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FAN STUDIES: RESEARCHING POPULAR AUDIENCES

Alice Chauvel, Nicolle Lamerichs and Jessica Seymour

Fan Studies

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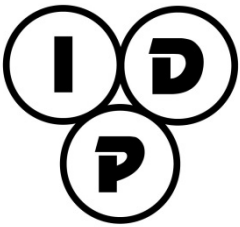

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Edited by

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Fan Studies: Researching Popular Audiences

Jessica Seymour, Alice Chauvel and Nicolle Lamerichs

The terms 'fan' and 'fandom' bring with them a stereotypical idea of a person, generally a young man, socially stunted and locked in his room with a laptop or game console, absorbed in the latest happenings of a world which exists outside of reality. In fact, fandom is a vibrant, socially rewarding space where groups of people come together to share interests, ideas, and occasionally work to change the world. Fandom is often designed to be participatory and engaging, bringing with it an expectation of performance, and fans are judged on their ability to engage with the source of their shared passion. Socially stunted or not, fandom's participatory culture is performed both in online and offline spaces; sometimes at a distance from its source material, and other times in close proximity to texts, celebrities or sports practices.

We define a media audience as 'an assembly of listeners or viewers who come together, if only virtually, through shared consumption of [media products].'[1] Historically, being part of an audience has meant being in a face-to-face situation (or crowd-to-face) with a communicator or entertainer, as in the case of a theatrical performance.[2] With the arrival of mass media, however, the need for 'physical co-location' was eliminated.[3] Audiences can enjoy a performance from thousands of miles away, in a theatre or, more likely, in the comfort of their own homes. This communication at a distance led to a frenzy amongst scholars and politicians as to the true impact of mass-media on audience members; particularly with regards to their emotional and psychological well-being. Early 19th century perceptions of media described it as 'a narcotic where messages are injected into the mass audience as if from a hypodermic syringe.'[4]

Eventually such hard-edged claims became more nuanced as scholars recognised that people are not always so easy to manipulate. Consequently, academia began employing 'effects research' to understand the ways individuals are affected by the media they consume.[5] This approach remained very much one-way: there was no recognition of agency on behalf of the audience in the context of academic studies. Instead it was claimed, for example, that though people were generally not easily influenced long term exposure to media would inevitably impact their values and behaviour.[6] Again, the problem did not so much lie in the conclusions reached by scholars as it did in the assumptions. Regardless of whether media has an influence on individuals; formulations like the one just mentioned assume that audiences are passive sponges rather than cognitive individuals. In reaction to this lack of agency, certain scholars developed what Abercrombie and Longhurst call the 'uses and gratification' paradigm, which recognised that 'the individual uses the media, rather than being affected by it' to gratify his or her needs.[7]

As each subsequent paradigm denoted an increasingly engaged audience, scholars moved away from the idea that 'an audience presupposes a binary opposition between producers and consumers,'[8] and instead developed theories where audiences were actively creating and reworking the meaning of texts. Academics then became concerned with the power relations between producer and consumer. Thus, the 'Incorporation/Resistance' paradigm was established; the paradigm seeks to determine whether audiences are incorporated into the dominant ideologies encoded in media texts, or whether they are actively resisting them.[9]

Unfortunately, such claims assume a single focal point for resistance and do not acknowledge that audiences can be active and give their own meanings to texts without necessarily aiming to subvert anything.[10] It also assumes that the audience will engage with every facet of an ideological perspective in a text, rather than engaging with those ideas which interest them and rejecting or ignoring those which do not. There appears to be a constant assumption of simplicity in the context of audience participation research – and audiences, being groups of human beings, are never simple.

A new paradigm, seeking to address these limitations, has since been elaborated on by Abercrombie and Longhurst: the 'Spectacle/Performance' paradigm, which assumes that audiences are 'groups of people before whom performance of one kind or another takes place.'[11] They are socially constructed, fluctuating units. It recognises that audiences are made up of multifaceted individuals for whom being part of a particular audience is reflective of who they are.[12] This approach also accounts for a more diffused (less Marxist) power structure, and assumes the coexistence of many different audiences with a variety of motives.

Thus, we see a conceptual shift away from the singular to the plural. Indeed, it is now commonly accepted that audiences are diverse. Thus, 'one cannot talk of the audience in the singular or, indeed, of the singular meaning or impact of particular media contents' – audiences must always be located within a specific context.[13] Henry Jenkins for example, identifies three audience segments for television: loyal viewers, casual viewers, and zappers. They watch television differently, with loyal viewers tuning in for every episode of their favourite show and zappers barely watching more than a few minutes of anything.[14] Interestingly, Jenkins does not posit these as static categories: most individual viewers flit from one to the other depending on the situation or the show.[15]

The audience segment that best embodies this activity and diversity is, of course, fans.

There has been an explosion of fan scholarship in the last two decades. As a result, fan cultures have become more engaged with academia as they have moved into the mainstream, particularly as academics became more comfortable with their inner 'aca-fan.' This has opened the door for more participatory ethnographic studies and a growing acceptance of fans and fandom as a potentially rich source of information, culture, and ideas.

The Global Project on Fan Communities and Fandom brought together aca-fans from many different disciplines, and many different countries around the world, to explore the dynamics of fandom in a holistic space. The conference drew the attention of academic researchers, industry professionals, artists and other stakeholders, who met at Harris Manchester College in Oxford, UK, to share their disciplinary-specific expertise. The resulting dialogue was a rich, immersive experience which inspired new explorations and approaches to research, as well as a few good laughs as the delegates shared their experiences of fandom (occasionally with pictures). This volume brings together a variety of critical perspectives in this rapidly growing field, engaging with multiple disciplines and theorists in order to explore the various methods of fan production and research.

Throughout this volume, there is a clear theme of fandom as a social space. Whether fans engage in the real-world, online, or are defined by their lack of engagement, the ability of fans to participate and share their enthusiasms with one another is one of the most striking features of the fandom phenomena. Most definitions of fandom involve some reference to visual media – particularly cult or science fiction media, which is often portrayed in mainstream media as being consumed by remarkably engaged and devoted viewers. There are occasional references to literary, game and graphic novel fandoms. These definitions tend to come from the realm of the humanities, social sciences and cultural studies, and fail to acknowledge the fandoms growing around sporting organisations and athletes, and niche interests such as trains and stamps. During the conference which led to this collection of inter-disciplinary scholarship, the general consensus was that the 'fan' is primarily an enthusiast, and a fandom is a community of like-minded individuals who are brought together by a shared enthusiasm.

In the opening chapter, Agata Włodarczyk kicks off the discussion of fandom and fans' places within it by examining the fan identity, and the different roles various fandoms play in the construction of an individual fan's sense of self. Fandoms often define themselves through characteristics which set them apart from other fandoms; for instance, the primary difference between Browncoats and Whovians is that they consume different science fiction television shows. Włodarczyk explores the ways which fandom identity can influence an individual identity, using a pilot study of music fans to determine whether a fan who belongs to multiple fandoms would describe their 'fan self' differently to how they would describe their 'real self.' The fascinating interplay of fandom, belonging and identity is staked out in this chapter, and the ability of fans to wear different 'masks' depending on context.

In the next chapter, Christine Lundberg and Maria Lexhagen develop a holistic approach to finding linkages between popular culture and the tourism industry. Through technology innovations such as the internet, and the increased availability of travel, destinations which tie into famous popular culture works such as *Twilight*'s Forks, Washington and *Mamma Mia*'s Skopelos, Greece must develop

their attractions in order to compete. Lundberg and Lexhagen explain the various research methodologies employed by pop culture tourism academics, including estimating tourist flows and postmodernity, before moving away from the case-by-case research often seen in the discipline by offering a holistic approach. This approach brings together the complex relationship between fans and culture, technology, and innovations in destinations and attractions. The power fans wield on social media platforms can facilitate incredible growth in tourism, particularly when tourist attractions bring to mind beloved scenes or memories from their favourite books, TV shows or films.

Hattie Liew explores different Chinese pop fan experiences in Singapore by comparing in-depth interviews from the fandoms of two Chinese pop singers, and the five themes which shape them. Liew's chapter examines the different methods used by fans in Singapore to showcase or participate in fandom. While the fandoms are structured differently, and respond to the mainstream shaming of fandom with varying degrees of internalisation or rejection, the chapter concludes that fandom in Singapore exists as an extension of media designed to pass time, and that pleasure derived from fandom explains how different fans experience fandom in different ways. There also appears to be a connection between the general passivity of fandom and the political climate of Singapore.

Monica Flegel and Jenny Roth's topical chapter on the publication of fan fiction examines how the degradation of female fan fiction authors who pull-to-publish reflects on the fans who police them. The majority of fan fiction authors are women, and the continued practice among critics both within the community and without towards demeaning and belittling the works creates a space where, despite claiming to be feminist, actually silences women and relegates them to the devalued genres of chick lit and mommy porn. By examining discourses within fandom, Flegel and Roth write that the fan space often uses gendered insults in order to deride those female authors who dare to publish their work in the mainstream. Women who claim authorship over their fan works are hounded for being derivative, indulgent, and poor storytellers. While fandom spaces often attempt to build a community of support for female creators, the misogynistic discourses engaged with by female fans still perpetuate that space.

The performance of gender in fandom underpins Barbara Braid's chapter on female fans' 'fassination' with Michael Fassbender's performance of masculinity. Fassbender, an American actor, has amassed a large female following, and this following represents a female gaze which idealises Fassbender's particular brand of masculine performance. The Fassbender fandom, comprised mainly of professional, heterosexual women in their 30s and 40s, engages with Michael Fassbender both as a representation of masculinity and as a stepping stone to critically discussing the various films he has been in and the performances he has given. While the male gaze has often worked historically to objectification of the female form, the female gaze within fandom fetishizes Fassbender's inclusive,

relatable masculine performance; thus pushing towards a new masculinity performance in the mainstream.

Continuing this theme of gendered fandom, Ann-Marie Cook and Deirdre Hynes' chapter takes a cross-disciplinary look at the position of gender and sexuality in online fan communities. Their qualitative analysis of female fans in British football forums is juxtaposed by and the *Hand aufs Herz* fandom, and the 'Jemma Phenomenon' which followed. Cook and Hynes' discussion of male dominated online football forums explores the ways female fans are forced to hide or compensate for their gender. This can lead to some female fans' perpetuation of misogynist ideology when they remain silent in the face of gendered slurs (in order to avoid being labelled an 'uptight woman') or their disassociation with other female fans who are perceived as not 'performing' fandom properly. This discussion is juxtaposed by Cook and Hynes' analysis of the *Hand aufs Herz* fandom and the accompanying online inclusiveness brought about by the lesbian relationship in the telenovela. The fandom uses the online space to neutralise offline prejudices and create a community of fans which value acceptance. This chapter demonstrates the ability of online fandoms to either perpetuate or dispel the heteronormative ideals of offline communities depending on the values of the collective and the interests they share.

Fandom is not confined to the online space. It contributes to and supports many aspects of the offline experience, including politics and civic engagement. In the next chapter, Alice Chauvel explores the *Twilight* fandom's contribution to real-world charities and political action. Data collected through online questionnaires indicated a perceived activism in the production and consumption of fan fiction, particularly slash fan fiction which deals explicitly with non-heteronormative ideals. Chauvel then outlines the various ways that the *Twilight* fandom's devotion to activism has translated to offline, real-world causes, such as raising money for charities, and fan fiction and fan art is often used as rewards for peoples' contributions to charities supported by the community. Chauvel's chapter concludes that fandom, while often perceived as anti-social in mainstream media has begun to shift towards more active political and social engagement, and that this shift is indicative of a larger social trend towards alternative outlets for activism.

Moving back into the online space, we see interesting relationships between fans and textual producers. Jessica Seymour's chapter examines how transmedia in the online environment has cultivated a new type of narrative which relies on fandom interactivity. Using the online adaptation of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* as a case study, Seymour discusses how the internet has changed the way that fans take ownership of texts, and how the narrative in the online environment takes this ownership and creates a new type of text with the fandom as an active character in the story. The online space creates an opportunity for characters to interact with fans and offer alternative points of view to the main narrative;

something particularly engaging in the context of *Pride and Prejudice*, where one of the main themes is the unreliability of the main narrator. By opening the narrative to the participatory environment of the internet, the fandom is engaged as virtual participants in the story.

Participation in the fandom is the crux of Nicolle Lamerich's chapter on the affective process of cosplay. In the offline world, fans can explore and portray the aspects of texts which they appreciate the most by wearing costumes of their favourite characters. The chapter begins with a creative look at the experience of creating a costume; engaging with different elements of the original text such as music and graphics, choosing materials and fabrics, and planning makeup. Then Lamerichs uses the traditional ethnographic practice of formal and informal interviews at cosplay events and online spaces to examine the affective and embodied dimensions of cosplay. To account for the diversity of fan practices, Lamerichs proposes an 'affective process' which emphasises the process of engaging in fandom, rather than the appearance of it or the space it is performed in. There is an emotional connection between fandoms and their affective process, or their performance of fandom, and this is seen clearly in the cosplay costumes which are produced through time, effort and, above all, engagement with the source material.

The fan is not a solitary creature typing away at their laptop in a darkened corner of their parents' basement; the fan is one part of a vibrant legion of enthusiastic consumers, sharing ideas, creative work and critical reflection on a global scale. The fan is never solitary, or isolated. Instead, they are constantly engaged, searching out new information and connections with the thing they are passionate about. This drives them to form an identity which is separate from who they are, or where they were born – the core of this identity is what they *love*. This excitement and joy drives them; and it has driven us to come together and share our knowledge and experience to gain a better understanding of the world of fandom. We invite you, dear reader, to engage with us. Enjoy!

Notes

[1] Sonia Livingstone, 'Media Audiences, Interpreters and Users,' In *Media Audiences*, ed. M. Gillespie (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2005).
[2] Ibid., 15.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian J. Longhurst, *Audiences* (London: Sage Publications, 1998).
[5] Ibid., 5.
[6] Ibid., 5-6.
[7] Ibid., 7.

[8] Roscoe, cited in Philip M. Napoli, *Audience Evolution: New Technologies and the Transformation of Media Audiences* (New York: Columbia University Press 2011).
[9] Abercrombie and Longhurst, *Audiences*, 15.
[10] Ibid., 30.
[11] Ibid., 40.
[12] Ibid., 37.
[13] Livingstone, 'Media Audiences,' 42.
[14] Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press 2006), 74.
[15] Ibid.

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Part 1

Investigating Fan Practices

Is There a 'Fan Identity'?

Agata Włodarczyk

Abstract
The notion of self and identity is one of the most important concepts for an individual, for it is often referred to as a guideline in behaviour or life planning. The concept of 'self' is one of the identity aspects, the knowledge of 'who' and 'what' a person is. Markus and Nurius (1986) argued that an individual possesses more than one 'self' and is in fact constantly reshaping his/her exact definition. Psychologists usually divide identities in two main groups: individual and group/social. The two are constantly negotiating which priorities are more important – the individual's or the groups.' Many fans, while describing themselves in various fandom-related contexts, often state to what fandom they belong to. The chapter will analyse, with the help of empirical study, if the notion of being a fan of a particular cultural text is significant enough to form the quantifiable 'fan self.'

Key Words: Identity, personality, fandoms, fan identity.

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1. Identity: Individual and Social

The question of identity is one of the most essential questions of modern times. Many researchers have addressed the issue in the fields of their studies – among them philosophers, sociologists, psychologists (in the fields of social psychology and personality studies), educationalists – looking to define what identity is, and what it encompasses. What constitutes a 'person,' an individual holding their own opinions and world-view? Why is it so important for us to feel, to various degrees, independent and psychologically separate from other people?

We refer to our own identity on a daily basis when we make statements about ourselves, which occurs in particular, when we meet new people. When I say: 'My name is Agata' that expresses that I am an individual who refers to herself using a tag 'Agata,' and it means I am not an 'Anna' or 'Maria.' If I add that 'I am a Whovian, a Browncoat and a yaoist' those terms define the 'me' more specifically than the previous information. Such labels ascribe a group of certain features to the speaker, in this case, by establishing links with specific groups of fans. A 'Whovian' is a fan of the British TV show, *Doctor Who*, a 'Browncoat' of the American TV series *Firefly*, and a 'yaoist' is a fan of Japanese comics (manga) portraying male homosexual love created by female artists for women. The 'I am' is a vital element of the problem in question, one that can be easily seen in the syntax of every European language, as it underlines the speaker's need to forge an identity through distinguishing themselves from others.

The sense of identity can be considered as a response to two questions: 'who am I?' and 'what am I?'[1] Although such an approach may seem simplistic, the more specific and accurate responses to such questions one tries to formulate, defining one own identity will become more difficult and complex. The nouns and adjectives that are given as the usual replies, as long as they are preceded with the pronoun 'I,' comprise the conception of an individual identity – a group of attributes that describe a particular individual.

The 'we' on the other hand denominates the idea of a group identity, which can also be referred to as social identity. It is not really clear which of those identities appears first, though there is no question that both are equally significant. Most scholars have reached an agreement that in order to form the individual notion of identity (and the self) one has to reach a certain stage in psychological development.[2] Scholars specializing in the field hypothesize that until reaching the age of 2, a child perceives itself as part of a group: he or she and the mother. Around the 8 or 12 month the first stage of identity development begins: the child starts to notice that people and objects exist constantly (not only when he or she sees them). Around the age 2 it starts to cognitively separate itself from the group and start perceiving itself as an individual.[3] A person then, apart from being part of a particular group (or later in life: groups), commences to establish their own character traits, values and opinions – the process of shaping the individual identity begins. In fact it is believed that the shaping of the self cannot emerge in isolation, since a certain amount of interaction with others is necessary.[4] The social feedback reinforces or undermines the conviction of one's identity and *self*. For example, I can think of myself as kind or emphatic and if I strongly believe that to be true, I might subconsciously ignore the situations suggesting otherwise, but it becomes harder to downplay as irrelevant, if I am told straightforwardly that I am, in fact, cold and mean. The observation only material is more likely to be regarded as insignificant in comparison to information given by other people. In this sense the individual identity is negotiated through the process of dialogue with social surroundings.

For many animals being in a group is highly correlated with survival, as it once was for humans. In the course of evolution many aspects of group dynamics – behaviour, emotion, psychological welfare – constructed what we call today social networks.[5] A person belongs to and identifies with at least one group. By this she or he is provided with a sense of causality and control. Using a fandomish example: one fan of the *Star Trek* TV series likely would not achieve anything when fighting against a TV station's decision to cancel their favourite show, but a group of fans is likely to succeed – and indeed they did.[6] A similar struggle with a big TV company happened in Poland, when a particular group of fans[7] demanded that *Home Alone* (1990), a film by Chris Columbus, should be broadcast at Christmas, as it had been over the previous decade. Belonging to, and identifying with, a group able to influence the external world reinforces, among others, self-

esteem, and provides the members with a sense of security and well-being.[8] 'This is my group, they are significant to me, they can influence the world, so they can also protect me.' The sense of belonging is considered one of the essential elements of psychological welfare for people; even those who prefer solitude maintain a certain amount of contact with others.[9] Social and individual identities are not equally important, they are in constant imbalance and depending on the circumstances, one is given priority over the other. Henri Tajfel's social identity theory (SIT)[10] is often called forth when writing about the inter-group and intra-group dynamics and interactions. Groups do not exist outside of social context, meaning there cannot be a group if there are no other groups nearby to which they can compare each other to. The group identity is being constructed repetitively when they come into contact with another group of different characteristics. Belonging to a specific group has consequences on an individual: the group affiliation becomes incorporated into the narrative description of self-identity, connecting the individual to a broader, social context; also some of the groups' characteristics may be included into an individual identity. Tajfel's ideas are usually applied when analysing radical political groups or group conflicts, since they were formulated on the basis of intra-group conflicts studies. STI argues that when a group is being endangered the group identity will become more important, which means that individuals will identify themselves more with the group and not as a collective of individuals. In fan studies they are mostly used in sport fans analysis.

2. Fandoms' Social Identity

As Tajfel suggests: belonging to a specific group may have consequences on an individual level and those consequences are usually beneficial for people belonging to the group. Thus, in the situation when fans and fandoms are stigmatized, the benefits of belonging to them are diminished. Such accusation may be perceived by an individual as not satisfactory positive and he or she may decide to leave the fandom or never identify with one at all. The category of being mad or out of control[11] is not, usually, considered as a positive aspect and as such people will not be eager to incorporate such traits into their own identities. Thus there are people who identify themselves as fans, but underline the lack of fandom affiliations. To quote: 'I am not a mindless fanatic ← the root word of 'fan.'[12] Fans in fandoms are considered (by other groups, in this case: non-fandom ones) pathological and obsessive, since they spend a lot of their free time examining their favourite cultural texts by re-watching or re-reading them; they surf the Internet with uncanny concentration and energy looking for pictures, information and interviews. As such this kind of statements can create a sense of being endangered and as such strengthen or pull forth the social identity (fandom one) and bring forth the defensive behaviours. But also it can create such internal tensions between

individual and social identities inside a person that they can decide to 'leave' the fandom group.

Fandoms have to important components as a group. First of all, a person is not born belonging to a fandom, moreover is not usually surrounded by people belonging to the same fandom. Identifying with a fandom group is made on a conscious level. Secondly, fandom exists mostly in the cyberspace and has characteristics of a bedroom culture.[13] The communication between fans is often virtual, occasionally extending to the outside world (sports fans meet more often in real life). Groups, as Taifel describes them, can form even when individual members do not meet face-to-face.[14] The cognitive, evaluative and emotional components[15] of the group can be ascribed to a virtually existing group of people, as long as individuals identify with it and inscribe some of the group characteristics as their own.

