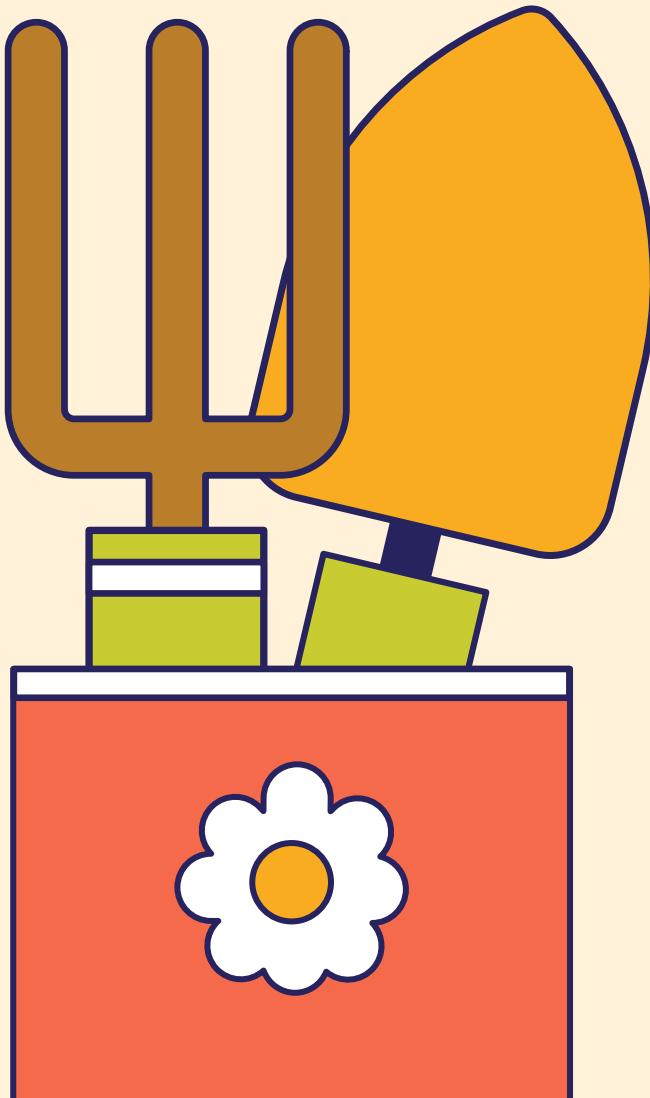
If you're friends/friendly with someone and you know that they would like to do better with their work, let them know privately when they've messed up. Link them to resources and offer support through the rewriting process. Calling in friends helps them be better without triggering embarrassment or anger.



Cut Out Racists

If you're in a fandom and you see a repeat offender constantly creating racist content or harassing/slandering POC, cut them out. No call outs necessary, of course, but say plainly if asked/you feel like it, that you just don't mess with racists who aren't interested in growth or being better.

Policies



If you're in charge of a fandom space (a specific shipping archive, a Discord server, a more organized group chat on Twitter, a fanwork fest, etc.) you need to have policies in place to protect fans of color from racists that recognize how complicated things are and how much beef people can get into. The goal should be to let people be complex... while recognizing that racism in our fandoms/fandom spaces doesn't look like it does in other places.

