

#aroacejugheadorbust: Social Media Fan Resistance and Asexual/Aromantic Erasure in CW's *Riverdale*

In CW's *Riverdale*, the refreshing river waters that lend the title town its name become polluted with the death of a young local boy, thus establishing a more transgressive tone to the television adaptation of the *Archie* comics. Murder is not the only element that adds an additional level of maturity to the young adult narrative, as the show also introduces verbally-expressed sexuality and on-screen sexual activity. However, to the dismay of many viewers who identify on the spectrums of asexuality ("ace"), aromanticism ("aro"), or as touch averse, the show adapted Jughead Jones, the canonical asexual/aromantic/touch averse character, as a heterosexual/heteroromantic boy. Aro/ace individuals and their allies, wishing to vocalize their condemnation of this erasure, took to social media to condemn and resist this erasure through multimodality. My paper examines the empowering ways people use the #aroacejugheadorbust hashtag on tumblr.com and twitter.com to post text, memes, original art, and photo-manipulations that deconstruct, invalidate, and ultimately erase *Riverdale*'s "straightwashing" of Jughead's identity.

This presentation speaks to an urgent problem of asexual erasure in media. Although Jughead Jones was only recently made canonically asexual/aromantic/touch averse in Chip Zdarsky's series, the character has been coded this way throughout the history of the comics. He is one of the most beloved asexual characters in pop culture, and the erasure of his identity misses an important opportunity for visibility of the community he represents. In an interview-based study by Kristina Gupta, she found that two thirds of the asexually-identifying people she spoke to expressed feeling "isolated or alienated from others or from society as a result of the stigmatization or invisibility of nonsexuality" (997). This experience is not uncommon for aromantic/asexual people, but through online communities such as The Asexual Visibility and Education Network (AVEN), they bridge spatial limitations and connect with other aro/ace people across the globe. The #aroacejugheadorbust hashtag is an important cultural moment where aro/ace people and their allies resist the lack of representation through social media. This presentation will help spread awareness of the emerging, but often overlooked, field of asexuality studies and explore the ways fan culture allows for empowerment.

Works Cited

Gupta, Kristina. "'And Now I'm Just Different, but There's Nothing Actually Wrong With Me': Asexual Marginalization and Resistance." *Journal of Homosexuality*, vol. 68, no. 8, 2016, pp. 991-1013, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00918369.2016.1236590>. Accessed 2 September 2017.