3. Fans' Individual Identity

Identity for a long time was considered to be a stable psychological construct, both on the individual and social level, though it was recognised that some affiliations could be rewritten. Traits like sex, gender, race and nationality were unchangeable, locating an individual permanently within those categories, whereas place of living and occupation were not. Personality traits and autobiography are also examples of the unchangeable traits of identity,[16] temperament is not, since it statistically changes around 45th year of life. In modern research, however, identity is seen as a concept of being in a constant change – even in terms of sex or gender changes are possible thanks to medicine advancements.

Zygmunt Bauman has argued that in modern times no identity is as stable as it used to be[17] – fluidity has become a skill necessary to adapt to the new, rapidly changing world. A similar thought was expressed by researchers analysing the concept of 'self' (a cognitive and affective part of identity and reflects the self-knowledge) – Hazel Markus and Paula Nurius.[18] They have developed a concept of 'possible selves:' 'ideal selves that we would very much like to become'[19] or could become in the future. They are representations of the past self and they encompass the future, possible representations as well. Every person can possess any number of such possible selves, although the invented constructs always derive from a context in which the person lives. They can be viewed, as the authors write: 'as the cognitive manifestations of enduring goals, aspirations, motives, fears and threats.'[20] The theory accentuates the construct of a future (possible) construct of oneself. Since the identity is not constant in time, it can change partially or as a whole structure. The future self is, in fact, constructed consciously by a person – a person can by experience change themselves if they work hard enough: if I want to be more assertive, I have to try being assertive in day-to-day interactions, until it becomes a part of my behaviour. By training a person can become what he or she want to be, at the same time in the process of rewriting oneself it is possible that a

person will decide that in fact such trait is undesirable and decide to not be assertive but supportive. Both of those possible selves – assertive and supportive – are called working selves, or self-images, projects (copies of the current self) that are tested and evaluated in the present.

In the age of the Internet using working selves has become even easier than before – the anonymity and low chances of meeting the interlocutors in real life create a space where a person can easily try different working selves. Social media, chats, message boards or on-line RPGs are excellent testing grounds. The avatars (internet personas) can encompass whatever characteristics a person desires, including changed gender or sex.[21] It is also possible to design a different personality and behave in such manner – it's easier to control the new persona in cyber world than in the physical one. There are, however, some circumstances in the real world when a similar tactics of becoming a different persona are necessary. When asking for a rise it could be beneficial for a person to be more assertive, and when explaining a mistake to one's boss it the assertiveness shouldn't be used or exposed too much. Jungian analytical psychology described such changing of character as wearing a mask fitting a role a person has to play in specific circumstances.[22] That mask, however, have to draw on traits that a person already possesses,[23] even if they are underdeveloped. Context calls forth certain behaviour of a person.

There are studies analysing the fans' of a specific fandom characteristics,[24] and as such they also give an insight into parts of the identity construction. There are nonetheless none, to my knowledge, that describe the fans' identity construction, individual predispositions to become fans or reasons of involvement in fandom practices. Since both individual and social identities are intertwined it would not be an easy study to plan and control all of its aspects. The psychological methodology could be helpful when designing a quantitative study of the fans' individual traits. I had conducted two separate studies on fans which I would like to briefly present.

4. Empirical Results

In my psychology Master's thesis I examined active and passive music fans in order to establish whether they personality profiles differed significantly. Active music fans took part in lives, bought merchandise and immersed themselves in the fandoms. Passive fans liked music, but rarely bought anything or went to lives; respondents in this group were used as a reference group. The second aim of the study was to check whether the participants different in terms of formulating life plans. All participants (78 of which 10 were excluded from the study due to formal inadequacies) were of Polish nationality, living in different areas of Poland. All were female between the age of 15 and 30, mean age equalled M=18.86, and standard deviation SD=2.89. Respondents were divided into three groups, based on a short interview proceeding given questionnaire: Asian music fans (AMF), Non-Asian music fans (NAMF) and Music listeners (ML). The AMF listened mostly to

J-rock and J-pop, few to K-pop. They consisted of females between the age of 15 and 25 (M=19, SD=3.22). The respondents were looked for on social media and before D'espairs Ray live in Gdynia, after initial talk the questionnaires were either send by mail to the respondent or handed directly to them. The NAMF were active fans, listening to music excluding J-rock, J-pop or K-pop, they were between 15 and 24 years of age (M=18.32, SD=2.55). The ML age was between 17 and 30 (M=18.86, SD=2.89). All groups were of the same size. Both NAMF and ML respondents were high school and university students from Pomerania province. The questionnaires presented to participants were as follow: title page, NEO-FFI personality test, and Life plans questionnaire of B.R. Little and Schwartzs' Value Survey (SVS). The obtained results were analysed using ANOVA procedure.

In terms of personality differences only one significant difference was found: AMF had higher scores on Conscientiousness scale than others ($F=3.76$, $p\leq0.05$). Probably such difference was connected to the fact that their fan activities required more coordination and planning, since Japanese bands rarely come to perform in Poland and Korean do not tour the country at all. No significant differences were found in terms of generated plans: the AMF a bit more often planned acquiring a well-paid job, most preferably in Japan. They also formulated more plans than other groups. The SVS analysis did not show any statistically significant differences as well, but some tendencies could be seen: the AMF group rated higher values connected to Success than other two groups; the AFM also rated lowest those values that are connected to Conformity.

Researching the issue further I decided to carry out a little pilot study concerning not personality, but one of its components – identity, or rather the possible selves. I intended to check the hypotheses: a fan belonging to several fandoms who identifies oneself with the group develops a fan identity. Meaning, he or she will describe their 'fan self' differently than their 'real self.'

I selected a Polish version of Adjective Check List (ACL). ACL has a form of adjective list, where respondents rate every adjective on the five point scale ranging from -2 to 2 as 'not true' to 'true,' with 0 being the neutral answer 'it's hard to say.' I had prepared two sets with a reduced number of items (from 300 to 125). Reduction was necessary, since reading twice through a list of 300 adjectives would have probably resulted in refusal of taking part in the study.

Participants were asked to rate the selected 125 adjectives in regards of: who they are (Real Self) and what fans they are (Fan Self). I decided not to insert into the study any operative definition of a 'fan,' deciding it could interfere with the respondents own definition that he or she identified with. Before the ACL-derived list respondents were asked to name minimum one and maximum three fandoms with which they identified.

The group consisted of 25 people, 22 of whom were women, 2 were men and one identified as other. All were Polish; the questionnaire was conducted in the Internet. Lists were prepared using google form and the link asking for help in the

study was distributed via Facebook. Seventy two percent of respondents came from big cities (more than 100 thousand citizens), the mean age was M=20.4 years old (SD=3.56). Eight were university graduates, eight were still university students, and seven were still in high school, two in the middle school. Among the fandom affiliation were book titles, TV series, comics, games titles, as well as writers and musician names. They were mostly unique answers due to the small number of respondents.

Since the analysed group was small, no definite conclusions could be drawn. Using a paired sample t-test I checked if there was a significant difference between Real Self and Fan Self. The results showed that there is, in fact, none ($t=2.09$, $df=24$, $p=0.48$). No correlation between the two exists either.

The little pilot sample study has shown that there seems to be no difference between the Real Self and Fan Self. The size of the group as well as its characteristics suggests that the study is not definite and further investigation is needed. Several criteria have to be taken into consideration in order to validate the result. The group should be bigger and more varied in terms of gender, age and sex. In further research varied nationality would also be desirable. The research method should also be changed, as a mean to cross-check the result with different questionnaires or methods of psychological measurement. Such a procedure may prove more useful. In the course of the study certain respondents found the questionnaire 'too long,' one of them said that 'what fans are – is lazy.'

However, there are several items were rated differently in both questionnaires, but none were significant. Such a trend, however, suggests that further investigation of the fan identity is necessary. It seems than indeed fans' express different traits of their identity make up when in the fannish context, or using Jungian metaphor: they wear a different mask among fans and different in non-fannish context. This issue should be addressed in next study, since it would be the one giving better insight into fans' identity constructs.

5. Conclusions

The results of two presented studies suggest little difference between fans and non-fans in terms of personality, values, plans and selves. This findings suggest that the pathological image of fans and fandoms is based on prejudice or fear rather than real, measurable differences. A person belonging to a fandom is no more mad or deviant than the rest of human population. But, the little differences that were found in the personality profiles, the scores obtained on Conscientiousness scale of the NEO-FFI suggest that some group of fans may not be pathological, but rather more hardworking than other people. The fans that were grouped in the Asian Music Fans had achieved even higher notes on this scale than the Non-Asian Music Fanc, which may be read as a fandom specialized characteristic and should be examined more deeply in contrast with other music fan groups or culture texts.

The pilot study of Fan Self had a small study group, but the obtained results had presented an interesting construction of fan identity that should be further examined. The fact that some adjectives were rated differently between Real and Fan self-signify, that some real differences may occur in bigger and more varied study group.

In terms of research conducted among media fans there is still a need for psychological and sociological data concerning groups and individual members of fandom groups. The results presented in this chapter are just preliminary attempts to describe social and individual identity of fans.

Notes

[1] Wiesław Łukaszewski, 'Tożsamość wieloraka,' in *Tożsamość. Trudne pytanie kim jestem*, ed. Wiesław Łukaszewski (Sopot: Smak Słowa, 2012), 9-10.
[2] Ibid., 14-15.
[3] Helen Bee, *Psychologia rozwoju człowieka*, trans. Alekander Wojciechowski (Poznań: Zysk i S-ka Wydawnictwo, 2004), 173-175.
[4] Piotr Oleś, 'Kim jestem? Spotkanie I,' In *Tożsamość. Trudne pytanie...*, 47.
[5] Nicholas A. Christakis and James H. Fowler, *W sieci*, trans. Izabela Szybilska-Fiedorowicz (Sopot: Smak Słowa, 2011), 42-45.
[6] Camille Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 5.
[7] Though, if one examined those fans more closely it would become obvious that they were not in fact, fans,' if fans' were a group of people bonded by love for a certain culture text.
[8] Łukaszewski, *Tożsamość wieloraka*, 22.
[9] Christakis and Fowler, *W sieci*, 37-39.
[10] See Henri Tajfel, *Human Groups & Social Categories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
[11] Jolie Jenson, 'Fandom as Pathology: The Consequences of Characterisation,' In *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, ed. Lisa A. Lewis (London and New York: Routledge 2003), 13.
[12] Jonathan Alec Lapkoff, comment on https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=471085062964810&set=a.293538274052824.67610.293522497387735&type=3&theater#
Accessed 8, May 2013.
[13] See Sian Lincoln, 'Teenage Girls Bedroom Culture: Codes versus Zones,' In *Beyond Subculture: Critical Commentaries in Contemporary Youth Culture*, ed. Andy Bennett and Keith Harris (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004), 94-106.
[14] Henri Tajfel, *Human Groups & Social Categories*, 231.
[15] Ibid., 229.

[16] Tomasz Maruszewski, 'Pamięć autobiograficzna i tożsamość,' In *Tożsamość. Trudne...*, 145-148.
[17] Zygmunt Bauman, *Płynne czasy. Życie w epoce niepewności*, trans. Maciek Żakowski (Warszawa: Sic! 2007), 7.
[18] Hazel Markus and Paula Nurius, 'Possible Selves,' *American Psychologist* 9 (1986): 954-969.
[19] Ibid., 954.
[20] Ibid., 954.
[21] Bauman, *Płynne czasy*; Wieslaw, *Tożsamość. Trudne pytanie kim jestem*, 16-17.
[22] See Jolande Jacobi, *The Psychology of C.G. Jung* (Chelsea: Yale University Press, 1973).
[23] Markus and Nurius, 'Possible Selves', 954.
[24] See Claudia Rabaza, 'The Problematic Definition of "Fan": A Survey of Fannish Involvement in the Buffyverse,' In *Buffy and Angel Conquer the Internet: Essays on Online Fandom*, ed. Mary Kirby-Diaz (Jefferson and London: McFarland & Company, 2009), 147-171.

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Pop Culture Tourism: A Research Model

Christine Lundberg and Maria Lexhagen

Abstract
The purpose of this chapter is to develop a model of central elements, and their linkages, for pop culture tourism research and for the benefit of innovation in the creative industries and tourism. Pop culture tourism is tourism that emerges from pop culture phenomena such as books, films, and music. It is based on both authentic destination attributes) as well as purely fictitious foundations. This implies an elusive form of tourism that has complex managerial dimensions. Research on pop culture tourism has to date been mostly case based, hence lacking a holistic approach. For example, specific destinations or pop culture phenomena, fans and fan communities, as well as effects of individual types of technology have been studied without the holistic perspective of finding the important links between these aspects and their significance for the successful development and management of pop culture tourism. An important shortcoming of this is that essential knowledge needed for successful innovation and development is missing. Additionally, an explosive growth in the film and music industries as well as the advent of the Internet warrant new knowledge and new ideas for innovation.

Key Words: Pop culture, film, literature, music, tourism, destination, research model, innovation, fans, technology.

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1. Introduction

Lord of the Rings/New Zealand, *James Bond*/Bahamas, *Harry Potter*/UK, *Twilight*/Forks, USA, *Mamma Mia*/Skopelos, Greece, are all examples of places where pop culture tourism has emerged from pop culture phenomena such as books, films, and music. Traveling to places associated with literature or authors is not new. However, these examples need to be seen in a context where there is an explosive increase in the creative industries' production of films, literature, and music, as well as a massive diffusion and increase of Internet use.

The importance of pop culture tourism can be seen from studying reported statistics such as the Belmont University study on the music industry in Nashville which states that 35% (3.7 million) of annual Nashville visitors are music related tourists.[1] Furthermore, 300, 000 people have visited Forks, USA, since the release of the first book in *The Twilight Saga* series,[2] and 600,000 people visit Liverpool annually to experience the Beatles, with tourists spending approximately 41 million US$.[3] In a recent study by Visit Britain,[4] international potential visitors state that going on a Beatles tour in Liverpool is the top choice among music related activities. Also, the economic impact of hip-hop music, film/TV, and

clothing on the US economy is substantial and has become an additional factor in attracting tourists to the country.[5]

Pop culture has been defined as a culture liked by many, something other than 'fine culture,' situated in the context of mass production and mass consumption, culture by the people for the people, accessible, and commercial.[6] Also, pop culture phenomena have strong impacts on attitudes, values, and behavior.[7] The term pop culture tourism refers to tourism induced by pop culture. The tourists that engage in this type of tourism can be characterized as fans. This form of tourism is becoming increasingly popular[8] and the growing interest among tourism researchers is indicated by the annual International Tourism and Media Conference (ITAM), which includes several topics, related to film and tourism and associated special issues in several leading tourism journals.

Pop culture tourism is highly demand driven[9] and since tourists associate the destination with dramatic events or dramatic characters portrayed in literature, on TV, or in a film,[10] it tends to create strong emotional ties to the destination visited. Tourists in general are mainly attracted to the mythology of a destination, not the 'real' place[11] and mythology is an even more important aspect for pop culture tourists.[12] For example, fan and fan culture motives are far more complex than what a traditional push-pull model of tourist motives suggests.[13] Push motives focus on the tourists' psychological and social characteristics, and pull motives on the attractiveness of the destination.[14] Also, it is not enough to consider pop culture tourist motives as escaping the routine of everyday life or as personal and interpersonal rewards such as rest, relaxation, ego enhancement, and social interaction with family and friends.[15] The interests of fans are directed to places where a constructed reality[16] is offered (i.e. a destination). Such experiences can be seen as evidence of Baudrillard's[17] claim that hyper-reality is the postmodern society's most prominent state and encompasses that the boundary between the simulated/fictitious and reality is dissolved.

Knowledge on the effects on travel and tourism from fans' interest in pop culture phenomena is limited in the creative industries. On the other hand, tourism destinations often face sudden demands on products and services connected to pop culture phenomena. This puts a strain on their strategic planning. In order to facilitate *innovation in destinations and attractions* which supports both the creative industries' interests (such as increasing sales volume, creating new markets, as well as historically preserving pop culture phenomena) and a destination's goal (such as creating long-term successful tourism), a better understanding of a holistic perspective and complex interaction between factors influencing pop culture tourism is needed.

Most research on pop culture tourism is focused on film tourism. Beeton's[18] review shows that scholars have moved from estimating tourist flows[19] to exploring travel motives,[20] management issues, and effects on destinations such as changed image or new market segments,[21] to postmodern interpretations of the

phenomenon. To date, the literature is dominated by case based research, in which specific destinations and/or films/TV-series have been in focus. Furthermore, regional effects of film and TV-series tourism have been documented in a number of studies on the British Isles[22] such as *Harry Potter*[23] and *Braveheart*.[24]

The dramatic growth of the creative industries of film/TV, literature, and music in recent decades offers consumers enormous amounts of choice and hence fierce competition. This should also be understood in the context of increased usage of the Internet and social media. Fans of pop culture do not exist in isolation. They communicate with each other, facilitated by various Web 2.0 applications, and access new information on the phenomenon in question from the constant flow of updates and sources available on the Internet. This means that *technology mediation* is an important factor to address. The use of online information has previously been mostly motivated by customers' need to improve efficiency in the search process while the decision about which travel destination to choose has primarily been influenced by family, friends, and peers.[25] However, with the developments of the online world and the introduction of social media, online information also influences purchase decisions.[26]

As a source of knowledge for innovation, user generated content (UGC) on the Internet can be analyzed for the purpose of understanding customer needs and wants, as well as to detect strengths and weaknesses related to existing product offers.[27] Blog entries, for example, can be seen as a manifestation of a tourism experience[28] and image dimensions of a destination can reliably be deduced from such information.[29] Moreover, online popularity is critical since it may reflect the attractiveness and future demand for a product.[30]

Previous research has treated central elements of pop culture tourism as separate research issues. For instance, specific destinations or pop culture phenomena, fans and fan communities, as well as the effects of individual types of technology have been studied without the holistic perspective of finding the important links between these aspects. Therefore, we propose a holistic research model encompassing both the elements of technology, destinations, and fans and fan culture. By employing a holistic research model and a multidisciplinary approach to pop culture tourism studies, previous research gaps are able to be filled that may benefit not only tourism research but also fan research. Figure 1 is an illustration of the main elements in the model and the linkages between them.

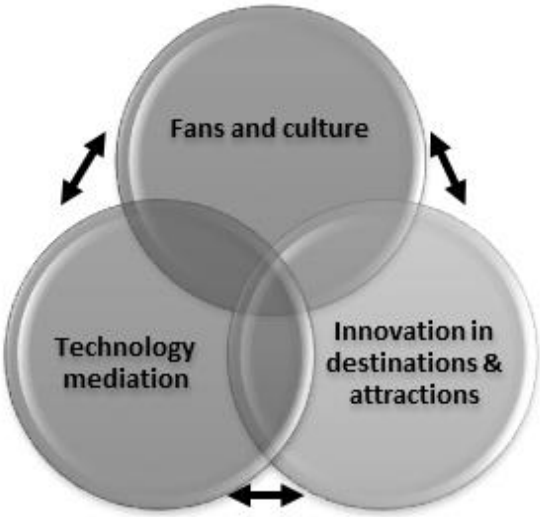

Image 1: Pop Culture Research Model Elements © 2014. Courtesy of the author.

2. Innovation in Destinations and Attractions

A destination is a place comprised of products and services that attract visitors.[31] A destination is traditionally divided into a number of elements: attractions (based on e.g. culture), services (e.g. food, lodging), infrastructure (e.g. transportation, information technology), accessibility (e.g. physical, psychological, and economic), and information/marketing (e.g. internal marketing/information sharing among destination stakeholders and external marketing towards consumers). Furthermore, all of these components are interdependent as the production process of tourism products at destinations, involving a wide range of stakeholders, is dynamic and often difficult to manage.[32] Central in the management of this production is the tourists' perceptions of service quality and value. These constructs are complex and destinations often struggle with identifying which elements, or combination of elements, evoke feelings of high service quality and value among their visitors.[33] Thus, customers play an important role as co-creators of the destination experiences in addition to the destination stakeholders.

It is paramount for pop culture destinations that their main attraction be based on a pop culture phenomenon. The fact that this form of tourism is based on both authentic destination attributes, such as attractions (e.g. film locations) and services (e.g. guided tours) associated to the pop culture phenomena, as well as purely fictitious foundations[34] is both a source for success but also poses difficulties. For instance, a destination's association to a pop culture phenomenon, whether it is a

music band, a film, or a book, can generate new tourist flows to the destination, which in turn results in a positive economic impact for the region, or it may create a new image of the destination. Collaboration between the creative industries and tourism stakeholders is therefore vital for successful product development. Examples are licensed merchandise, souvenir stores, and signage.[35] In Liverpool, for example, several attractions have been developed to satisfy the large number of Beatles fans that travel there to partake in Beatles holidays such as a themed visitor attraction called The Beatles Story and the guided tour of Beatles attractions – The Magical Mystery Tour.[36]

Since pop culture tourism is to a large extent highly demand driven,[37] grows rather rapidly and is thus difficult to predict, it creates specific demands on the destination. Knowledge about the visiting fans' complex set of travel motives, fan identity, community activities, and usage of technology is essential.