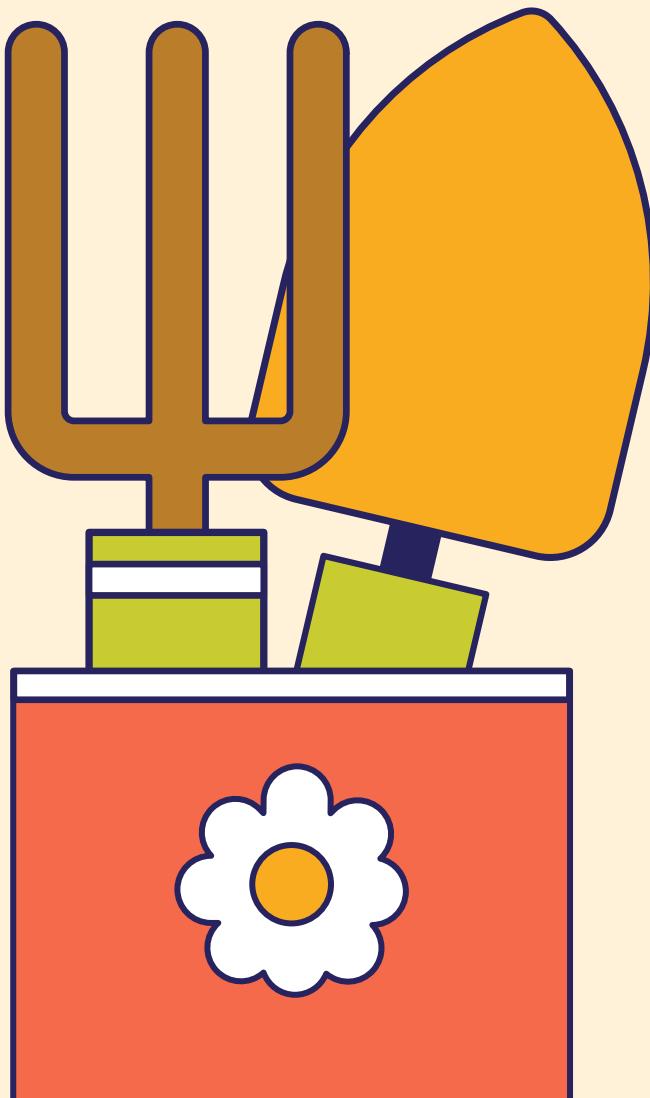
When creating these spaces, your goals should be that:

- POC should feel safe when publicly speaking about racism in fanworks/from fans/in media
- There's no "tone" that invalidates conversations about racism
- Private spaces for POC to express themselves and their needs
- Community feedback is received and taken into consideration

Over on WordPress, Bianca Hernandez of BookHoarding fame has a guide to organizing inclusive fandom spaces that's a great jumping off point.

Confronting racism in your fandom space

Tips for organizers
and event planning:





The Best Way To Help?



Public support. Be vocal about what you're

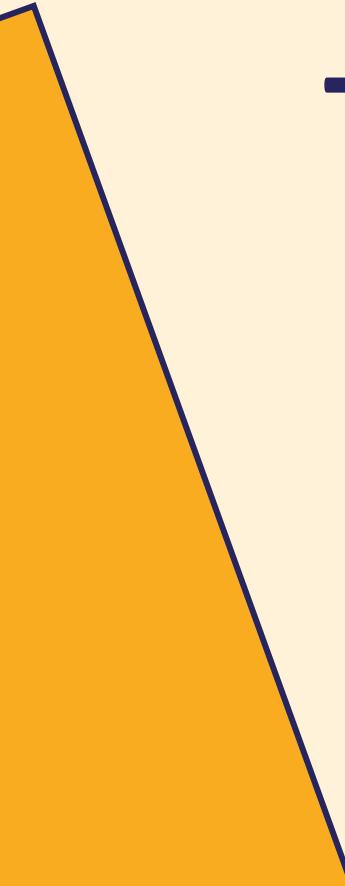
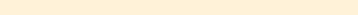
seeing, what fans, creators, and celebrities of

color are being put through. If you feel like

something is racist, do your homework and then

say something about it if you can. Add your

voice to ours!