These pop culture destination characteristics place new demands for development and innovation of services on the destination's stakeholders in order to attain sustainability. Services development and innovation are characterized by all things that differ from *business as usual* or deviate from praxis.[38] The concept of innovation is based on the theoretical logic that businesses are mostly conservative until they are faced with a threat or a challenging change (e.g. increased competition or changes in access to resources). On the business level, two types of factors influence the motives for development: *push factors* and *pull factors*. The first concerns new technology or methods which are more efficient in the production process or which make the product more attractive to customers. The second is reflected in the demand from customers.[39] According to tourism researchers, only limited systematical and empirical research has been presented on innovation and its effects on tourism.[40]

In pop culture tourism, different types of innovation strategies at various destinations have been documented in the case of the book and film series *The Twilight Saga*. At one of these destinations, Forks, US, the stakeholders have gone all out and *adopted a constructed reality*, in terms of profiting from the phenomenon. They have developed what can only be described as Twilight Land. This has been made possible, according to Forks' tourism stakeholders, by Twilight Saga author Stephenie Meyer's authentic descriptions of their town and neighboring areas. The Italian destinations, Volterra and Montepulciano, have followed an innovation strategy where they *guard their identity while capitalizing* on the phenomenon. This entails that they use *The Twilight Saga* to attract interest for their historical/cultural heritage. For example, due to the author's accurate portrayal of Volterra's history in her books, the tour operators are able to connect the Twilight vampire characters with their Etruscan heritage. In British Columbia no strategy has been implemented and this form of tourism is only seen as marginal and only capitalized on at particular points in time (e.g. DVD/Blu-ray releases). In

this region, small-scale entrepreneurs struggle against the copyright owners in order to run their businesses.[41]

3. Fans and Fan Culture

To date, there is not a lot of research on fans as tourists. However, research on sports fans has established a set of motives: psychological (eustress, escape, aesthetic pleasure, drama, entertainment), socio-cultural (family and social interaction, cultural connections), and social belonging (tribal connections, vicarious achievement).[42] From this research, a particular emphasis on social dimensions can be seen showing the importance of group activity and community building factors. Furthermore, research on music tourism has shown that tourists are lured by the feelings evoked by music, such as nostalgia, elation, energy, melancholy, and a desire for pilgrimage. They search for novel and authentic experiences.[43] Music tourists have also been described as partaking in serious leisure 'where perseverance, a 'career' progression, personal effort, durable benefits and the ethos of community characterize participants.'[44]

In order to understand fans and fan culture, it is important to look at not only motives but also the outcome of experiences in pop culture tourism, for example, through the concept of perceived value. The concept of perceived value is close to the concept of motivation since it is also about understanding why people choose to participate in experiences.[45] Research has shown that the motivation to consume hedonic types of products, such as travel and tourism, is based on the direct linkage between attribute-based values and higher-held, individual, enduring values in life.[46]

Experiences, such as those in pop culture tourism, are believed to be subjective, intangible, continuous, and highly personal phenomena,[47] and satisfaction can be viewed as a general outcome of tourism experiences.[48]

In an attempt to uncover the essence of memorable tourism experiences Tung and Ritchie[49] found that affect, expectations, consequentiality, and recollection enable the formation of memorable experiences. Specifically, customer perceived value is different depending on if it is valued for its contribution to an end-state or for the pure possession of a product/experience. It is a trade-off between negative and positive consequences from using a product/experience, and it is context dependent.[50] Perceived value is also interactive (product/experience – customer), relativistic, comparative, situational, personal, and a judgment of preference.[51]

Value can be used as an approximation of what customers want and what they believe they will get[52] and is hence linked to the formation of motivation. Additionally, research has shown that it is important to measure satisfaction, loyalty, and customer perceived value since these concepts have a comprehensive and complex effect on behavioral intention,[53] such as the intention to purchase and recommend.[54] Importantly for pop culture tourism research specifically found that affective benefits positively influence future vacation choice.[55]

4. Technology Mediation

Technology mediation points to the importance of seeing pop culture destinations and fans through the lens of our information society. Various forms of technology mediate and facilitate the diffusion of information and the creation of tourist experiences.

In social media, large volumes of user generated content (UGC) can be found which, in turn, have a rapidly increasing importance for consumers' decision making processes.[56] In social media, marketing messages and meanings are co-produced through consumer-generated narratives found in online networks which may then lead to the formation of consumer tribes.[57] Hence, technology facilitates fans to be involved with other fans as well as with the actual content of books, films, music, and etcetera. From a marketing perspective, Cova and Cova[58] suggested that citizens in the 21st century are more interested in social links and the identities that come with them, than the pure consumption of objects. Cova, Kozinets, and Shankar[59] argue that these new types of consumers, consumer tribes, are active and enthusiastic in their consumption, sometimes to the extreme, and produce a range of identities, practices, rituals, meanings, and even material culture which in turn may influence the formation of pop culture destinations. Unruh's[60] concept of the social world can be seen as an early conceptualization of the phenomenon of consumer tribes, noting that common 'world views' are often created which unite social actors in terms of practices, procedures, and perspectives. Social media can be seen as a form of communication center in Unruh's[61] conceptualization of social worlds. Furthermore, in the early 1990s, the concept of a virtual community was introduced. In virtual communities, people are motivated by entertainment and escaping from real life, as well as to meet and interact with people from around the world, to communicate and maintain relationships.[62]

Social identity and a sense of belonging are important for the development and success of online communities[63] and tourists' level of involvement can explain the formation of certain behaviors.[64] Jepsen[65] found that information searches in virtual communities to some extent replace information from marketer-dominated sources.

Furthermore, it is by now a widely established fact that consumers' use of social media applications such as Facebook and Twitter reached enormous proportions by the end of the first decade in the 21st century. Social media is very much the essence of Web 2.0 and the focal points of applications on the Internet are that they are customer-centric, user-generated, interactive, and dynamic, foster community participation, and build on collective community intelligence.[66] Social media is becoming increasingly important for tourism. A PhoCusWright[67] report on social media in travel states that traveler reviews, photos, trip planning, sharing, and blogging are all influencing how travelers connect to and interact with suppliers and products. Also, results from Xiang and Gretzel[68] support this view. They found that social media constitutes a substantial part in the search engine

results of travel searches. The possibility to use the Internet to disperse information and share opinions at the 'speed of light' is an important factor that influences the proliferation of pop culture phenomena and hence potentially also the development of pop culture tourism. As Guex[69] asserts, 'the Web has become for many a travel companion who gives good advice and has an attentive ear.'

Specifically, research on pop culture tourists has shown that they are avid users of the Internet and very involved in social media use, searching for information, interacting with other fans, producing their own content associated to the pop culture phenomena of interest.[70] Also, social media is important in their search and decision-making processes and how they interact with other fans and share their experiences.[71]

5. Conclusions

The purpose of this chapter was to develop a model of central elements for pop culture tourism research and its linkages for the benefit of innovation in the creative industries and tourism. The identified elements are 1) innovation in destinations and attractions, 2) fans and fan culture, and 3) technology mediation. Based on the three elements in this model, the following two functions serve to highlight the links between them and hence the theoretically motivated rationale for the model.

$$F_{\text{pop culture tourism success}}=(\text{PP}+\text{TMFE}+\text{ST}+\text{DIPD})$$

The first function, focusing primarily on the tourism stakeholder perspective, is aimed at identifying the elements of successful pop culture tourism as well as the interaction effects between the elements. In essence, it is the interplay of these elements that enable a positive outcome. The first element is pop culture phenomena (PP) which acts as the basis of this type of tourism. Technology mediated fan experiences (TMFE) facilitate the communication between fans as well as the creation and augmentation of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors such as travel interest. Strong ties (ST) illustrate the need to acknowledge how an emotional connection between fans and their pop culture interests plays a significant role also in a tourist experience. Destination innovation and product development (DIPD) is the effort required by various stakeholders in both tourism and the creative industries to capitalize on pop culture tourism.

$$F_{\text{pop culture product/market development}}=(\text{NAD}+\text{REFB}+\text{TMFE}+\text{V})$$

The second function, focusing primarily on pop culture copyright owners in the creative industry, is aimed at identifying the elements of pop culture product and market development based on tourism. New attractions and destinations (NAD) refer to the need for creative industries to engage in the development of attractions

and destinations connected to pop culture phenomena and the management of the inherent cultural heritage in pop culture phenomena. Based on these attractions and destinations, the revival and extension of fan bases (REFB) pose an opportunity for product and market development, as well as innovation both for the creative and tourism industries. Technology mediated fan experiences (TMFE) entail the possibilities for fans to create and communicate new pop culture phenomena. Virtualization (V) represents the potential for creative industry stakeholders to produce technology augmented pop culture experiences.

Thus in conclusion, moving away from case-based research requires the development of holistic models which encompass multi-perspectives and offer opportunities for multi-disciplinary studies. Such a development may benefit tourism research as well as fan research and cultural studies.

Notes

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The Pleasures of Fandom and the Affective Divide: Chinese Pop Fandom in Singapore

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Abstract
What is fandom? Studies on Asian fan culture have been preoccupied with issues of identity, and anxiety concerning celebrity influence. However, it is unclear what shape fandom takes, or how and why it is sustained. In the kaleidoscopic media environment of Singapore, this study seeks to understand two groups of Mando/Canto-pop (popular music performed in Mandarin and Cantonese) fans in Singapore. Interviews with fans of Hong Kong singer Sandy Lam, and that of Singaporean singer Kit Chan, reveal that the sustenance and evolution of their respective fandoms take on very different forms and intensities. While both groups declare themselves as huge, long-time fans (of 13 to 27 years), Lam's fandom is affective, yet intellectual; a hybrid of what Shuker[1] describes as 'fans' and 'aficionados.' Chan's fandom, on the other hand, can be described as ambivalent for most part. In understanding the differences, five binary themes are explored. Firstly, 'de-centred/centred' takes a look at fan ecologies and how they shape fandom. Secondly, 'shame/pride' discusses how the fans perceive their identities as fans, which in turn influences their performance of fan practices. This contributes partly to how much the fan integrates fandom into his life, explored in the third theme, 'separation/integration.' Their motivation for sustaining their fandom will be investigated in the fourth theme, 'nostalgia/renewal.' Finally, the para-social interaction that is instrumental to fan-celebrity relationships is discussed in 'desired-reality/perfect-fantasy.' Through these themes, the derivation of pleasure from fandom (or lack thereof) in the context of living in Singapore explains the different fan experiences.

Key Words: Mandopop, canto-pop, popular music, Sandy Lam, Kit Chan, fandom, affect, pleasure, construction of fandom, Singapore, East Asia.

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1. Introduction

What is fandom? Since Jenkins' landmark study in *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*,[2] studies on media have constantly shown that fans are not the stereotypical geeks and social misfits that they are believed to be, nor are they passive 'cultural dopes.'[3] Instead, fan culture, with its complex web of social connections, consumption, performance and production practices, is very rich and plays a productive role in the fans' lives.

Studies on Asian fan culture have been largely preoccupied with issues of identity and resistance – issues that fan studies have grappled with since its' early

roots in sub-cultural studies. While these issues are no doubt important, it is just as important to widen our understanding of what shape fandom takes, of how and why it is sustained. It is through looking at the form and function, and the negotiation of fandom itself, that we are able to gain insight on the very core of fandom – the enjoyment of being a fan.

This study seeks to investigate fandom using in-depth interviews with long-term Mando/Canto-pop[4] (hereafter referred to under the umbrella term, 'Chinese pop') fans residing in Singapore. This would help to further our understanding of how fandom figures in these individuals' lives. In addition, as a substantial portion of fan research in Asia was done on adolescents,[5] this study contributes to the growing number of studies in adult and long-term fandom, especially in Asia. Lastly, because of the language and the geography of Chinese pop, a sizable portion of the research in this genre was written in Chinese, and thus is inaccessible to those who do not read the language. This study contributes to the available literature on the Chinese pop music fandom done in English.

2. Who Are They?

Two Chinese pop singers have been selected for this study – Kit Chan and Sandy Lam. Kit is a Singaporean Singer, dubbed a 'national treasure' by the local media, after her success in the competitive Taiwanese market in the 1990s. Sandy Lam is from Hong Kong and started out in the mid-1980s doing Canto-pop, particularly in dance/club music and Japanese pop adaptations. Although Sandy has had a longer career and is what many consider the bigger 'star,' both are dubbed 'shi li pai'[6] singers. They are fluent in the same languages (Mandarin, Cantonese and English) and hence compete in the same markets. In addition, both singers took a 6-year hiatus[7] from producing new studio albums in the mid-2000s, and returned with self-produced albums, working with record companies only in the distribution stage. With such similarities, they, and more specifically, their fans, were chosen for comparison in this study.

3. Canto/Mandopop and Its Fandom

Fan Studies in Chinese pop occur primarily in the third wave of fan studies.[8] They address fans' experiences and investigate how fandom fits into their lives, why they become fans, and why they engage in certain fan practices. As Taiwan and Hong Kong are the centre of Mando and Canto-pop respectively, research in this field, has mostly been centred on the stars and fans in these two areas - though this has recently expanded to include Mainland China.

In general, research on Chinese pop music fandom has been sparse, although there has been a fair amount of work done on the industry, the genre and its stars. While general studies about the genre and industry focus on the issues of globalization, localization and transnationalism,[9] the case studies explore cultural or national identity in depth. For example, Guy analyzed audiences' responses to

Taiwanese Singer A-mei's performance of the national anthem at Chen Shui Bian's inauguration as the president of Taiwan.[10] After the event, China placed a media embargo on her and banned her from entering the country for three years. Issues like Taiwan's tense history with Mainland China, and the Taiwanese cultural identity shaped audiences' comments. This performance was then read as A-mei's betrayal of and disappointment to her Mainland Chinese fans.

The above study reveals that cultural and national identities are important in the consumption of Chinese pop. In addition, its fandom in this region can also be a site of political resistance, and an exploration and expression of sexuality and gender identity, all of which are themes that are familiar to fan studies in other parts of the world.[11]

Of course, the study of the Chinese pop fandom cannot be separated from the study of fan practices and fans' motivations. Certainly, not every fandom is politicized and fans do derive other pleasures from fandom. For instance, through studying the fan labour practices of Chris Li Yuchun's fans, Yang found that they 'positioned themselves as guardians of her music career.'[12] This fan-celebrity dynamic was attributed partly to a maternal love driven by Confucian family values, where fans are like Chinese parents and 'feel that they are obliged to do whatever they can to help 'the kid' succeed and in turn they take pride in her achievements.'[13] From this study, we can see how the context can determine fans' motivation in engaging in fan practices.

A comparative study between fans of Hong Kong singer Leon Lai, and his Dutch counterpart Marco Borsato further illustrates the importance of context. Chow and de Kloet found that Lai's fans describe his most desirable traits as his 'hard work, perseverance and constant attempt to seek improvement and honour.'[14] They hope that he will become a global star, and didn't mind him being based elsewhere. Borsato's fans see him as an ordinary man, and preferred to have accessibility to him. The authors conclude that such differences are due to the discourses in their respective societies. Hong Kong, historically an emigrant settlement, valued being extraordinary, hardworking and proud; while the Dutch society emphasized being ordinary, emotional and humanitarian.

On a separate occasion, Chua points out the difference between East Asian popular culture fandom and its Western counterpart - instead of occupying themselves with active discussion and meaning making, East Asian fans seek intimacy.[15] Such differences are worth a second look, a deeper investigation into the 'hows' and 'whys' of fandom. They also are testament to the fact that there is not just one definition of fandom.

Unlike Hong Kong, Taiwan and China, Singapore, though having a large proportion of ethnic Chinese in its population, does not share the same political or cultural tensions. While English is the official first language, Mandarin-language media has consistently topped the national ratings; and although Canto-pop does not air on television or radio,[16] concert ticket sales have attested to its popularity.[17]

Despite the common use of Mandarin, and the popularity of Mandarin-language media, Singapore is 'quintessentially an import and consumption location,'[18] that never had a thriving local Chinese-language film or music industry, with most imports coming from East-Asian neighbours like Taiwan and Hong Kong. Thus, by virtue of the context itself, fandom in Singapore could take a different shape as those described in existing literature on Chinese pop fandom. With very little work done on fans in Singapore, there remains a paucity of research in this area, and this study hopes to explore what fandom looks like in Singapore.

4. The Pleasures of Fandom and the Affective Divide

A combination of Jenkins,'[19] Hills'[20] and Grossberg's[21] writing were the starting point for this study. Putting their thoughts together, we can view fandom with cognitive, social, psychological and affective dimensions, and fans as productive in each of these dimensions, within a cultural context. Through this combined framework of understanding fandom, this study, through interviews with 15 fans (8 of Kit's and 7 of Sandy's),[22] seeks to investigate the construction of the two fandoms over time and differences between them. Findings reveal that the sustenance and evolution of their respective fandoms take on very different forms and intensities.

In particular, this study focuses on affect fans have for fandom. Grossberg[23] makes the distinction between a fan and a regular audience based on an 'affective sensibility.' He argues that while our most common relationship to popular culture lies in the production of pleasure, the fan's relationship to cultural products is characterized by affect or mood.

> Affect is perhaps the most difficult plane of out lives to define, not merely because it is even less necessarily tied to meaning than pleasure, but also because it is, in some sense, the most mundane aspect of everyday life… Affect is closely tied to what we often describe as the meaning of life.[24]

Affect, in this sense, has a quantitative and qualitative component, where the former determines the strength of the fan's investment in the fandom, and the latter determines the nature of the investment. It is such affective relations that help to determine the meaning and/or pleasure derived out of one's object of fandom. In Grossberg's words, 'affect is what gives 'colour,' 'tone' or 'texture' to our experiences.'[25] Grossberg uses the metaphor of a fluid 'mattering map' to explain how affect is organized in our lives, such that we are able to identify where, when and how to invest in what we perceive as something that matters. According to him, investment in popular culture potentially empowers the fan on various levels, such as identity construction, to 'find ourselves 'at home' with what we care

about;'[26] and when the fan gains returns through his investment in fandom, he feels like he can exert control over his affective life.

While both groups of fans in this study declare themselves as huge, long-time fans, Kit's fandom can be described as ambivalent for the most part and somewhat affective at best. They tended to downplay their involvement in fandom. In addition, how they described their fan activities and their idol suggested a lack of emotional investment in being a fan. Kit fans also seem to have a like-dislike relationship with her. While they unanimously agreed that she was a good singer with musical talent, they were also critical of her. Part of this like-dislike relationship is also expressed as disappointment in various aspects of the fandom, including the fan-celebrity relationship and fan dynamics. In addition, her fans admit to have dropped out of fandom during her hiatus, and returned when she returned.

Sandy's fandom, on the other hand, is affective, yet intellectual; a hybrid of what Shuker describes as 'fans' and 'aficionados.'[27] This group of fans are as attracted by her charisma and persona as they are passionate about analyzing her music and career. They put great investment (in terms of emotions, time, resources, etc) in their fandom, and in many ways, are the textbook description of what fandom is like as described in existing literature – participative, collaborative, empowered, with a sense of community. With so much invested in fandom, they are protective of Sandy and declared that they were proud to be a fan.

In understanding the differences in these two groups of fans,[28] we will explore five binary themes derived from the data obtained through my interviews with them.

In the first theme, De-centered/Centered, we will take a look at fan ecologies. The structure and dynamics of the fandom shape how much the fans participate and how much they enjoy being in the fan community.

From the diagram, we can see two important differences in the structure of the two groups of fans: the presence of a centre of activity amongst Sandy fans situated in Hong Kong and Taiwan – the 'core fans;' and the fact that isolated Sandy fans have their own network of fellow fans, or have a connection to the 'core.'

In this aspect, the presence of a 'core,' a flat structure[29] that encourages collaboration, participation and sharing, as well as the use of internet platforms to create and disseminate information, especially by the core fans, help to foster a strong community and sense of ownership amongst Sandy fans. In addition, those who are isolated from the main group of fans in Singapore have their own network, thus enabling them to forge a sense of community with other fans at large, and experience the pleasures of collective fandom, even though they are away from the main network.

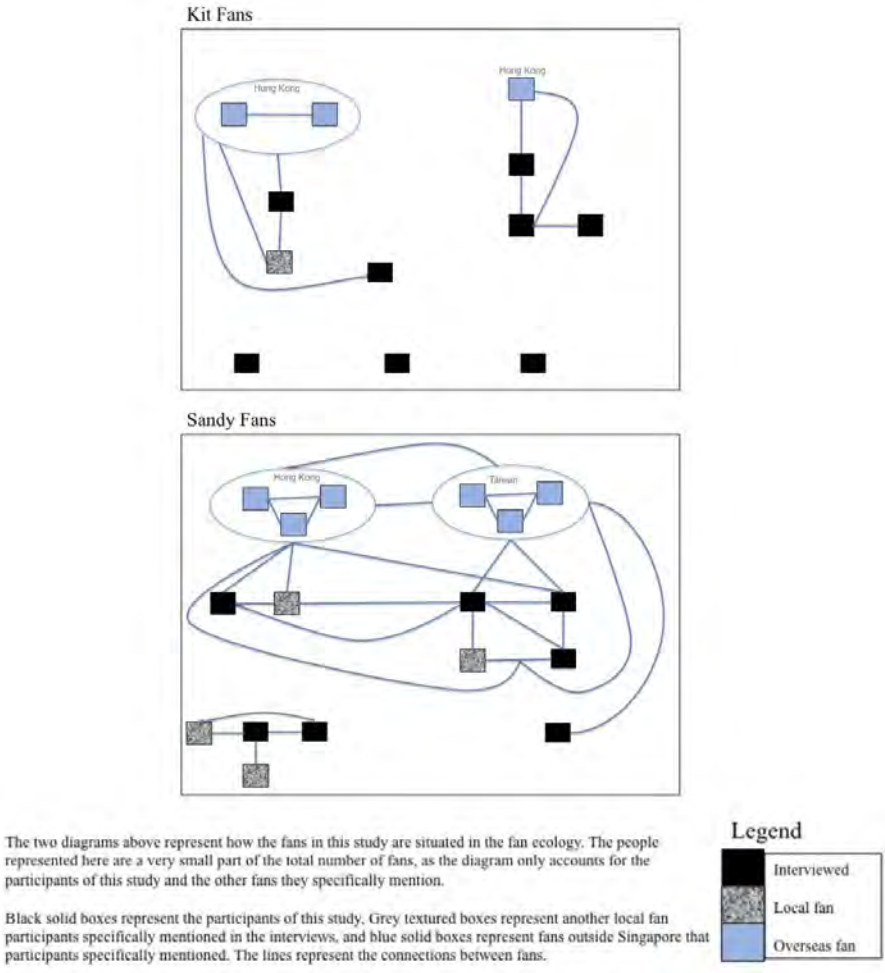

Figure 1: Structure of Fandom. © 2014. Courtesy of the author

Kit Chan fans, however, are unable to experience the same as fan politics due to competition for Kit's attention have divided the group. While the fan club used to be based in Singapore and headed by one of the fans in this study, it is now based in Hong Kong. Fans speak of dissatisfaction with how the fan club is now a tool for a small group of fans to get closer to Kit. Consider the comments from this fan,

> I must say that I was a bit disturbed. I want to distance myself because of certain things that have taken place. I think it's totally nonsensical..., I don't want to be part of it..., I'm supporting her in my own way, anyway. I don't need a fan club, if she's not having a show. (Kate)

With this, any participation is usually goal oriented and short term. Fans also rely on word-of-mouth to update each other, rather than via a central platform, and the fan-maintained news website and Facebook page seem to serve as a source of information for the general public. The result of this is that fans have little sense of community, and the competitive atmosphere has led to unhappiness and limited participation.