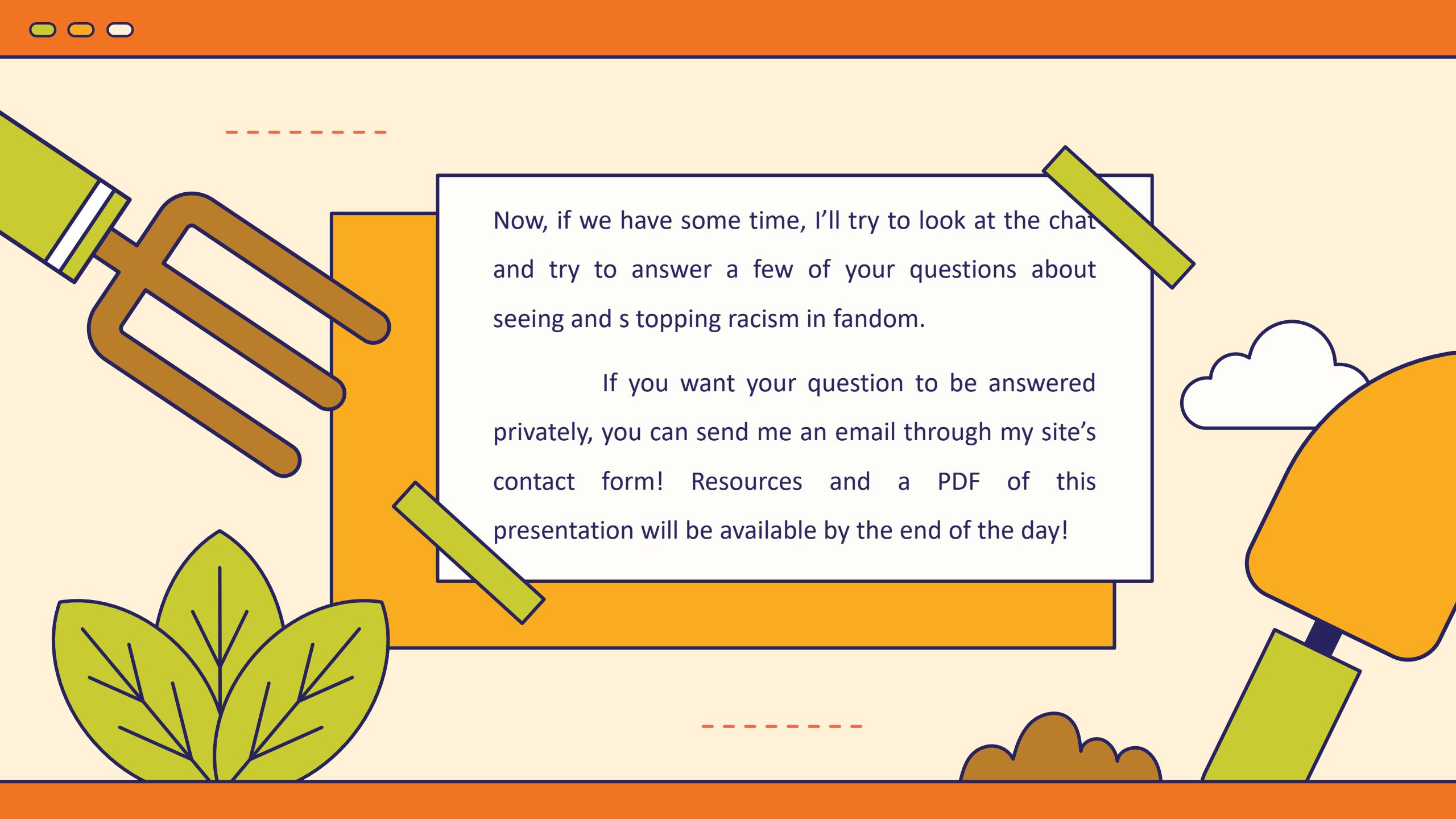


“Stopping Fandom Racism”

Thank you so much!

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Now, if we have some time, I'll try to look at the chat and try to answer a few of your questions about seeing and stopping racism in fandom.

If you want your question to be answered privately, you can send me an email through my site's contact form! Resources and a PDF of this presentation will be available by the end of the day!