The result is an uneven distribution of information, and the lack of perceived closeness to Kit in some fans. Stevens argues that closeness can be 'experienced through the accumulation and distribution of material objects and information.'[30] Thus, without a strong network that allows such accumulation and distribution, Kit's fans do not experience the same closeness to their idol, as Sandy's fans do.

The second theme, shame/pride, manifests itself in two ways – firstly in the fans' attitude towards their object of fandom, and secondly, in their opinions towards being a fan.

Sandy fans consistently declare that they are proud of Sandy's accomplishments, how she works hard to improve herself, and how '… she was doing the J-pop thing. I found that she can't really sing … [now] the change is quite incredible … it shows that she is very determined to improve her craft' (Calvin).

This finding that is similar to that of Chow and de Kloet's regarding fans of Hong Kong singer Leon Lai.[31] With hard work and meritocracy part of the dominant discourse in Singapore, it is not surprising that Sandy fans find her so agreeable, as she is known to be a perfectionist and hard worker, and thus represents the ideal in this context.[32]

This is not to say that Kit Chan does not work hard, but fans know of her as a dreamer, who quit school to pursue singing. In a society highly prioritizes educational and economic success, Kit is 'quite different from the normal people, the normal humans that I have around me.' (Catherine) While fans admire her for daring to go against the norm, they do not necessarily relate to it, and sometimes judge her based on their understanding of the norm. Speaking of Kit's hiatus from recording albums, Catherine then adds, 'and she at least finished the degree that she abandoned.'

The concept of a fan has often been framed as pathological, and plagued with images of deviance.[33] Kit fans, expressing embarrassment about what they do as a fan, has internalized such views, something that Sandy fans seems immune to. In fact, Sandy's fans adopt her work ethic into fandom, taking pride in what they do

as her fans. They are, in Sonny's words 'very pro [professional].' It is interesting to also note that this professionalism comes not only as an extension of Sandy's work ethic, but also as a way to differentiate themselves from other fans. To a certain extent, it also helps fans to legitimise their fan practices. In comparing Sandy's fan club with Taiwanese Singer A-mei's fan club, Sonny recounts how dissatisfied he was with booking A-mei's concert tickets through her fan club and if 'you are her die-hard fan, and I should admire you. You know. So you should be more pro, this shows how serious you are towards your idol.'

In discussing the *Supernatural* female fandom, Zubernis and Larsen discuss how fans demonstrate shame towards being a fan. Citing Freudian theories of psychoanalysis and Bartky's writing on shame, Zubernis and Larsen illustrate that these fans' actions show how their sentiment of shame acts as a barrier between their private and public identity, where the public shields the inadequate identity underneath.[34] Herein lies a contradiction among Kit's fans, when Belle says 'it's [being a fan] not something you declare to everybody' - something that is seen as fulfilling for Sandy's fans is seen as an inadequacy Kit's fans.

The fans' take on 'shame/pride' then contributes partly to how much the fan integrates fandom into his or her life in our fourth theme, Separation/Integration. Sandy Lam's fans integrate fandom into their lives on many levels because of their structure and the pride they have in fandom, as well as the emotional and intellectual interest they have for Sandy and her music.

However, Kit Chan fans' shame and embarrassment in fandom has led them to conceal or limit their performance of fan activities. The structure of the fandom, as mentioned earlier, has also resulted fans interacting only when the need arises (e.g. there is a concert), and not as part of their routine. In fact, in some instances, participation in fandom was viewed as intrusive. With minimal integration of fandom in their lives, it is difficult for these fans to experience the cultural production of pleasure. If, according to Grossberg,[35] affect determines investment, the lack of affect would also mean a lack of investment in the fandom.

The fourth theme, Nostalgia/Renewal, explores how the fans sustain their interest in fandom. The lack in investment in Kit fans' in fandom has also allowed it to rely primarily on nostalgia and habit to sustain itself.

This is in contrast to Sandy Lam's fans, who, although nostalgic to some extent, find more joy in the continued renewal of their interest in the music, the celebrity and fandom itself. Part of the credit goes to the celebrity because, firstly, one aspect that fans enjoy very much are her more experimental works that were not necessarily well received at the time of release, but in retrospect, are considered by many fans to be ahead of their time. Secondly, her songs are rearranged in an unexpected way for her audience in each concert that she has. Thus, the texts' renewal motivates the fans to continue engaging in fan practices like attending performances, uploading/watching bootleg concert recordings, and discussing them with other fans.

On the other hand, when Kit fans described what they enjoyed about fandom and how they were able to sustain their interest in fandom, nostalgia and habit were the main points that came out from their answers. Consider the following two responses – "Cos I have never supported other singers before… maybe I'm a person that likes to … reminisce … I will just continue … no reason to stop" (Don); and "Because I've liked her since I was young. It's just a hobby and I just like her songs … it's just in me to support her" (Ellen).

Thus, while both groups have an element of nostalgia in them, Sandy's fans have another element that enriches their experience in fandom.

Next, we will look at the fans' expectations of the fan-celebrity relationship in our last theme, Desired-reality/Perfect-fantasy. In this aspect, Kit fans have experienced disappointment. Perhaps it is partly because of underwhelming experiences in the other aspects of fandom that some fans actively engage in proximity seeking activities. More specifically, some fans want to go beyond scoring an autograph or first-row concert seat, to establishing a more personal relationship with Kit. For example, Kate writes about her own life in her letters to Kit, and gives her CDs of guitar music that she likes. Similarly, Lily writes about her personal thoughts and other things related to her own day-to-day life in her letters to Kit. Horton and Wohl, in writing about para-social interaction, state that the performer-spectator relationship comes with unspoken terms, and the spectator has to play the part that is demanded of him; if not, s/he will experience increasing dissatisfaction.[36] Although they know that as a celebrity, Kit is unlikely to reciprocate in terms of friendship, they seem to be unable to come to terms with the fact that they cannot have a personal relationship with her. They also speak of how she is inconsistent towards her fans and the disappointment this creates for her fans. Lily describes how she has 'learnt to have zero expectations,' because 'you will do crazy things like going to the airport and send her off but then she will also blackface [slang for showing displeasure on one's face] at you if she is not happy that day. So now, you know that she will blackface at you or maybe she will not blackface.' Such inconsistencies have made them less enthusiastic in engaging in fan activities.

In describing what she feels is a pleasant fan experience, Kate compares her experience, with what she observes through her friends, who are in Hong Kong singer Denise Ho's fan club - 'So I really feel that she [Denise Ho] takes care of her fans, that's why she wants to do more things [for them]. Her fans just come and watch, and enjoy the show.'

Sandy fans on the other hand, accept the distance between them and their idol. In fact, they do not want to bring that para-social relationship into a real relationship, because doing so spoils the fantasy. Despite not seeking to be close to her in the way that Kit's fans do, Sandy's feel that they are being rewarded in other ways (by her) that allow them to feel closer to her. Apart from spending time on her Facebook page, which Sandy appears to manage herself, fans also feel that they

are being heard. Calvin explains that, 'she is one artist who is willing to give back in terms of reaching out. That's something also makes me feel close to her… And I also think she listens to her fans.' He recounts a concert in 2007 where Sandy did a series of shows in Hong Kong that focused on her B-side songs, with minimalistic stage design, and lounge or jazz-styled music arrangements. This was something rarely heard of in Chinese pop, and was initially not well received by the media. Fans were supportive of Sandy, and provided many suggestions about the song line-up and arrangements. Calvin adds on that Sandy 'tweaked it for the later shows… by the time I watched the last few concerts, I thought it was fabulous. So you can see that she listened to the fans.'

While Sandy is able to manage the relationship with her fans, fans also understand their importance in shaping this relationship. In Sonny's words, it's 'like you throw something out, and something needs to come back. If not, it's like playing alone - boring. So, having fans is her fortune in a sense.' In this aspect, the two parties clearly understand the dynamics of what Horton and Wohl referred to as a 'simulacrum of conversational give and take.'[37]

Despite the differences in these two groups of fans, fandom in Singapore, at least with fans in this study, is far from being transformative in the ways being described in existing literature. Instead, it seems to exist as an extension of consuming entertainment media to pass time.

In addition, both groups described fellow Singaporean fans as loyal, but also 'boring' and 'passive,' which they attributed to a general social climate. These stereotypes have some truth in them, for the local government has actively cultivated a depoliticized citizenry, and public participation in decision-making is almost non-existent,[38] though studies suggest that social networking platforms have been pushing it in the other direction.[39]

It is also useful to note that in comparison to other groups of fans, this may be especially true for Mandopop fans by virtue of the inherent properties of Mandopop, and hence the audience it cultivates. Contemporary Mandopop's products are made based on what sells better and thus its themes focuses on personal relationships and one's immediate surroundings.[40] Although previous studies of other fandoms (e.g. Jenkins on the Harry Potter Alliance[41]) shows how popular culture can 'offer particularly rich resources for supporting collective action,'[42] the themes of Chinese pop, with a largely introspective point of view, more often than not offers (at best) resources for personal transformation, rather than an external, politicized transformation.

6. Conclusion

We have discussed five themes that shape fandom in this study. Firstly, in De-centered/Centered, we saw how fan ecologies and dynamics affected how much fans participated and how much they enjoy participating in fandom. Secondly, in Shame/Pride, we looked at fans' attitudes toward being a fan and toward their

object of fandom. This in part affects the third theme 'Separation/Integration,' where fans integrate fandom into their lives to different degrees. It is then difficult for fans that separate fandom from their daily lives to experience pleasure in fandom. The sustenance of the two fandoms was then investigated in the fourth theme, Nostalgia/Renewal. Lastly, we looked at how fans either want to have a real personal relationship with the celebrity, or prefer to keep the distance, in Desired-reality/Perfect-fantasy.

Through discussing the five themes above, the derivation of pleasure from fandom (or lack thereof) explains the different fan experiences – the affective divide. It is also evident that any simplistic view of fandom is a mistake, for it is shaped not only by the fans, but also by the context they are in, as well as the celebrities themselves.

In addition, this study suggests that, because of the general social climate in Singapore and the depoliticized nature of contemporary Mandopop, fandom in either group is unlikely to go beyond personal transformation to be that agent of social or political change seen in the other parts of the world.

Notes

[1] Roy Shuker, *Understanding Popular Music Culture*, 3rd Ed. (London: Routledge, 2008).

[2] Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 1992).

[3] Stuart Hall, 'Notes on Deconstructing the Popular,' in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, ed. J. Storey (Prentice Hall, 1998), 442-453.

[4] Mandopop refers to popular music sung in Mandarin. Its centre of activity is in Taiwan. Canto-pop refers to popular music primarily originating in Hong Kong, and sung in Cantonese, a Chinese dialect.

[5] For examples of studies done on adolescent fans, see Chau-kiu Cheung and Xiao Dong Yue, 'Identity Achievement and Idol Worship among Teenagers in Hong Kong' *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth* 11.1 (2003): 1-26; Stella Chia and Yip Ling Poo, 'Media, Celebrities, and Fans: An Examination of Adolescents' Media Usage and Involvement with Entertainment Celebrities,' *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 86 (2009): 23-44.

[6] 'Shi li pai' (实力派 in Mandarin), literally translates into 'ability group. This meant that the singer has singing prowess and does not rely solely on looks for success in the popular music market. This term originated from Hong Kong and Taiwan and basically means the opposite of 'ou xiang pai' (偶像派 in Mandarin), literally 'Idol group,' a class of manufactured pop idols, who are nice to look at, but many of which cannot not sing live. See Chu Xin, '偶像派与实力派,' *音乐天地* 1994.10 (1994).

[7] Kit did not produce any new albums between 2004-2011, and Sandy did not produce new albums between 2006-2012. However, they still were engaged in other work in the entertainment industry, like holding performances, making appearances at public events etc.

[8] Gray, Sandvoss and Harrington describe three waves of fan scholarship. The first, through concepts like 'textual poaching' and 'participatory culture' in Jenkins' work, highlight the empowering potential of fandom against widely accepted stereotypes of media fans as 'brainless consumers.' The second focuses on what fandom tells us about fans' identity, but instead of fandom being empowering, show how 'the interpretive communities of fandom (as well as individual acts of fan consumption) are embedded in the existing economic, social, and cultural status quo.' As such, fandom is an extension of existing social structures, and fan hierarchies replicate them. With fandom becoming an increasingly common mode of cultural consumption, the third wave address difference in fans' experiences and investigates how being a fan fits into their everyday lives, why they become fans, and why they engage in certain fan practices. See Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss and C. Lee Harrington, 'Introduction: Why Study Fans,' in *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, ed. Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss and C. Lee Harrington (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 1-16.

[9] For example, see Wai-Chung Ho, 'Between Globalization and Localization: A Study of Hong Kong Popular Music,' *Popular Music* 22.2 (2003): 143-157.

[10] Nancy Guy, 'Republic of China National Anthem on Taiwan: One Anthem, One Performance, Multiple Realities,' *Ethnomusicology* 1 (2002): 96-119.

[11] For examples of research in these areas, see Anthony, Fung, 'Fandom, Youth and Consumption in China,' *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 12.3 (2009): 285-303; Anthony Fung and Michael Curtin, 'The Anomalies of Being Faye (Wong)' *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 5.3 (2002): 263-290; Anthony Fung, 'Faye and the Fandom of a Chinese Diva,' *Popular Communication: The International Journal of Media and Culture* 7.4 (2009): 14.

[12] Ling Yang, 'All for Love: The Corn Fandom, Prosumers, and the Chinese Way of Creating a Superstar,' *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 12 (2009): 527-544.

[13] Ibid., 536.

[14] Yiu Fai Chow and Jeroen de Kloet, 'The Production of Locality in Global Pop: A Comparative Study of Pop Fans in The Netherlands and Hong Kong,' *Particip@tions* 5.2 (2008).

[15] Beng Huat Chua, *Structure*, *Audience and Soft Power in East Asian Pop Culture* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012).

[16] Mandarin is the official Chinese language. Schools teach Mandarin, and the state's language policy does not allow mainstream media to disseminate content in Chinese dialects such as Cantonese, Hokkien, etc.
[17] Kai Khiun Liew, 'Limited Pidgin-Type P? Policy, Language, Technology, Identity and the Experience of Canto-Pop in Singapore,' *Popular Music* 22.2 (2003): 217-233.
[18] Chua, *Structure*, *Audience and Soft Power in East Asian Pop Culture*, 26.
[19] Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*; Henry Jenkins, et al., 'Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century,' *Building the Field of Digital Media and Learning* (The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, 2006).
[20] Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures* (London: Routledge, 2002).
[21] Lawrence Grossberg, 'Is There a Fan in the House? The Affective Sensibility of Fandom,' in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, ed. Lisa A. Lewis (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 50-68.
[22] A total of 15 fans, 5 male (4 Sandy fans, 1 Kit fan) and 10 female (3 Sandy fans, 7 Kit fans), were interviewed for this study. While every effort was made to recruit male interviewees, they are small in numbers, especially in Kit's fandom, which is predominantly female. The interviewees were aged 27-44 years old at the time of the interviews. They are in general well educated and are employed in professional jobs (e.g. Architect) with the exception of one interviewee who is a student. The in-depth interview was the primary methodology of this study, and took place in public places or interviewees homes. I also had the fortune of attending some small Sandy fan gatherings, while there were no such events for Kit fans. While this meant that I had to opportunity to observe the Sandy fans more frequently, the lack of fan gatherings or other organised events among Kit fans is also symptomatic of the group dynamics discussed in Section 4.
[23] Lawrence Grossberg, 'Is There a Fan in the House?' 50-68.
[24] Ibid., 56.
[25] Ibid., 57.
[26] Ibid., 60.
[27] Roy Shuker, *Understanding Popular Music Culture*.
[28] For easy reference, fans of Singaporean singer Kit Chan would simply be referred to as Kit fans, and Sandy Lam fans as Sandy fans; all names used here are pseudonyms.
[29] The fan club has no real structure (e.g. committees), although fans agree who the head of the fan club is. With this, involvement in projects is voluntary and highly collaborative.
[30] Carolyn S. Stevens, 'Buying Intimacy: Proximity and Exchange at a Japanese Rock Concert,' in *Fanning the Flames: Fans and Consumer Culture in*

Contemporary Japan, ed. William W. Kelly (New York: State University of New York Press, 2004), 59-78.

[31] Chow and de Kloet, 'The Production of Locality in Global Pop'.

[32] Informed by its history, Chow and de Kloet attribute Leon Lai's fans appreciation of his hardworking qualities and perseverance to the dominant discourse in Hong Kong, where it is desirable to be extraordinary, hardworking and proud (Ibid). Singapore, like Hong Kong, is a highly urban area that is predominantly ethnic Chinese and is also historically made up of an immigrant population. Thus, it is reasonable to say that the same qualities are valued. In addition, the Singapore government has made use of the notion of meritocracy as an important ideological resource for managing multiracialism and to justify its government and pro-capitalist orientations. See Kenneth Paul Tan, 'Meritocracy and Elitism in a Global City: Ideological Shifts in Singapore,' *International Political Science Review* 29.1 (2008): 7-27; R. Quinn Moore, 'Multiracialism and Meritocracy: Singapore's Approach to Race and Inequality,' *Review of Social Economy* 58.3 (2000): 339-360.

[33] Joli Jenson, 'Fandom as Pathology: The Consequences of Characterization,' in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, ed. Lisa A. Lewis (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 9-29.

[34] Lynn S. Zubernis and Katherine Larsen, *Fandom at the Crossroads: Celebration*, *Shame and Fan Fan/Producer Relationships* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012).

[35] Grossberg, 'Is There a Fan in the House?'

[36] Donald Horton and R. Richard Wohl, 'Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction: Observations on Intimacy at a Distance,' *Psychiatry* 19 (1956): 215-229.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Lily Kong, 'Music and Cultural Politics: Ideology and Resistance in Singapore,' *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers New Series* 20.4 (1995): 447-459.

[39] Marko Skoric, Deborah Ying and Ying Ng, 'Bowling Online, Not Alone: Online Social Capital and Political Participation in Singapore,' *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 14.2 (2009): 414-433; Marko Skoric, Youqing Liao, Nathaniel D. Poor and Stanley Wei Hong Tang, 'Online Organization of an Offline Protest: From Social to Traditional Media and Back' (paper presented at the 44th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences, Kauai, Hawaii, January 4-7 Jan, 2011).

[40] Mandopop, as we know it today, stemmed from the Taiwanese 'Campus Songs' movement in the late 1970s. Although Taiwan has a highly politicised history, an international conglomerate, Sony Music, and their creation of the 'Golden Melody

Awards,' pushed the 'Campus Songs' movement into commercialization. The Mandarin 'Campus Songs' were born during a time where Mandarin (instead of the Hokkien dialect) was aggressively promoted by the Taiwanese government; and initial themes of these songs addressed issues like identity. However, that quickly changed to pander to market exportability when it was commercialized. See Marc L. Moskowitz, *Cries of Joy*, *Songs of Sorrow: Chinese Pop Music and Its Cultural Connotations* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2010).

[41] Henry Jenkins, '"Cultural Acupuncture": Fan Activism and The Harry Potter Alliance,' *Transformative Works and Culture* 10 (2012).

[42] Ibid.

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Part 2

Female Fans and Fandom

Mommy Porn and Regurgitated Fiction: The Silencing of Women in Fan Debates About Pulled to Publish Fan Fiction

Monica Flegel and Jenny Roth

Abstract
E. L. James's *Fifty Shades of Grey* has ignited controversy within fan fiction communities about the practice of publishing fan fiction as original fiction (after changing the names of the characters to erase marks of its origins). We examine some of the major critiques of P2P (pulled-to-publish) fan fiction: namely, that it is poorly written, produced by 'hacks,' and valueless due to its derivative nature. While criticism of fan fiction as derivative and talentless is not new, it is significant that these sorts of arguments also come from fans themselves. We read fans' rejection of pulled-to-publish fiction within the denigration of most women writer's work as chick lit and mommy porn. By placing most women's writing into devalued genre categories, society pushes back against women who dare to publish: women writers may have something to say, pink-collar genres imply, but not anything particularly important. Our chapter asks: what does it mean when fans themselves police women writers in terms of taste? How do such critiques participate in silencing or excluding women in/from the publishing world, and how might such silencing challenge constructions of fan fiction circles as feminist spaces?

Key Words: Fan fiction, feminism, women writers, gender and authorship, labour, feminist cultural studies.

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1. Feminine-Linked Genres

Feminist cultural critics have identified how some cultural texts are gendered by the ascription of feminine- or masculine- linked traits.[1] This is not to say that only women produce feminine-linked genres, that only women consume them, or that they are meant only for women, but that the texts themselves are associated with feminine-linked signifiers such as emotion, relationships, social support, and a focus on private sphere-identified traits like love, family, and personal loss.[2] Some genres of fan fiction and what has been identified as 'Mommy Porn' (texts such as E. L. James's *50 Shades of Grey*), for example, with their focus on intimate relationships, friendships, and community, are feminine-linked genres, and are often devalued within a patriarchal aesthetic. Ironically, this aesthetic is often applied by many female fans when they attack women who choose to pull their fan fiction and publish it professionally (P2P).

The publication of E. L. James's *50 Shades of Grey* has raised arguments within fandom about P2P – the act of removing fiction from free sites, changing

details, and publishing for profit. While some fans support P2P, there is also a persistent and troubling representation within fandom of P2P writers as bad fans who damage fandom's gift economy (although the gift economy has existed alongside P2P works for some time), and, most importantly to our argument here, as hacks who are not true writers. In response to a fan who sought payment that would allow her to take time off to finish her fanwork, for example, another opined, 'What gets me … is the fact that so much of the feeling of entitlement I've seen in this and other situations has been from people who are not the most stellar examples of their particular craft.'[3] janissa11's comment about cousinjean's request reiterates sentiments about fans seeking profit: 'entitlement,' narcissism, and delusion, not a fair desire for paid work, is at heart. For others, seeking payment is a failing as a writer: 'I'm not sure which part gets me more – that she's begging to be subsidized for a not-entirely-legal hobby, or that she thinks her audience and her talents are that large…'[4] For neadods, thinking that one has a profitable talent is a failure equal to mistaking hobby for career.

We argue that, for female writers, daring to think of oneself as a writer rather than a hobbyist is still believed to be a wrongful act of narcissism, one that makes the quality of the author's work suspect. Attacks that devalue P2P authors are therefore paradoxically both structural violence – the policing of gender norms – and the assertion of a close-knit, feminized, kinship. In order to understand this paradox, we contextualize the *ad feminam* attacks on publishing women as hacks within the social construction and policing of women's 'proper' role.

In 2005, when the Organization for Transformative Works proposed to archive fan fiction, authors like John Scalzi and tie-in writer Lee Goldberg wrote blog posts lambasting the OTW's claims for legitimacy. It is not clear, given hyperlinking, whether the dissemination of these discussions was what leads to an increased focus on fan fiction, including the possibility of getting paid for fanworks.[5] What is noteworthy is that from 2005 until 2012, the increased focus on fan fiction, combined with the success of the *50 Shades of Grey* trilogy (which altered fan fiction's socio-legal landscape), meant that the subject of P2P appeared on many sites.[6] To analyse the data we used feminist discourse analysis to identify the social construction and internalization of gender-role stereotypes.[7] We found that, often, fans' presumably unconscious internalization of gender-role stereotyping about women's 'proper' place and social role contributed to the attacks on P2P women writers. The quotations in this chapter exemplify the major discussion themes.[8]

Feminist cultural studies critics have identified the hierarchies that gender texts. Building on Stuart Hall's argument that texts exist in cultural conditions, feminists noted how 'feminine' cultural forms and practices are simply identified with all the things that women do and have done, [which] ignores …[how] cultural forms come to be classified as 'masculine' and 'feminine', and the ways in which these classifications may change over time.' They also asked why 'feminine' texts are

categorized as 'rubbish … unworthy of analysis.'[9] Their conclusion was that under patriarchy, feminine-linked traits are under- or devalued.[10] As media critic Becca Cragin notes, 'women's genre[s]' have been 'a first site of analysis, drawing connections between the contours of women's experience under patriarchy and the contours of [cultural texts] directed at women,'[11] and they are often denigrated for simply being feminine-linked. Despite some inroads made by feminist critiques of the literary canon, that is, legitimate authorship remains largely the realm of men.[12] Indeed, the etymology of 'author' is linked to masculine creativity and authority.[13] Although currently post structuralism asserts 'that the authorial presence is best set aside in order to liberate the text for multiple users,'[14] Nancy Miller argues, 'that the Author is dead … does not necessarily work for women …. Because women have not had the same historical relation of identity to origin, institution, production, that men have had.'[15]

Unfortunately, then, the woman author is not neutral. The revelation that author J. K. Rowling was instructed by her publishers to use her initials to market *Harry Potter* to boys prompted science fiction author John Scalzi to ask: 'Would a 12-year-old boy have picked up a book by Joanne Rowling?'[16] It is the social system which causes that hypothetical boy to see a book by someone named Joanne as not worth reading which we see operating in attacks from within fandom. Fans, as members of society, are embedded in social constructs and gender-role stereotypes, and their responses are part of the larger continuum of rejection that women authors face: whether that be as writers whom publishers want to camouflage as men because of the belief that books by men will sell more; or about social structures which perpetuate a culture in which it is easier for men to publish and profit; or even the ideological mechanisms used to silence women and make them less-visible in the public sphere, in general.

In fan critiques of P2P authors, we find discourses about value that contribute to the denigration of feminine-linked cultural texts. Some responses, certainly, are focused on the derivative nature of fan fiction itself, rather than attacks on female authors, such as the comment that, 'rewrite' can easily mean a thorough use of the Find and Replace button and tweaking of a character's appearance. But others are more clearly gendered in terms of identifying what they find particularly offensive about published fan fiction: referring to *Twilight* P2P authors as 'egotistical, greedy bitches who want to wank off on their readers'[17] and who dare to think 'they're the shit,'[18] for example, makes it clear that the accusations of 'entitlement' and 'delusion' are explicitly levelled at female writers in fandom who want to publish.

2. Silencing/Excluding Women

Advocates of feminism argue that silencing women is oppressive violence. Silencing occurs in a number of ways: gender norms that describe 'good' women as passive, supportive and childishly dependent; or cultural practices that censure women who speak publicly. Even now, sanctions against women's public speech

and writing are easily evidenced: women scholars are less likely to get published when reviewers know they are women;[19] in mixed-sex groups, women who speak more than 30% of the time are perceived to dominate the conversation and are ignored or challenged until a 30/70 split is re-established;[20] and women employers who manage forthrightly are resented by employees who believe that women's speech should be indirect and pleasant.[21] As Sandra Gubar and Susan Gilbert note, women are sanctioned for writing

> precisely because a woman is denied the autonomy – the subjectivity – that the pen represents, she is not only excluded from culture (whose emblem might well be the pen) but she also becomes herself an embodiment of just those extremes of mysterious and intransigent Otherness which culture confronts with worship or fear, love or loathing.[22]

In challenging gender norms which construct women's speech as circumscribed and confined,[23] women who speak publicly in the form of publications face censure for overstepping their prescribed role.

Expectations about women's speech and labour are rooted in women's connection with the private sphere. As Gayle Rubin points out, gender roles are shaped by, and contribute to, capitalist systems. She notes that the needs of workers are produced, in part, by 'cultural tradition,' which assigns gender roles, values and expectations.[24] Women who publish challenge the economics that require the 'domestication of women'[25] and instead insert themselves into the labour economy.[26] Entry into that economy is the trigger for self-regulatory mechanisms in fandom, because women writing for free in a feminized gift economy of fandom are still safely contained within their feminine-linked gender role. For example, the often-reiterated position that fan fiction is a 'labour of love' dangerously recalls patriarchal ideological discourse that keeps women's care-work in the home invisible and devalued. Therefore, when illumine77 asked whether fan fiction could build a fanbase to support a writing career, she was told by cofax7 to write for love not gain, anything else would make her suspect.'[27] Of course, James was able to build a writing career doing exactly that: building a fanbase through her fan fiction, which then allowed her to publish. Her statement that 'I have done it as a sort of exercise… to see if I could … and I think I have proven that I can… I now want to capitalize on it…' is reproduced by gentleblaze, another fan, to out James as the bad-fan who mis-used fandom,[28] but it is the fannish context that insists it is love, and love alone, that should motivate female writers, which renders her statement abhorrent.

When women take up cultural reproduction, one of the 'multi-faceted aspects of social reproduction' that is part of the binary sex-gender system,[29] they challenge their passive reproductive role. They become a visible example of the

'*asymmetrical demands generated by different writing identities*, *male and female*, *or*, *perhaps*, *more usefully*, *canonical or hegemonic and noncanonical or marginal*.'[30] Once in the public sphere, denigration continues on the same lines: genre stereotypes that devalue feminine-linked or women-authored texts; pressures from publishers to use initials only or a pen name so that men and boys will buy; and assumptions about the value of feminine-linked storytelling all undercut women authors' legitimacy.

3. Complicating the Fandom + Feminism Paradigm

Thus, many of the responses to P2P authors bely the vein of fan studies that identifies fandom as a feminist space where women 'return the [male] gaze [to] manipulate representations of (and by) men'[31] in order to challenge the symbolic annihilation of their worldview in malestream popular culture.[32] Too often, fan criticism of those who seek payment relies on traditional constructions of the female writer as greedy – someone who does not want to exist solely within the gift economy and who feels 'entitled' to be paid for her work, delusional, and/or talentless: once outside the validating narrative of writing as labour of love, that is, these writers are revealed to be the worst kind of hacks, producing inferior texts unworthy of publication. Linked to the idea that the fan who writes for pay deserves disrespect is the idea that her work also lacks value. The social repercussion against women writers, in general, may be seen in the general denigration of feminine-linked genres. By devaluing 'chick lit' and 'mommy porn' precisely because they are linked to women, society pushes back against women: women may have something to say, pink-collar genres imply, but it's not particularly important.

Critic Alicia Ostriker points out that when authors belong to marginalised groups, their authorship matters because they are visible and marginalized both self-defining and defined by dominant stereotypes.[33] Thus, the woman writer is doubled by cultural images of delusional, vain, unprofessional, and irrational women. If these writers are 'dishonest,' as they are repeatedly accused of being by other fans, their 'dishonesty' extends to self-delusion. One fan exclaims, '[w]hat's beyond old are these delusional, greedy … special people who think they should be published and profit off fan fiction.'[34] The idea of the 'delusional' fan comes up repeatedly; one fansite asks Lady Sybilla, a fan who proposed to publish another *Twilight* novel, '… are you off your meds? I'm wondering are you bi-polar? Someone emailed me … on another site … and they are wondering if you have Asperger's?'[35] While Lady Sybilla's self-aggrandizing might rightly give rise to such a question, the critique of 'delusional' fans who seek to self-publish does not seem to be supported by the success that other P2P authors, such as James, Alice Clayton, and others have enjoyed. While James has not met with critical success, the continued fan denigration of her text in comments such as, 'The existing typographical, grammar and plot issues remain very much intact …. Unfortunately,

this poorly written and poorly edited soap opera that was 'published' to line James' … pockets gains fame,'[36] set fandom up as the arbiter of taste, rejecters of a garbage culture visited upon us by P2P authors – a culture which is ironically also fan culture.

For example, besame-bj complains of Cassandra Clare's novels that 'someone is asking you to pay for something that's regurgitated fiction, not original,'[37] while a commenter on 'Which '*Twilight*' Fan Fiction should receive a publishing deal next?' minces no words: 'I think the next publishing hit should be a good piece of literature written by someone with actual talent instead of some fanfic written by some stupid fuck sitting around transcribing their wet dreams onto paper.'[38] While criticism of fan fiction as derivative and talentless is not new, it is significant that these comments come from fans who themselves write and read fan fiction. For all of the criticism of James's text, it was, by some accounts, 'the most popular story in fandom … and had something like 20,000 reviews on ffn before it was pulled and moved to her blog.'[39]

Something is going on besides the fact that fan fiction may not be exemplary. That thing is cultural: women who stake an authorial claim to storytelling and desire are not safely contained in their relationship to patriarchal society, and thus pose the same threats to patriarchal codes as do women who are not safely contained in monogamous, heterosexual relationships. They cross the line between public and private, speech and silence, good and bad and are rendered as less valuable women, even, and perhaps especially, by other women who have much to lose if there are repercussions for some women's transgressions. As literary critic Jonathan Culler reminded us in the early 1980s, 'women share men's anti-female feelings – usually in a mitigated form, but deeply nevertheless' because women 'have been steeped in self-derogatory societal stereotypes.'[40]

While writing some fic that makes money is allowable so long as it is for charity and 'doesn't conflict with the 'do it for love, not for gain' fandom ethic,'[41] all other monetary exchanges should be excluded because 'fandom isn't a market, it's a community, and treating your community as a market (by, say, asking to be paid for fanfic) is taboo.'[42] Mhari's argument that women can acceptably work for charity but not pay taps into tenacious ideas about appropriate female labour which exist on the historical continuum that saw Victorian women's public philanthropy as perfectly reasonable, and their foray into paid public work as gross indecency.[43] Similarly, Vinylroad argues that writing should be done without any expectation of return: 'I write what I write for myself; getting to share it with other people is a bonus, but it's not why I do it;'[44] and Nutkin agrees, 'that's what fandom SHOULD be about. If you're writing for comments and popularity and respect on the internets, you're falling even further from this ideal of fandom as a feminist academic movement…'[45]

In contrast, the success of self-published e-books since *50 Shades* from within *Twilight* fandom suggests that there are many who support movement into paid

published work, and have been inspired to explore the possibilities of the new market.[46] As one fan complains, 'some people go out of their way to shit on people who are trying to make some extra cash in this piss-poor economy.' Her attitude reminds us that labours of love do not a living make, and that fandom community, when it exists to repress and silence women who move outside of its borders, is something less than a woman-centred space.

4. Conclusion

One of the goals of feminism and its advocates since the mid-twentieth century has been to make the labours of love that women do visible and to have them recognized as labour which produces value in a market economy. Aligned goals have been to break women's silence, and to challenge stereotypic gender norms that cast women's speech and participation in the public sphere as 'abnormal,' 'illegitimate,' 'dangerous,' or, as in the case of feminine-linked cultural texts, 'worthless.' Although fandom does create a space where women can and do speak, and where many find a strong sense of community, affection and support, it is also clear that many female fans' reiteration of misogynistic discourses that silence women through traditional denigrations about grammar, content, or genre, disturb a clear reading of fan communities as empowering. Indeed, if women are allowed to write and share their stories only so long as they stay within a self-sacrificing, feminine-linked, labour of love paradigm, then fandom does not empower, but becomes an online version of the kitchen table – where women can gather to have a giggle over a cup of tea, but that's as far as it's allowed to go.

Notes

[1] For example, chick flicks versus action films; romance novels versus 'serious' novels; romantic histories versus 'real' histories; pop versus rap.

[2] In contrast to socially constructed masculine-linked traits such as militarization, violence, independence and competition. See germinal and recent cultural studies on feminine-linked genres by critics such as Ien Ang, *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination* (London: Methuen, 1985); Charlotte Brundson, 'Pedagogies of the Feminine: Feminist Teaching and Women's Genres,' *Screen* 32 (1991): 364-81; Brundson, *The Feminist*, *The Housewife*, *and the Soap Opera* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000); Christine Geraghty, *Women and Soap Opera: A Study of Prime Time Soap Opera* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991); Andreas Huyssen, 'Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism's Other,' in *After the Great Divide: Modernism*, *Mass Culture*, *Postmodernism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986): 44-64; Barbara Klinger, *Melodrama and Meaning: History*, *Culture and the Films of Douglas Sirk* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994); Annette Kuhn, 'Women's Genres,'

Screen 25 (1984): 18-28; Tania Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-produced Fantasies for Women* (London: Routledge, 1984); Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature* (London: Verson, 1987); Pamela Regis, *A Natural History of the Romance Novel* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); among others.

[3] janissa11, comment on 'So Let's See,' *Emland*, 11 August 2005 (11:15 am [UTC]), viewed 27 May 2012, http://janissa11.livejournal.com/103982.html?style=mine.

[4] Neadods, comment on 'Fandom and Money,' *Fanthropology*, 11 August 2005 (9:32 am), viewed 27 May 2012, http://fanthropology.livejournal.com/116923.html?style=mine.

[5] It was two years later in 2007, for example, that the now-infamous *Warner Bros. and JK Rowling vs. RDR Books* 575 F.Supp.2d 513 (SDNY 2008) pit corporate producer-owner of the *Harry Potter* franchise against Steve Vander Ark, a school librarian who wanted to publish a print version of his popular online Harry Potter Lexicon website.

[6] The many sites included Fandom Wank, the clearing-house for all things explosive in fan communities, author and personal blogs, and LiveJournal posts and comments. While P2P remains a hot topic, the introduction of self-publishing houses and Amazon's proposed paid fan fiction platform, Kindle Worlds, as well as an increasing number of comments and posts in support of pulling to publish, suggest that, at present, the landscape is shifting and it remains to be seen where it will land. In the main, the most fruitful online discussions took place on *LiveJournal* pages where fans discussed Journal owners' posts and their many comments, with *FandomWank* often glossing the debates. Sites elicited thousands of data entries, which were analysed and commented on by Research Assistants as they pertained to different themes of our larger project. This chapter is part of a larger project funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), and was expedited by the work of Research Assistants Dianne Cataldo, Robyn O'Loughlin-Pepin, Heather Cameron, and Kasandra Arthur.

[7] See, for example, Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of Performativity* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Deborah Cameron, 'Gender, Language, and Discourse: A Review Essay,' *Signs* 23 (1998): 945-973; Mary Crawford, *Talking Difference: On Gender and Language* (London: SAGE Publications, 1995); Susan Gal, 'Language, Gender, and Power: An Anthropological Review,' in *Gender Articulated: Language and the Socially Constructed Self*, eds. Kira Hall and Mary Bucholtz (New York: Routledge, 1996), 169-182; Michael Kimmel, 'Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity,' in *Theorizing Masculinities*, eds. Harry

Brod and Michael Kauffman (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1994), 119-141; Michael Kimmel, *The Gendered Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Cecilia Ridgeway, 'The Social Construction of Status Value: Gender and Other Nominal Characteristics,' *Social Forces* 70 (1991): 367-386; Ridgeway, 'Framed Before We Know It: How Gender Shapes Social Relations,' *Gender & Society* 23 (2009): 145-160; Carol Smart, 'Law's Power, the Sexed Body and Feminist Discourse,' *Journal of Law and Society* 17 (1990): 194-210.

[8] We use publicly accessible sites as our data, a point important to our engagement with fan culture. Some fans feel exploited or misrepresented by scholars, so scholars sometimes seek permissions from fans to cite them. Not all fans hold this position, however, and the ability of the Internet to provide for the dissemination of ideas outside of traditional publishing challenges us to rethink questions of public and private. Therefore, while we are both ourselves fans, and recognize and appreciate the reasoning behind those who are sceptical of outsiders, we also treat online postings and comments that are publicly accessible (that is, materials that are not locked or do not require a password to access) as publicly disseminated material. Following the requirements of the Tri-Council Policy Statement 2, Chapter 2, Article 2.2, the formal document which governs the ethics of research activities in Canada, we received ethics approval for our research methods and project on April 18, 2011.

[9] Hollows, *Feminism*, 30.

[10] See, for e.g., Hollows, *Feminism*; and Morag Shiach, ed., *Feminism & Cultural Studies*, Oxford Readings in Feminism (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[11] Becca Cragin, 'Beyond the Feminine: Intersectionality and Hybridity in Talk Shows,' *Women's Studies in Communication* 33 (2010): 154; See also, for example: Lynn Spigel, 'Theorizing the Bachelorette: "Waves" of Feminist Media Studies,' *Signs* 30.1 (2004): 1209-1221; S. Craig Watkins and Rana Emerson, 'Feminist Media Criticism and Feminist Media Practices,' *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 571 (2000): 151-166.

[12] See Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London and New York: Methuen, 1985), 62-3.

[13] See *Oxford English Dictionary*.

[14] Cheryl Walker, 'Feminist Literary Criticism and the Author,' *Critical Inquiry* 16.3 (1990): 553; See also Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author,' in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Noonday Press, 1977), 142-48; and Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?' in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Josué Harari (New York: Random House, 1984), 101-120; Edward Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), 162-3.

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[20] See, for example, Dale Spender, *Man-Made Language* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), 41-9; Luc Cousineau and Jennifer Roth, 'Pervasive Patriarchal Leadership Ideology in Seasonal Residential Summer Camp Staff,' *Leadership* 8.4 (2012): 426.
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[22] Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, 'The Madwoman in the Attic,' in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, eds. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, 2nd ed. (Blackwell, Malden, MA, 2004), 814.
[23] Carli, 'Gender Issues,' 69-83; Eagly and Carli, *Through the Labyrinth*, 105-106.
[24] Gayle Rubin, 'The Traffic in Women,' in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, eds. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, 2nd ed. (Blackwell, Malden, MA, 2004), 773.
[25] Rubin, 'Traffic,' 771.
[26] See Gilbert and Gubar, 'Madwoman,' 812-825, for their discussion of the 'Eternal Feminine,' which defines 'good' women as 'wholly passive, completely void of generative power … For in the metaphysical emptiness their 'purity' signifies they are, of course, *self-less*, with all the moral and psychological implications that word suggests,' 815.
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[31] Kristina Busse, 'In Focus: Fandom and Feminism: Gender and the Politics of Fan Production,' *Cinema Journal* 48.4 (2009): 106.
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Fassination, Fandom and the Crisis of Hegemony: Michael Fassbender's Performance of Masculinity and the Female Gaze

Barbara Braid

Abstract
Although an interaction between male celebrities and female fandom in terms of a female gaze or an outlet for female sexual expression is not a new concept, the shifts in the ideals of masculinity that this relationship favours may constitute an interesting example of more general transformations in a given culture. The commodification of certain ideals of masculinity is not only a form of tapping into the desires and expectations of female spectators, but also serves as an indicator of a range of the accepted gender performances in Western mainstream culture. In the 1990s and early 2000s such an example of masculinity performance was metro sexuality, with David Beckham as a chosen representative. Today, however, there seems to be a new ideal emerging in pop culture. In the proposed presentation I would like to discuss one example of such a new performance. An A-list actor of German-Irish roots, Michael Fassbender, serves as an example of a celebrity whose performance (including his roles, interviews and the imagery) and its interaction with Fassinators (that is, his fans) creates a space where this new representation of masculinity is performed. The definition and discussion of the new performance of masculinity is set against the term of hegemonic masculinity, which is, I argue, contested by this new gender performance, where the female gaze also plays an important role. The presentation will propose a short introduction into Michael Fassbender's fandom (on the basis of personal accounts and narratives among the members of online communities of Fassinators) and an illustration of chosen aspects of Michael Fassbender's persona – corresponding to Eric Anderson's concept of inclusive masculinity – which appeals to the heterosexual female spectators.

Key Words: Heterosexual female fandom, Michael Fassbender, hegemonic masculinity, inclusive masculinity, performance, male gaze, female gaze.

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1. Introduction: Michael Fassbender and His Fans

A key turning point in Michael Fassbender's acting career came in 2008, when his first film made in collaboration with the artist and director Steve McQueen, entitled '*Hunger*,' premiered at the Cannes Film Festival and won both critical and public acclaim. Few film buffs would have noticed him before: perhaps they might have remembered him as an over-eager Spartan soldier in *300* (2006, dir. Zack Snyder) or as the main character's love interest in Francois Ozon's *Angel* (2008).

Hunger (2008), however, appreciated as it was, was after all an independent, European movie with a limited audience. True fame came a little later with *Inglorious Basterds* (2009, dir. Quentin Tarantino) and *Jane Eyre* (2011, dir. Cary Fugunaga), followed by *Shame* (2011, dir. Steve McQueen) and X-*Men: First Class* (2011, dir. Matthew Vaughn). It took Michael Fassbender a decade to achieve his status as one of Hollywood's leading man, and with that came wide exposure to international public and the admiration of the fans. Fassbender has been hailed the 21st century Marlon Brando;[1] a new heart-throb in contemporary cinema to replace Hollywood stars such as George Clooney.[2]

To discuss the phenomenon of Michael Fassbender's fame and fandom, as epitomes of slow, but sure cultural changes in masculinity performance, I am going to use data from two sources. One of them is the textual and visual data coming from interviews in lifestyle and film magazines with the actor, websites and blogs devoted to him, and video interviews widely available on the Internet. This is combined with data concerning the experience of fandom, collected among Fassbender fans who volunteered to take part in the poll. The questions included personal data (age, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, nationality and ethnic identity, and professional background and occupation), as well as information concerning the experience of fandom and the image of Michael Fassbender each fan possesses; the questions included the following: 'how long have you been a fan and how did you become one?'; 'What has attracted you to Fassbender and his fandom?'; 'What kind of a man does Fassbender represent for you?' The results of the poll were ten personal narratives, which I will reflect upon below and toward the end of this chapter.

Contrary to the stereotype which assumes that such fandoms comprise mostly of sexually awakening teenagers, a small but growing community of Michael Fassbender's fans, or 'Fassinators' as they call themselves, includes mostly a variety of professional women in their 30s and 40s. A preliminary research, in the form of personal narratives by some of the fans meeting on 'Fassinating Fassbender' blog and Pinterest board, proved that the average Fassinator is female and heterosexual, aged between 25 and 60, with a university or college degree and a professional career, with a family or in a long-term relationship. They mostly mention Michael Fassbender's latter performances of 2011 and 2012, such as *Shame* (2012), *X-Men: First Class* (2011) or *A Dangerous Method* (2011) as the most important factors which have drawn them to this particular fandom. Even if they mention Fassbender's persona as a reason for their attraction, they focus on his work ethics or his attitude to fans and co-workers rather than, as could be expected, the sexual attractiveness. Nevertheless, they tend to compartmentalize their online presence as fans, pointing out that the 'Fassinating Fassbender' blog serves as a space for serious film criticism and discussion, thus epitomising 'mature,' pride-inducing experience of fandom, whereas other online spaces, like the 'Fassinating Fassbender' Pinterest board, are a playground where 'fangirling'

(the emotional and excited response to material connected with the actor) can be practiced. However, in their personal narratives few of the respondents openly admit that the erotic attraction revealed in the 'fangirling' is a part of this fandom as well.

In spite of the sexual fascination which is obviously present in the notes and comments one can find on the majority of the websites devoted to Fassbender, there appears to be a deeper sense of the actor representing a certain zeitgeist concerning the way masculinity is performed today in Western culture. For some, for example Marian Salzman, this new masculine ideal could be defined as übersexuality. Salzman had previously popularized the term metrosexuality coined by Mark Simpson in 1994; now she has written a book *The Future of Men: The Rise of the Ubersexual and What He Means for Marketing Today* (2005), which defines this new trend in masculinity as a combination of stylish, rugged looks, sexual attractiveness, confidence, political awareness and intelligence.[3] Still, Marian Salzman's book, like the previous one on metrosexuality, is focused on the marketing use of such representations of men in popular culture. Her description unfortunately lacks a deeper, academic analysis of contemporary masculinity, which would discuss the implications of the changes is this new gender practice. Therefore, it is more advisable to turn to such theories as the one presented by Eric Anderson in his book *Inclusive Masculinity* (2005), whose tenets I will discuss shortly. I would also like to show that the female gaze also plays a pivotal role in the construction of the new, inclusive masculinity. Thus, on the example of the relationship between Michael Fassbender's public persona and the female gaze of his fans, I would like to show how popular culture embodies the movement from hegemonic masculinity and homohysteria towards inclusive masculinity. The combination of feminine sensitivity and openness to intimacy as new elements of masculinity combined with awareness and even invitation of the female gaze are new components of masculine performance in other popular textual practices and persona performances, such as slash fiction, a textual practice which puts male fictional characters or actors in homosexual romantic scenarios, or new male celebrities: Ryan Gosling, Tom Hiddleston or Benedict Cumberbatch. Obviously, the analysis I propose is by no means exhaustive and is not limited to one male celebrity only.

2. Hegemonic Versus Inclusive Masculinity

The term 'hegemonic masculinity' was first fully defined by R. W. Connell in 1987 in her book *Gender and Power*. She used the term 'hegemonic' in the Gramscian understanding of a relation of social domination, a sophisticated 'play of forces,' achieved not by physical brutality (although often combined with or backed up by it), but by an 'organization of private life and cultural processes.'[4] Later, her concept was developed in another book, *Masculinities* (1995), where she defines it more precisely as a 'configuration of gender practice which embodies the

currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.'[5] According to Connell, hegemonic masculinity can only be defined in a relation of subordination to femininity and other realizations of masculinity.[6] In the decade following the publication of *Masculinities*, hegemonic masculinity became the key term used by the scholars of masculinity studies to define and characterised the preferred masculine identity in a patriarchal society.[7]

Connell does not see hegemonic masculinity as a total gender practice, which obliterates other cultural representations of gender, but rather as something that subordinates them[8] or compels other representations of masculinity to comply with it.[9] The two key representations which are subject to domination by hegemonic masculinity are femininity and homosexuality. As Michael S. Kimmel aptly put it, 'masculinity has been defined as a flight from women, the repudiation of femininity.'[10] But hegemonic masculinity is, above all, about 'dominance and subordination between groups of men,'[11] mostly homosexual men, as '[g]ayness, in patriarchal ideology, is a repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity' and it is 'easily assimilated to femininity.'[12] Yet even though the majority of men might not exactly practice the hegemonic ideal, most men gain from hegemonic masculinity as a prevailing social force for the upholding of the patriarchal subordination of women; thus, even if they do not consider themselves hegemonic men, most men in a patriarchal context comply with the hegemonic project,[13] as it helps to maintain 'the practices that institutionalize men's dominance over women.'[14]

However, from the very beginning Connell sustained an opinion that hegemonic masculinity is not a universal concept; rather, it is complicated by class, race and gender differentiations,[15] and above all, that it is a contestable, 'historically mobile relation.'[16] As she asserted a decade later, she had predicted a possibility of hegemonic masculinity being replaced by 'a more humane, less oppressive, means of being a man [which] might become hegemonic, as part of a process leading toward an abolition of gender hierarchies.'[17] Perhaps the beginning of such a process can already be witnessed in mass culture as well as in private practices of masculinity. Such a theory has been proposed by Eric Anderson in his book *Inclusive Masculinity* (2005). He starts his argument by describing what he calls 'orthodox masculinity,' which corresponds to Connell's hegemonic masculinity, and focuses on the homophobia and forbiddance of any codes and behaviours which might be perceived as feminine and/ or gay as the basis for the orthodox performance of masculinity.[18] Anderson wonders if it is possible to limit or even eradicate the homohysteria, as he calls it, so characteristic of the Western societies of the late 19th and early 20th centuries: 'what happens when, collectively, heterosexual male youth cease to care about whether their male friends are gay or straight? What happens when heterosexual men proudly adopt the codes of homosexuality and thus remove the homosexualizing agency from them?'[19] On the

examples of homosocial context of college sports, Anderson concludes that one may observe the emergence of an archetype of masculinity that 'undermines the principles of orthodox (hegemonic) masculine values, yet one that is also esteemed among male peers,' which he calls inclusive masculinity.[20] In the past two decades, he claims, new kinds of male relationships have emerged, ones which allow increased emotional and physical intimacy and decreased aggression and misogyny.[21]Anderson ascertains that inclusive masculinity is getting widely accepted among white, middle-class and educated heterosexual men, thus signifying a more general change in the mainstream culture.[22] Therefore, even though Anderson analysis college sport teams in his book, it seems equally applicable to analyse masculine representations in other contexts as potentially furthering the inclusive masculinity performance.

3. Masculinity: The Perpetrator or the Object of the Gaze?

A changing masculinity performance in popular culture and media may thus be the epitome of the shift towards inclusive masculinity. What is, however, an important element missing from Anderson's argument (largely because he does not deal with the media context, but with the college sports one) is the presence of the gaze, especially the female gaze, to which these new performances of masculinity are subjected. To explain the importance of this concept one should go back to Laura Mulvey's discussion of the male gaze, which she presented in 1975 in her chapter 'Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.' Mulvey understands the male gaze, a prevalent practice in cinema of classic Hollywood era, as a combination of scopophilia (the pleasure of looking at a female erotic object), mixed with narcissism of the viewer's identification with the male hero.[23] Therefore the male gaze works doubly: it is both the male gaze of a male hero in the film as well as the male spectator; when the male hero possesses the girl, the male spectator does too via identification.[24] The male gaze is active, controlling and dominating, while the female object of the erotic gaze is passive and becomes the embodiment of 'to-be-looked-at-ness.'[25] Moreover, Mulvey claims that the gaze cannot be inversed, as the masculine 'cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification.'[26]

This theory has been subjected to varied criticism since 1980s, as it has been summarized by Tim Edwards in his *Cultures of Masculinity* (2005). Most of this criticism revolves around the binary structure of gender it represents and perpetuates, as well as the compulsory heterosexuality it assumes. Steve Neale in 'Masculinity as Spectacle' (1982), for example, claims that masculinity not only becomes an object of gaze, but also that male objects of gaze become feminized by it, therefore becoming potent objects of homosexual desire.[27] Rodowick (1982), instead, asks about a possibility of a feminine perpetrator of the gaze.[28] Indeed, later on, in her 'Afterthoughts' (1981), Mulvey comments on the possibility of a female spectator, who nevertheless finds herself in a masculine position. Practicing a spectator's gaze and identification with the male hero in a film is thus a form of

transvestism.[29] It seems that Mulvey associates the dominant gaze invariably with masculinity, therefore positioning domination, power and gaze always as masculine, whether it is actually practiced by male or female subjects, while she associates to-be-looked-at-ness with femininity. It also transpires from Mulvey's discussion that the act of looking is always and essentially powerful, which could also be questionable. Kenneth MacKinnon notes in 'Uneasy Pleasures' (1997) that these premises of her theory are faulty and discusses male exhibitionism, female scopophilia and the sexual objectification of men in popular culture as examples of much more fluid and less essentialist examples of domination/submission dynamics in the act of looking.[30]

The aforementioned theories of male and female gaze unquestionably assume the hegemonic representation of masculinity, thus describing the male object of the gaze as eradicating all possible feminine elements. It is also crucial to avoid a possibility of a homosexual gaze when it comes to a male spectacle. A question remains, however, if the shift in the construction of masculinity from hegemonic toward inclusive will also change the realization of the male objectification and the female gaze. Indeed, it could be argued that a female appropriation of the gaze will not be fully possible unless the prevailing heterosexual masculinity performance stops being associated purely with domination, power, hardness and activity.

4. Michael Fassbender's Inclusive Masculinity

Michael Fassbender's realization of masculinity can be considered an example of the shift from hegemonic towards inclusive masculinity. This can be perceived in interviews with both him and his co-workers, as well as in his imagery (studio and candid photographs) and, last but not least, in the reactions of his fandom. Fassbender often claims that accepting one's 'feminine side' is an important element in the construction of one's masculinity; for example, in the interview for the German edition of GQ magazine, when asked what makes a gentleman in 2012, he replied: 'He is not opposed to the woman in him. I'm certain that men have female qualities, as well as female have male. To recognize and admit it is male.'[31] Steve McQueen, the director who has made three films with Fassbender since 2007, also claims that what makes Fassbender exceptional are his 'feminine' qualities:

> [h]e's a man, but at the same time, there's an extraordinary femininity, tenderness and openness, and I think that's the appeal. Often, actors want to be these macho types and they never show their heart or their vulnerability. I think it's pretty amazing that he can be so open and vulnerable, and still be able to wear it with pride.[32]

Fassbender himself stresses the necessity of opening oneself to the possibility of failure or seeming weakness; for example in his interview with *The Guardian* he says: '[t]he problem is, we feel a lot of pressure about looking silly or appearing weak, whatever that means, or being a failure.'[33] Last but not least, Fassbender does not shy away from homoerotic innuendos in his interviews and candid photos; for example candid photos from Hollywood parties present him kissing one of his directors, David Cronenberg, fully on the lips or dancing with a co-star Viggo Mortensen. One more example of an element of Fassbender's inclusive persona is the 'bromance' discourse that surrounds the promotion of *X-Men: First Class* (2011) and Fassbender's friendship with his co-star James McAvoy. The suggestiveness of their interviews together was quickly appropriated by the fans in the form of visual and textual slash fictions.

Michael Fassbender's choice of roles more often than not also put him in the position of an erotic object. One such film is Andrea Arnold's *Fish Tank* (2009), where Fassbender's character Connor becomes 15-year old Mia's object of sexual fascination. In one of the interviews Fassbender admits the director's conscious choice was to make the character an object of female erotic gaze:

> [o]ne thing about Connor that I knew Andrea was looking for was that he was quite a sexual character. He was coming into a house full of women. That's why she had me come downstairs for breakfast with my shirt off and jeans hanging down very low.[34]

Thus the film represents a combination of camera's gaze, intra-diagetic gaze (one practiced by a character in the film) and spectator's gaze. Another powerful example of a performance which attracts the female gaze, although not backed by the camera's gaze, is Steve McQueen's *Shame* (2011). One of the opening scenes of the film, showing Fassbender's character Brandon stark naked and full frontal, caused a stir among both audiences and film critics. It may be perceived as an example of the masculine erotic object where MacKinnon's 'common sense scenario' – an 'alibi' to show a naked male body so that it is done without eroticisation or feminisation[35] – has been done away with. The character's nakedness, although perhaps logical in the morning, after a night of sex, is nevertheless not an indispensable element of the plot. A quick glance at any of the fan blogs will also prove that the scene has not escaped the female gaze either. However, it is arguable that what is truly disturbing about *Shame* (2011) is not so much the nudity or the sexual nature of certain scenes, but the psychological exposure. It depicts, above all, the main character's struggle with the required hegemonic masculinity he has been performing, which turns out to be the source of fear and shame for the protagonist. As Maryann Johanson, a film journalist and a blog, has noted:

> [W]hat is shocking about *Shame* is the male vulnerability, the male weakness, the abject male misery we see onscreen. Movies simply don't do this. Movies protect the male ego, even to the point of (…) decreeing that male nudity is much more scandalous and is to be treated much more seriously than female nudity, which may be treated casually. (…) Male dignity is something that the status quo – in Hollywood and in the larger culture – works very hard to maintain in the same way that it does not do for women.[36]

Again, the male gaze is still being perpetuated by the establishment in Hollywood as the male nude is threatening to the male audience, albeit it may be liberating and empowering to the female one. To paraphrase Mulvey, male audiences are reluctant to gaze at their exhibitionist like.[37] Michael Fassbender's deliberate nudity is unsettling to hegemonic male gaze for two reasons: as the pleasure which might result from watching a male nude results in a homophobic panic the narcissistic identification with the male character puts the male spectator in a position of a spectacle, thus feminizing both the character and the spectator. It is the female spectator then who receives control over the male spectacle.

5. Conclusion

What is interesting for this discussion, therefore, is the way Fassbender's inclusive masculinity is perceived by the female gaze of his fans, and how his public representation and fans' reactions mutually feed each other. The personal narratives of fans may not immediately suggest a physical attraction to the actor, but references to the visual aspects of fandom are nevertheless made. Some fans actually admit to have started their interest not from watching a film, but instead from seeing Fassbender's photos in magazines or on the Internet. Fassbender is mentioned as a sexual fantasy with hypnotic eyes and voice; one respondent who is bisexual herself claimed there is 'something about him that oozed bisexuality.' This perceived ambiguity in Fassbender's persona could be seen as one of the typical features of inclusive sexuality; this is confirmed by other narratives, which stress a combination of 'male' and 'female' characteristics, which they find attractive in Fassbender: confidence without cockiness and feminine sensitivity; one fan called him 'a vulnerable bad boy.'

Michael Fassbender is obviously not the only contestant for the title of the sexiest man of the decade, nor maybe the most popular one. The features a contemporary A-lister should have to become a true movie star includes relatability and mystery, sex appeal, sense of humour, an element of surprise, the right timing and indispensability.[38] As much as the Irish-German actor has them all, so do other male Hollywood stars, like Ryan Gosling or Channing Tatum. Still, what makes these celebrities interesting for the perspective of gender studies is the fact that

they propose a certain shift in the acceptable masculinity performance. It can be concluded therefore, that the female fans apply their gaze to validate the new performance of masculinity, the inclusive masculinity, which thus makes its way into mainstream popular culture. This signals a change in the way masculinity is being performed in culture today.

Notes

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[11] Connell, *Masculinities*, 78.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid., 79.
[14] Connell, *Gender and Power*, 185.
[15] Ibid., 183.
[16] Connell, *Gender and Power*, 77.
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[20] Anderson and McGuire, 'Inclusive Masculinity Theory,' 250.
[21] Anderson, 'The Rise and Fall of Western Homohysteria,' 88.
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[24] Ibid., 838-839.
[25] Ibid., 837.
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[28] Ibid., 105.
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From the Football Terraces to the Television Screen: Gender, Sexuality and the Challenges of Online Fan Communities

Ann-Marie Cook and Deirdre Hynes

Abstract
This chapter offers a cross-disciplinary, comparative analysis based on research into two distinct online communities: female fans in British football forums and the global fandom that produced the so-called 'Jemma Phenomenon' in the wake of a lesbian storyline in the German telenovela, *Hand aufs Herz* (Producers at Work, Sat.1/six; 2010-2011). The juxtaposition of these case studies illustrates the pivotal role gender and sexuality can play in both the construction of communities and the negotiation of interpersonal connections. Drawing upon qualitative data gathered from fans, our analysis sheds further light on the inter-play between virtual and real life communities; the development of social identities within virtual networks; and factors that inform the dynamics of community-building and the habitus that conditions membership.

Key Words: Fans, femininity, football, habitus, *Hand aufs Herz*, Jemma, online communities, queer, sexuality.

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A comparative analysis of case studies that focus on female fans in online football forums and the fandom that developed around a lesbian storyline in a German telenovela might seem like an unusual juxtaposition at first glance. However, the choice to compare such seemingly different groups is a deliberate one that demonstrates how different modes of fan studies can complement each other and ultimately produce a more complete understanding of fan behaviours across different contexts. In this case, our respective research findings offer a more nuanced understanding of issues concerning the dynamics of online communities, the performance of fan identity and the opportunities and challenges of connectivity in virtual spaces. Drawing upon qualitative data gathered from members of the communities under examination,[1] we explore these case studies in terms of technological and social mechanisms of connectivity, the relationship between online habitus and its offline counterpart, and the ways in which identity is performed in a virtual environment where the usual physical markers of self are absent.

Forums constitute a space in which physical bodies are replaced by bodiless, virtual selves that can be (re)constructed in any way one chooses. Nevertheless, interaction still involves aspects of performance that are shaped by beliefs and practices within the virtual community, or what Pierre Bourdieu calls *habitus*. According to Bourdieu, fields have particular rules, customs and forms of authority

that impose themselves upon individuals through the process of interaction; interpersonal engagement within these fields produces a particular habitus.[2] The habitus of online football forums is shaped by offline influences tied to the masculinisation of the game and the particular ways female posters negotiate the dual identities of fan and female. Assimilation into the masculine territory of the football forum necessitates stifling characteristics of femininity (and to certain extent feminism). Habitus functions in a rather different way for the television fandom under consideration by providing an open, inclusive space that not only made the show accessible to a global audience, but offered an alternative to the heteronormative habitus of the real world.

1. Female Football Fans in Online Forums

New media technologies have transformed the experience of the game as well as the practices that define fandom. Traditionally, communalism was underpinned by activities in stadiums, pubs, offline social networks and fanzines. Online football forums now offer platforms for engagement that benefit from the Internet's capacity to disseminate information widely and instantly. Forums function as a social and symbolic meeting place where online and offline activities, such as boycotts, petitions, rallies and supporters' unions, can be organized. Such virtual communities foster interaction that promotes a sense of belonging that reaches a greater number of people than fan rituals that depend upon face-to-face interactions.[3] In this way, forums play a key role in promoting expressions of social identity via fandom.[4] The term, *fan*, has generated considerable discussion, particularly around the contested issue of spectator identities. In his seminal work on the subject, Giulianotti defines four ideal types of spectator identity: supporter, followers, fans and flâneurs.[5] The Internet facilitates the *follower* type and the cool *fan* typology described by Giulianotti by enabling the support of football clubs from a geographical and temporal distance, and promoting the cultivation of relationships with clubs and players which are built upon consumption of club-related products (c.f. pay-per-view subscriptions, merchandise, shares, etc.). This has significant ramifications for the tendency within fandoms to define individuals as either *supporters/fans* and *Johnny-come-lately's/plastics/bandwagon jumpers* depending on factors like geography, match day attendance, ties to the club (familial or otherwise), duration of support for the club, and the possession of subcultural capital that indicates affinity and therefore bolsters claims to greater status vis-à-vis other supporters.[6] As spaces of interaction, engagement and identity formation that reach beyond the discrete physical space of the stadium or the pub, online forums have potential to serve as catalysts for greater participation and inclusiveness. In practice, however, they can create experiences characterised by discontinuity as activities become compartmentalised in a series of brief, fleeting textual encounters.

One key finding to emerge from the qualitative data obtained through surveys sent to female participants in football forums was a preference for online interaction over offline gatherings. The online setting was described as 'cheaper and healthier' and more conducive to discussion because conversations were going on 'any time' and participants did 'not have to shout to be heard.'[7] At the same time, participation in these male-dominated online spaces[8] was threatened by the dynamics of inter-personal interactions that occurred when a poster was discovered to be female. Respondents involved in the research project acknowledged receiving 'lots of attention but less respect at times,' and expressed a wish that they had been able to maintain a genderless, 'neuter' (*sic*) online persona.[9] The revelation that a poster was female prompted 'humorous 'chat up,' innuendo's [sic], the clearly tongue in cheek responses about women and football and/or women should be at home.'[10] Cloaked in the anonymity afforded by virtual communities, male fans posted patronising or offensive comments that had the dual effect of challenging the credibility of female fans and denying their claims to be football fans in the first place. Such exchanges made it difficult for women to feel a sense of belonging because, as participants in the study explained, 'you feel like you have to justify your presence' and deal with posters who accept 'males expressing anger or irritation but not females.'[11] Thus, the forum becomes an instrument of power that enables males who dominate the space to use language to alienate and demean female fans.

Participants developed a range of tactics to combat the chauvinism they experienced online. These included appropriation of male gender markers, male language styles, concealment of femininity through visible verbal, textual and other signifiers, and the protection of one's forum persona by simply avoiding situations that could lead to being 'outed' as a woman. Some fans attempted to gain credibility and 'compensate for their femininity' in a community whose gold standard was knowledge of the game by reinforcing their affiliation with the club and brandishing their mastery of facts and figures. Others attempted to mask their identity by adopting non-gender specific communication styles. BM observed that 'most people who don't know me would think I'm a bloke due to the fact that people tend to take it for granted that people are blokes.'[12] Since the online population is vastly male dominated, the assumption that posters are male until proven otherwise is not surprising. More problematic, however, is the resulting habitus, which is structured around masculine sensibilities that require women to regulate their behaviour in order to be accepted. JT described trying to avoid conversations aimed at determining whether she was male or female, including 'one direct 'outing' attempt which [she] found intimidating.'[13] Even when female posters attempt to work within the 'rules' prescribed by the habitus they are constantly faced with the challenge of fending off efforts to expose their true identities. JT recalled feeling so inhibited by the dynamics of the forum that she allowed sexist comments to go unchallenged because of the need to 'protect my

own 'identity' [and] avoid the label of 'uptight woman' that some unreasonable people might express if my gender was known and I objected to sexist comments.[14] Another strategy employed by participants was to distance themselves from women who 'didn't do fandom properly' because they lacked deep knowledge and feeling for the game and embraced what Jones calls 'emphasised' femininity.[15] Designer label-clad women who attended matches simply to see and be seen, along with 18-year old wannabe WAG' types that 'treat football forums like a dating site'[16] were regarded with antipathy by female fans struggling to combat the sexist attitudes that regarded the concept of female football fans as an oxymoron. Thus, while football forums enable greater opportunities for participation, they are also sites of conflicts that pit men against women and 'true' female fans against women perceived as ersatz fans.

For many commentators, a crucial aspect of virtual communities is the potential to produce social spaces in which 'unfreedoms' such as gender, race, ethnicity and class are left behind.'[17] However, as Ferreday concedes, online belonging is dependent upon the ability to produce an '*unmarked*' self that bares no trace of the racial and gender markings that shape offline identities and prejudices.[18] Football forums have enabled the concealment of gender markers to some extent, but they still incorporate the traces of offline football culture's masculine sensibilities. As such they are shaped by a habitus that rests upon normative conventions of 'acceptable' or 'authentic' demonstrations of fandom and femininity and fandom that bring signifiers of gender to the surface. The reproduction of offline 'unfreedoms' undermines efforts by female fans to participate in discussions as disembodied, unmarked selves and thus creates an environment in which their sense of belonging is both contingent and problematic.

2. Connectivity and the Construction of Community through the Jemma Phenomenon

Overcoming offline society's 'unfreedoms' around sexuality is central to the existence and popularity of the online community that developed around *Hand aufs Herz*. The series ran from 4 October 2010 to 2 September 2011 on the Sat.1 and sixx networks in Germany and on ORF1 in Austria.[19] Access to episodes before they aired on Sat.1 was also possible via Maxdome, a pay-per-view video portal. Set in an arts high school in Cologne, the show revolves around melodramatic romantic couplings and regularly features diegetic musical performances by the school's singing club. Despite failing so massively in its primary viewing market that Sat.1 cancelled it early, one particular storyline gained international attention and a loyal fan base that turned it into an unexpected media phenomenon.

Technology played a critical role in creating a community that simply would not exist if spatio-temporal constraints limited viewing opportunities to a specific transmission time and broadcast market in Germany and Austria. Access alone is meaningless unless stories generate fan interest, however, and it is unlikely that

Hand aufs Herz would have come to the notice of overseas viewers had it not included a storyline about the blossoming romance between schoolgirls Jenny Hartmann (Lucy Scherer) and Emma Müller (Kasia Borek) in such a positive and authentic way. The Jemma storyline as it came to be known by fans who are accustomed to creating portmanteaus from the names of characters who are a couple, was about visibility, acceptance and being yourself. Appropriately, it was made visible on an international scale thanks to the efforts of German fans whose own personal commitments to the visibility of lesbians in film and television led them to create a space for an international community to take shape. They blogged about the show, created forums for discussion and perhaps most importantly, recorded, translated and posted clips on YouTube so that fans could watch Jenny and Emma, or Jemma as they are affectionately known, anywhere in the world, on-demand, even if they couldn't speak German. Fan activities played out across blogs,[20] social media pages,[21] the show's official website,[22] pop culture sites,[23] Tumblrs,[24] forums,[25] various video channels on You Tube and Vimeo and fanfics.[26] In addition to analysing the content of these platforms, the researcher also asked contributors to Jemma threads on *L-Chat* and *Fan Forum* to participate in this study by sharing how they watched the show, what the storyline meant to them and any other details about their 'Jemma experience.' All of the participants surveyed used You Tube, other video channels and the *HaH* official site to watch episodes. Whether it served as the platform for first-time viewings or for 're-watches' enjoyed either individually or as planned group activities, these sites played an integral role in creating and sustaining the Jemma Phenomenon.

The phenomenon was also driven by the dynamics of fandom and the storyline's content. A sense of belonging to a community was frequently cited as a reason for fan participation. Part of the affinity for Jemma rested on a 'love of being part of a world-wide phenomenon that 'gets it.'[27] Another draw was the opportunity to form friendships in which fans got to 'know people…know things about them…care about them…and look forward to hearing from them daily.'[28] The awareness of a community identity was conveyed by the name the fandom adopted for itself: Jemma Nation. Identification with the love story and appreciation for the positive portrayal of a same-sex relationship bolstered the appeal of the storyline for many fans. One participant in the study noted that the 'storyline is sweet and involves young people and I, as a 20-year old lesbian, can relate to everything they are and have been going through.'[29] Other respondents who came to terms with their sexuality at a time when film and television ignored homosexuality or portrayed it in a negative light, highlighted the importance of telling stories that portray the love between two women as something normal because visibility combats the silence and homophobia that exists in many segments of society.[30]

Intense attachments to the characters created the insatiable need for more Jemma and put the community into conflict with the ProSeibenSat1 media group.

In a twist, technology became a double-edged sword that undermined the fan community it once facilitated. The posting of content that had aired on Maxdome, but not on Sat.1 prompted the broadcaster to demand the removal of offending clips from YouTube. However, YouTube removed *all* Jemma content and accompanying posts. The impact of that loss was summed up by one of the translators who observed that, 'you have this huge community of people who've followed the story together, and have commented and joked about things, and speculated about things and are participating in this together online, and then it all just disappears!'[31] The setback ultimately motivated the fan community to come together in a stronger, more unified voice. In response, Sat.1 reached an agreement with the creator of the *Jemma International* blog that involved creating a Jemma page on the show's official site with clips that fans could watch legally. In return, there was a tacit agreement that the fan community would refrain from publicly posting links to illegal clips. This uprising prompted *After Ellen* editor Heather Hogan to declare, 'I'd never seen anything like that fandom and it made my heart so proud.'[32] Technologies of connectivity enabled fans from around the world to speak with a single, powerful voice that reached the network and provoked the desired outcome. Fans did not target casting or other creative decisions,[33] or advocate offline civic engagement around a specific cause[34] as Henry Jenkins and others have observed in other examples of fan activism. Nevertheless, by preserving access to a show that they loved, Jemma fans engaged in collective action that bolstered the exposure of a storyline that affirmed and validated lesbian relationships and thus contributed to a broader social climate of equality and inclusion.

In contrast to the local-versus-global conflicts and jockeying for status that exist within the male-dominated habitus of football forums, the habitus of the Jemma fandom has promoted inclusiveness, equality and a commitment to generating appreciation of the storyline. Fans who posted clips and translations after watching the show in its home market, or posted autographs, pictures and videos after attending meet and greets with Borek and Scherer played a vital role in making the Jemma storyline a global media phenomenon. But local and global fan activities worked in tandem to foster the community's overarching commitment to accessibility neutralised the development of hierarchies or prejudices that favour participation in offline, in-person fan activities over virtual interactions. While access to the show, knowledge of the storyline and creative talent are highly prized, Jemma Nation offers a fun, welcoming space filled with people who gratify each other's need to talk about storylines, share a laugh, find support, come together as friends and participate in any way they choose. Even those who prefer to 'read and watch the dynamics play out by those willing to post' find the experience satisfying.[35] This is because, as an L-Chat forum explained, the board is filled with 'kind, generous people' who create 'a safe space…because people

aren't judgmental. I can be my real pervy geeky self and people will just take me in as I am because they all are as well.'[36]

As Jemma travelled the Internet, the storyline's popularity drove and was driven by a growing sense of community of fans who came together to inform, speculate, criticise, and rework much as soap fans did in the usenet groups that feature in Nancy Baym's research.[37] The difference is that contemporary fans exist in a world where connectivity is so constant and continuous that their online selves can actually become more present and dominant than their offline selves. Indeed, because the Jemma fandom offers members support and acceptance that contrasts with the heteronormative habitus that prevails offline it is little wonder that some posters feel more at ease in this virtual community than in the physical world.

3. Conclusion

At the heart of online interaction lies the paradox that, although the Internet facilitates unprecedented levels of participation and fosters communal bonds that reach every corner of the globe, the importation of offline ideologies, power structures and social scripts plays a key role in determining whether connections are fostered or undermined. The participation of female fans in football forums is indicative of shifts taking place within football culture as efforts by governing bodies to make the game more inclusive by appealing to women, ethnic minorities and families disrupt the tradition of privileging white, working-class males. Yet, online forums (like their real-life counterparts) can marginalise women within the discourses of fandom, regulate the performance of their identities as football fans, and diminish the feeling of belonging to a group. The masculinised character of football culture informs the habitus of forums populated primarily by men and creates an environment that can be both welcoming and intimidating to female fans in equal measure.

By contrast, the acceptance and inclusion that underpins the love story between Jenny Hartmann and Emma Müller in *Hand aufs Herz* informs the habitus of an online fandom committed to acceptance and visibility. Their collective power transformed this secondary storyline into a global, cross-platform phenomenon that reinforced the growing fandom's activities. Jemma Nation emerged as a space in which members could be themselves in ways that were impossible in homophobic offline settings. Although some would assert the primacy of face-to-face interactions, the depth and meaning of the relationships that formed between members of Jemma Nation is a testament to the strength and value of virtual connectivity. Gender and sexuality inflect the dynamics of online communities in ways that have yet to be fully understood. But by engaging in close analysis these groups, it becomes possible to identify ways to overcome the challenges that impede the fundamental drive to connect.

Notes

[1] Data on female football fans was collected via surveys conducted in June 2009. Sixteen female football fans were interviewed online and participants' observations of two online forums were conducted. For the sake of anonymity, citations of quoted material from the surveys use only the participants' initials. Because data on Hand aufs Herz fans was collected via dated messageboard posts and direct messages, citations list the date and screen name.
[2] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1984), 101.
[3] See Sonia Livingstone, ed., *Audiences and Publics: When Cultural Engagement Matters For the Public Sphere* (Bristol, UK: Intellect Press, 2005); Felicia Wu Song, *Virtual Communities: Bowling Alone, Online Together* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2009); and Danah Boyd, 'Social Network Sites as Networked Publics: Affordances, Dynamics, and Implications,' in *Networked Self: Identity, Community, and Culture on Social Network Sites*, ed. Zizi Papacharissi (New York: Routledge, 2011), 39-58.
[4] Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society, The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture Vol. I*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA and Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2000).
[5] Richard Giulianotti, 'Supporters, Followers, Fans and Flaneurs: A Taxonomy of Spectator Identities in Football,' *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 26:1 (2002): 25-46.
[6] Ibid., 34.
[7] SD.
[8] Based on usage figures from August 2012, male posters on the popular Liverpool supporters' forum, RAWK (Red and White Kop), outnumbered female posters by nearly 13 to 1. *Red and White Kop Independent Liverpool FC Website*, http://www.redandwhitekop.com/forum/index.php.
[9] KL - Neuter was the term used by the respondent in the interview.
[10] KH.
[11] JT.
[12] BM.
[13] JT.
[14] JT.
[15] Katharine Jones, 'Female Fandom: Identity, Sexism, and Men's Professional Football in England,' in *Sociology of Sport Journal* 25 (2008): 519.
[16] SD.
[17] Victor Seidler cited in Debra Ferreday, *Online Belongings: Fantasy, Virtuality, Community* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009), 20.
[18] Ibid., 20-21.

[19] The first 213 episodes ran on Sat. 1 while the remaining 20 were shifted to a slot in network Sixx's programming once Sat. 1 made the announcement that the show was being cancelled.
[20] See 'MeL,' *Jenny and Emma International Blog,* http://jennyandemma1.blogspot.co.uk; 'MeL,' *Jemma Episodes Blog*, http://jemmaepisodes.blogspot.nl; 'Amidola,' *Jemma International,* http://www.jemmainternational.org; 'jemmafanfic,' *The Jemma Phenomenon,* http://jemmafanfic.wordpress.com/about/; *All About Jemma,* http://allaboutjemma.wordpress.com.
[21] See for example *Jemma Nation Fans – Hands auf Herz Facebook Group,* http://www.facebook.com/pages/Jemma-Nation-Fans-Hand-aufs-Herz/233602343331310 and *@Amidola*, https://twitter.com/Amidola.
[22] *Hand aufs Herz Official Website*, http://www.sat1.de/tv/hand-aufs-herz.
[23] *Rosalie und Company*, http://www.rosalieundco.de and *After Ellen,* http://www.afterellen.com/tags/hand-aufs-herz.
[24] Many Tumblrs that were active during the show's transmission are now inactive; an indicative Tumblr that existed at the time of writing is 'marmitepandasdrinking-tea,' *Jenny and Emma Tumblr*, http://www.tumblr.com/tagged/jenny-and-emma
[25] *Fan Forum*, http://www.fanforum.com/f88/jenny-emma-%5bhand-aufs-herz%5d-1-ich-hab-mich-wirklich-schrecklich-furchtbar-dich-verliebt-63000971/; and *The L-Chat*, http://s1.zetaboards.com/L_Anon/topic/4614941/1/.
[26] See *FanFiction.net*, http://www.fanfiction.net/tv/Hand_aufs_Herz/.
[27] 'Shazza65,' personal correspondence with the author, 16 July 2011.
[28] 'Sones502,' personal correspondence with the author, 13 July 2011.
[29] 'Alex,' personal correspondence with the author, 13 July 2011.
[30] 'Prankster,' personal correspondence with the author, 31 July 2011.
[31] 'Utu' quoted in Clare Lawlor, 'The Art and Commerce of Fan Love,' *Spark Podcast with Nora Young* 151, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, accessed 12 June 2011, http://www.cbc.ca/spark/episodes/2011/06/10/spark-151-june-12-15-2011/.
[32] Heather Hogan quoted in Trish Bendix, 'What Makes Us Proud,' *After Ellen*, 8 June 2012, accessed 1 November 2012, http://www.afterellen.com/content/2012/06/afterellencom-huddle-what-makes-us-proud.
[33] For example, the fan protest against the casting of white actors as Asian characters in a live-action movie adaptation of *The Last Airbender* is examined in Lori Kido Lopez, 'Fan Activists and the Politics of Race in *The Last Airbender*,' *Journal of Cultural Studies* 15, no 5 (September 2012): 431-445.
[34] See for example Henry Jenkins, 'Cultural Acupuncture': Fan Activism and The Harry Potter Alliance,' *Transformative Works and Cultures* 10 (2012): accessed 20 October 2013,

http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/305/259;
Melissa M. Brough and Sangita Shresthova, 'Fandom Meets Activism: Rethinking Civic and Political Participation,' *Transformative Works and Cultures* 10 (2012): accessed 20 October 2013, http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/305/259.

[35] 'Globemallow,' personal correspondence with the author, 17 July 2011

[36] 'Dani,' personal correspondence with the author, 14 July 2011.

[37] Nancy K. Baym, 'Talking about Soaps: Communicative Practices in a Computer-Mediated Fan Culture,' in *Theorizing Fandom: Fans, Subculture and Identity*, eds. Cheryl Harrison and Alison Alexander (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 1998), 111-29.

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Part 3

Alternative Fans Practices and Engagement

Fandom and Civic Engagement: From Fan Fiction to Fandom Led Social Causes

Alice Chauvel

Abstract
Fan cultures have long been perceived as detrimental to civil society, encouraging a disconnection from the real world and fostering anti-social behaviours. Such criticism has generally put forth the social isolation of fans and their extreme emotional engagement with fictional rather than 'real-world issues'. Over the past 30 years, fans and academics have worked hard to debunk these widely held misconceptions by analysing the complex interplay between popular culture, its associated practices, and the socio-political domain. Following this tradition, this chapter looks at fandom through the prism of civic engagement. As both a research and a position chapter, it aims to shine a light on the potential of fan communities for socio-political action. In redefining civic engagement through the introduction of notions like 'entertainment politics' and 'political consumer,' this chapter examines the complex relationship between media technologies, popular culture, and civic engagement. It argues that the fans' deep emotional engagement with their fan object is precisely what makes fandom a valid medium for engagement with wider societal issues. Situating fan practices in the theoretical context of audience studies, through the lens of the 'acafan' as I am myself a fan actively engaged in the communities and practices observed here, the chapter revolves around two specific case studies inspired by media fandoms (mainly TV series, films, and books). The first shorter example concerns slash fan fiction; the second, more detailed study investigates charity fundraisers in the Twilight fandom. As the crux of the chapter, these two examples are presented as both the source of the discussion and evidence in favour of fans' potential for social and political action.

Key Words: Fan, fandom, civic engagement, New Social Movements, fan activism, *Twilight*.

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Many have posited media and youth cultures as detrimental to civic engagement and social activism. Fandom, with its ties to both has been one of the prime targets for criticism of this sort. However, over the past 30 years, more and more people have come out in support of practices associated with popular culture and worked to demonstrate their relevance to political and social engagement. Recently, instances of fan charitable campaigns have sprung up, in support of a variety of causes – from wildfires to cancer research. But how exactly do fans use fandom to engage with social issues and why?

I will first quickly situate fandom through the prism of audience studies. Then, I will redefine civic engagement to account for a more diversified understanding of citizenship. Lastly, I will look at fan practices – from fan fiction to fan fundraisers in the *Twilight* fandom – in order to better understand the context of fan activism.

The approach followed in this chapter is inspired by both Matt Hills' *Autoethnography* (2002) and Robert Kozinets' *Netography* (2010) in order to investigate fan communities through the acafan's subjectivity within the unique dynamic of computer-mediated social interaction. Indeed, I am myself a fan, active in a variety of media fandoms from the BBC's *Sherlock* to the *Harry Potter* franchise, as well as the slash community examined later in the article; all of which inform my understanding of, and approach to, fandom. As for the use of 'netnography,' the analyses of fanfiction and fan charities were conducted through online questionnaires and email interviews, both for ease of access and so as to engage with these fans in their primary fandom environments.

1. Fans as Active Audiences

Historically, being part of an audience has meant being face-to-face in the presence of a communicator or entertainer.[1] However, with the arrival of mass media, the need for 'physical co-location' was eliminated.[2] This communication at a distance led to somewhat of a frenzy as to the true impact of mass-media on audiences: in the early 19th century media was perceived as 'a narcotic where messages are injected into the mass audience as if from a hypodermic syringe.'[3] With each subsequent paradigm denoting an increasingly less passive audience, scholars eventually moved away from the idea that 'an audience presupposes a binary opposition between producers and consumers.'[4]

Fans are typically perceived as embodying this convergence. Defined by their 'regular, emotionally involved consumption of a given popular narrative or text,' they are generally characterised by their more vocal and active forms of engagement with the fan object – conventions, fan fiction, etc.[5] The first wave of fan studies sought to redeem these so-called 'pathological' fan behaviours by portraying them as cunning and creative.[6] John Fiske even goes so far as to compare fan creativity to guerrilla tactics against the established cultural system.[7] However, later scholars sought to nuance such perspectives, arguing that fan practices are empowering not so much because they are necessarily emancipatory or oppositional, but rather because they contribute to the formation of fans' sense of identity.[8]

2. Of Fans and Engagement

Traditionally, popular culture and politics have been identified as distinct fields with different logics which should be kept apart.[9] However, this has rarely been the case empirically. Musicians have long used their music to express their political allegiances,[10] and governments have sought to get soap opera producers to include

health messages and privileged values into plot lines.[11] These and other overlaps have allowed for the displacement of the political struggle away from politics and into the personal sphere.[12]

One of the most common platforms for political and social engagement has historically been literature. Fan fiction, fandom's own brand of fictional works, is no exception. To narrow the scope, I decided to focus on male slash (online fiction featuring gay men). Arguably, this decision is somewhat of a double edged sword. On the one hand, given the troubled social climate surrounding slash's focal elements, partaking in the genre could be considered a form of engagement in and of itself; on the other, my conclusions may therefore not be generalizable to less politically-laden iterations of fan fiction. However, as my aim is to demonstrate a general concern with social issues amongst fans rather than definitively proving anything, I believe this is not an issue in this case.

My initial plan was to spark an informal discussion amongst fans as to whether they believed fan fiction could be considered a form of engagement with socio-political issues. Thus, I posted the question 'Do you think fan fiction can be considered a form of social activism, in so far as it demonstrates a very vocal concern with issues such as abuse, trauma, war, etc.?' to The Slash Pile, a community on blogging platform Livejournal for (non-fan fiction) slash fans.[13] I targeted this community partly because of easy access (I myself am a member), but also because many members read and write fan fiction.

However, this approach fell completely flat when one person raised concerns with regards to my intentions and criticised my methods, arguing that posting an open question to a community on a blogging platform had no academic value. I had to prove my research was sanctioned by the university, post an official questionnaire (a modified version of the one I'd designed for the second part of my research) and it still took the interference of the community's founder in my favour for members to participate. By then, the damage was done and no real discussion ever happened. I knew some distrust was to be expected – slash fans in particular have been the target of very misguided and negative portrayals[14] – but I had hoped that my prior engagement with the community would work in my favour. Though this was not the case, I still got a few very interesting responses worth analysing.

There were 8 respondents: most were women in their early 20s to early 30s from Europe and North America. They were students (6), teachers (1), editors (1), and in between jobs (2). As for the discussion post, it only yielded one relevant comment out of a total 14 (half of which were posted by me).

Fan fiction is highly influenced by 'the source text [as well as] the cultural context within and outside the fannish community in which it is produced.'[15] Slash in particular is also defined by a set of generic formulas and a precise ideology about non-heterosexual relationships.[16] Both of these assumptions were touched upon in the questionnaire responses. For example, Alex claimed that:

> Fan fiction is by definition art […] and all art can be part of social activism. In fact, one could argue that is the very essence of art, to make you think about something. […] Fan fiction […] has the advantage of allowing an author to address a subject with which the readers might not be comfortable in an environment (the fandom) the readers are comfortable with.

Wanda, on the other hand, was less enthusiastic and warned of the formulaic tendencies in slash:

> I feel like [fan fiction] addresses social issues the wrong way, ha. […] Abuse and trauma are very important themes in slash, especially rape. I've seen rape treated carefully and I've seen it romanticized, and every day I'm reminded of how casually many of us seem to view rape, especially female authors, despite how horrifying it is.

Thus for Wanda, like Amanda (also a respondent), fan fiction can only be considered engagement if the subject is addressed properly, with the intention to educate. Both lament that this is rarely the case.

There were also respondents like Neko who see fan fiction as escapism, far away from reality, and thus believe that most readers do not see the connection to real world issues.

Given this very limited sample, making a general statement about fan fiction as civic engagement is near impossible. However I believe that these short snippets show that certain fans, like Alex and to a degree Wanda and Amanda, do perceive fan fiction as a means of engaging with issues of concern to them, whether by actively writing them into their stories or creating meaning in the fan works they read.[17]

Fan fiction is not the only platform for fan engagement: some fans have taken it upon themselves to instigate change through campaigns. Fan activism is a phenomenon that encompasses all 'fan-driven efforts to address civic or political issues through engagement with and strategic deployment of popular culture content.'[18] It is generally enacted through 'informal, non-institutionalized, non-hierarchical networks in and around the Internet.'[19] These characteristics place such campaigns within the scope of 'New Social Movements' (NSMs). Generally small-scale, NSMs reject traditional methods of political action and focus primarily on daily concerns (i.e. the environment) and group identity, for example LGBT rights.[20] Fan activism has thus often been associated with lobbying for content related outcomes (i.e. saving a show from cancellation),[21] the representation of racial and sexual minorities (see racebending.com on whitewashing), and the promotion of social themes in program content.[22]

Some fans have thus used their fan objects as platforms for social causes. The practice, closely associated to philanthropy, relies on social media to organise and manage campaigns, with proceeds donated to charity. The causes supported vary but the majority tend to be social rather than political. Common throughout a variety of fandoms, these campaigns are launched in response to current events (the conflict in Darfur, the earthquake in Haiti, to name a few.), and issues of direct concern to individual fans (autism, cancer, homelessness, etc.). For many, this is a way to 'give back' to society. I will now look at a particular example of fan altruism: fan fundraisers in the Twilight fandom.

3. Fandom4causes and The *Twilight* Fandom

The *Twilight* Fandom – dedicated to the universe outlined in Stephanie Meyer's series of vampire-themed fantasy novels of the same name – is one of the largest fandoms today, as demonstrated by the close to 200 000 fan fictions present on fan fiction.net alone. More importantly in this context, it is one of the most socially involved, with over 25 causes currently on-going ranging from premature births to animal rights. Again, the aim here is not so much to provide an exhaustive case study, but rather to allow fans to describe their own experiences with this type of fan activism.

One of the defining elements of charitable actions in the Twilight fandom is the federation of all relevant information through a blog, fandom4causes.blogspot.com. The blog serves as an information centre where fan activists can get the most up-to-date content regarding on-going campaigns. The moderators are themselves involved with a number of charitable causes, though the blog itself is more of a portal than an actual initiative.

I conducted four semi-structured interviews by email with fans involved in a variety of causes. This method was chosen largely for practical reasons – time and geographical constraints would have made other types of interviews more complicated to set up – but also because they tend to convey a sense of intimacy while allowing respondents the time to carefully consider and construct their answers.[23] In order to get these testimonials, I contacted the moderators of the fandom4causes blog and they very kindly agreed to participate in my research by passing on the questionnaires, which the individual respondents then sent back to me. Questions included: 'Why choose fandom to make a difference?' 'What kind of campaigns respondents had been involved in and whether they felt these had been successful?'

Although I was expecting some difficulties in getting participants because of my outsider status with regards to the *Twilight* fandom, this was not the case. The participants were women between the ages of 22 and 28. Three reside in the US and one in the UK. All four came into the *Twilight* fandom in 2008-2009, when the film adaptation of the first book came out (in November 2008).

The first instance of a fan run cause in the *Twilight* fandom is 'Fandom Gives Back' – an initiative started in November 2009 to raise money for Alex's Lemonade Stand (ALSF), a US based foundation for childhood cancer. As one can see from the cause's website, it has been extremely successful, to the point of raising over $230,000 over three years and receiving various mentions in mainstream media. Since then, many other fandom causes were created – most of which are fundraisers.

To better understand this process, I asked the respondents why and how they had become socially engaged through fandom. I received two types of answers: on the one hand, for fans like Ayden, it was a very natural transition as they were already involved outside of fandom.

> I'm very socially active in my everyday life. I work as a volunteer coordinator for a charity, I fundraise within my community for organizations that are important to me, and I work every day with my nephew, who was born over three months early and is now, seven years later, dependent upon a ventilator as result.[24]

Others got involved coincidentally, for example, through acquaintances. Janine thus explains that learning of the effects of Myalgic Encephalopathy from a fellow fan afflicted with the disease spurred her to take action.

The motivations for involving fandom as described by the respondents were also twofold. On the one hand, the fans expressed very practical justifications. Thus, lvltwilight09 said 'the fandom is a great way to make a difference because the audience is so large. It is a great opportunity to get attention for various worthy charitable causes.' In the same vein, Ayden said:

> We wanted to change, and we all kind of realized that the best way to do that was to start close to home. […] We had the means to involve others, and do so on a large scale, while making the experience fun, educational, and worthwhile for others.

On the other hand, there is an unfailing faith in the people who make up the Twilight fandom. Thus Janine says 'I truly think we're one of the best fandoms out there, when it really, really matters we come together,' and Monika claims that 'though this fandom can be so drama-crazy, it is inherently made up of good people.'

Thus, we see here a discourse about helping others and making society a better place, combined with a very positive, if fondly exasperated, outlook on the community – something already observed in interviews with fan activists from other fandoms.[25]

But who are the ones driving these initiatives? Ayden points out that most of those organising the fundraisers are otherwise active in the fandom. Monika, for example, is a moderator for various Twilight fan sites and all four respondents are fan fiction authors. Nonetheless, according to both Ayden and Janine, when it comes to donating everybody gets involved, regardless of one's background and level of engagement with the fandom.

Although a wide variety of fans are present in these initiatives, it appears as though the same get involved across many diverse causes. For example, both Janine and Ayden have participated in at least a dozen of events: 'I've written for no less than ten fundraisers, and have seen friends in the fandom writing for twenty, twenty-five different causes' Ayden says.

Interestingly, fan products like fan fiction and fan art serve as both an incentive and a reward for donations, with organisers often giving compilations of specially-written fan fictions in exchange for donations to relevant charities. The theme of the works is generally left up to the authors (bar certain basic requirements), and does not necessarily address the fundraiser's cause. Monika points out that the success of a campaign can actually depend on which fan fiction authors are involved in the project.

> The majority of my visitors came from the authors involved in the fundraiser personally. For example, in the Back to School Fundraiser 2011, we held a pledge-a-thon with SoLostInTwilight who at the time was pretty popular with her story In Your World. She brought in a ton of people and raised more than $900.

This corresponds with observations by Hellekson and Busse concerning 'BNFs' (Big Name Fans), who use their large followings to spread awareness and get others involved in causes they support.[26]

Finally, it is interesting to note that, in the opinion of their organisers, these fundraisers were perceived to be successful and impressions were overall very positive:

> I absolutely believe fandom led social initiatives have been effective. As a fundraiser organizer, I've seen hundreds of people make donations (or spend hours writing to benefit) to an organization they knew little about at the start of the fundraiser. […] Many of those individuals have since gone on and started fandom causes together to bring awareness to issues, or support organizations important to them. (Ayden)

'Success' in this context is not defined purely in terms of financial gain for the cause, but also in terms of participation and building long lasting relationships

with other fans – a sentiment that is echoed (to varying degrees) across all four interviews.

Financially speaking, it appears as though apart from Fandom Gives Back mentioned earlier; most initiatives have had a more moderate success. For example, the Back to School Fundraiser has raised $2000 over two years and Fandom for Autism around $800. Still, these initiatives are quite popular with fans (Janine received around 50 donations for Fandom for ME), though their success depends on the cause: according to Ayden, campaigns benefitting an individual rather than an organisation have a tendency to not be well received.

5. Conclusion

Though fans have historically been perceived as abnormal and isolated people exhibiting often hysterical behaviours,[27] they can no longer be considered purely in those terms: as this chapter highlights, they engage socially and politically in many different ways, from less overt actions like reworking meanings and writing fan fiction, to more direct activities such as fan activism. Whether it is organising a campaign to save a show from cancellation or fundraising for a charitable cause, fans use fandom as a vehicle for mobilisation. Crucially, this phenomenon is part of a larger societal trend of new social movements where individuals' wish to influence current affairs meshes with everyday life, thus providing alternative outlets for activism. More research needs to be conducted in order to better understand fan political engagement and the strengths and limitations of fan activism, but the potential is definitely there.

Notes

[1] Sonia Livingstone, 'Media Audiences, Interpreters and Users,' in *Media Audiences*, Vol. 2, ed. Marie Gillespie (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2005), 15.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst, *Audiences* (London: Sage Publications, 1998), 5.

[4] Timothy Roscoe quoted in Philip M. Napoli, *Audience Evolution: New Technologies and the Transformation of Media Audiences* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 13.

[5] Cornel Sandvoss, *Fans: The Mirror of Consumption* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 8.

[6] Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington, *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 3.

[7] John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, 2nd Ed. (New York: Routledge, 2011), 152.
[8] Cornel Sandvoss, *Fans: The Mirror of Consumption*, 47.
[9] Liesbet Van Zoonen, *Entertaining the Citizen: When Politics and Popular Culture Converge* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007), 53.
[10] Ibid., 37.
[11] Ibid., 30-31.
[12] Ibid., 6.
[13] Slash as a genre is generally considered a fandom in and of itself – on the same level as science fiction, fantasy, etc.
[14] See the case of the Ogi Ogas and Sai Gaddam failed survey on Fanlore. *Survey Fail*, http://fanlore.org/wiki/SurveyFail.
[15] Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse, *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2006), 7.
[16] Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 188.
[17] Readers' comments on fan fictions are extremely telling in this respect.
[18] Melissa Brough and Sangita Shresthova, 'Fandom Meets Activism: Rethinking Civic and Political Participation,' *Journal of Transformative Works and Culture* 10 (2012), doi:10.3983/twc.2012.0303.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Leah A. Lievrow, *Alternative and Activist New Media: Digital Media and Society Series* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), 41-42.
[21] See John Tulloch and Henry Jenkins, *Science Fiction Audiences: Watching Doctor Who and Star Trek* (London: Routledge, 1995) on *Star Trek*; Melissa C. Scardaville, 'Accidental Activists: Fan Activism in the Soap Opera Community,' *The American Behavioural Scientist* 48 (2005): 7, on the soap opera *Another World*.
[22] Melissa Brough and Sangita Shresthova, 'Fandom Meets Activism.'
[23] Robert V. Kozinets, *Netnography: Doing Ethnographic Research Online* (London: Sage Publications, 2010), 112.
[24] Ayden Morgan is the founder of the Fandom for Preemies fundraiser.
[25] See Kligler-Vilenchik, Neta et al. 'Experiencing Fan Activism: Understanding the Power of Fan Activist Organizations through Members Narratives,' *Journal Transformative Works and Cultures* 10 (2012), doi:10.3983/twc.2012.0322 on the Harry Potter Alliance.
[26] Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse, *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*, 23-24.

[27] Karen Ross and Virginia Nightingale, *Media and Audiences* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2010), 120.

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Lizzie Bennet: Breaking the Fourth Wall since 2012

Jessica Seymour

Abstract
Multimedia has changed the way audience interact with narrative. Apart from the obvious differences in availability and distribution, the internet as a source for entertainment has changed the way fans engage with existing stories; they can enter the narrative, interact with the characters and, occasionally, influence the plot. This can be seen especially in classic narratives updated to a modern context and rewritten specifically for an internet format and an online fandom. The *Lizzie Bennet Diaries* (The *LBD* - http://www.youtube.com/user/LizzieBennet) is a web series on YouTube created by Bernie Su and Hank Green in April 2012. It is a modern adaptation of Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen. While Austen's source text has a following online in fanfiction forums such as pemberley.com, the new interactive nature of the web series allows for greater engagement and emotional involvement because the fans are active participants in the story. Fans have direct contact with the characters, as well as a minor role in the narrative itself, by engaging with them via Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr and YouTube. The *LBD* has created an online presence for each character, allowing the minor characters to explain their motives and flesh out subplots such as Charlotte's partnership with Mr Collins and Lydia's elopement. As an adaptation, The *LBD* is an extension and modernisation of original source material which the fandom has access to, creating a layer of dramatic irony and engagement as fans see modernised versions of characters making the same mistakes as their Regency counterparts, and fans are taking an active role in the story by attempting to warn these characters. As the *LBD* is the first narrative of its kind, the negotiation between fans and producers over issues of ownership is still under construction, and will need further examination as these narratives become more common.

Key Words: *Pride and Prejudice*, *Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, YouTube, web series, adaptation, fanfiction, The *LBD*, transmedia, social media, Jane Austen, Twitter.

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1. Introduction

The ready availability and accessibility of the internet has changed the way fans interact with each other, as well as how they interact with narrative. Fandoms are more informed and engaged as a result of their development of online communities were like-minded, informed individuals, can interact. By repositioning narratives into these spaces, textual producers can increase fan immersion and engagement with surprising results. The Lizzie Bennet Diaries is an online adaptation of Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice, and until the series

entered production, the use of online spaces was limited to author-produced blogs ostensibly maintained by fictional characters. The *LBD* has revolutionised transmedia storytelling by creating online personas for characters which occupy and engage with the fandom's online spaces on the same level as the fans themselves, allowing the fans to have direct contact with characters as well as an active role in the story. This is part of a wider trend of character role-playing and performance in various online and real-world scenarios. As this relationship between fans and producers develops, more analysis will be necessary. This chapter will address the *LBD* as an entirely new form of narrative and examine the budding producer/audience relationship.

2. Fandom and the Internet

The internet has brought instantaneous connectivity between individuals across continents and time zones, allowing fans to build stronger relationships and share knowledge among their peers.[1] While fans and fandom existed before the introduction of digital technology, the availability of information and the ability of fans to maintain a dialogue were made easier when fandoms migrated to cyber space.[2] Fans can meet through a number of platforms online, including forums, blogs and social media, in order to discuss the latest episode of a show or sequel of a book series. This ability to engage with a community which is built on shared interests rather than shared physical spaces brings a level of engagement and discussion which has rarely been seen.[3]

These breakdowns of physical barriers and ready availability of background information, interpretations and like-minded individuals has created a new type of fandom: one which has learnt to disseminate information quickly and which is open to lively and sophisticated debate. The creation of online spaces where fans can interact has led to 'transmedia storytelling,' which was a term coined by Henry Jenkins to describe when fans interpret, re-interpret, reflect on and extend narratives beyond their original scope.

Occasionally, the producers of a text will actively engage with the online spaces of the fandom in the hopes of encouraging more open and nuanced interpretation and increasing the fans' level of immersion. Aside from open-access forums and discussion boards, producers of traditional media have begun creating blogs for particular characters where the original text makes mention of them.[4] In offering a diverse range of transmedia and interacting with fans in the online format, producers of texts engage with the fandom on multiple levels and appeal to their technological awareness to further engagement. This transmedia production of online texts alongside traditional narratives can be considered 'transmedia storytelling' – but I would argue that this is not, in fact, storytelling because the use of transmedia in these circumstances only *extend* an original narrative and build upon what is already known. They do not *tell* the story in the way that traditional media such as books, films and TV series do.

3. The *LBD* and Transmedia

I will be discussing transmedia as a storytelling *device* rather than an online space for discussing stories, which is slightly different. For the purposes of this chapter, transmedia storytelling will be defined as storytelling which uses a combination of video, text and audio to tell stories. The 2005 version of *Pride and Prejudice*[5] starring Keira Knightly as Elizabeth Bennet is an example of a transmedia adaptation of Jane Austen's original text. Transmedia, on the other hand, will be defined as a storytelling technique which uses multiple online spaces to tell the same narrative. *LBD* uses online social media, blogs and multimedia together to tell the modernised version of *Pride and Prejudice.*[6] While fans of *LBD* do form groups and forums to discuss and interpret the show, often operating in the same online spaces as the show itself (Twitter, YouTube, etc.) they exist outside of the narrative canon.

The *Lizzie Bennet Diaries*[7] are a web-series adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*[8] in vlog format, created by Hank Green and Bernie Su for YouTube. Lizzie Bennet, the narrator, is a grad student studying mass-communication who vlogs about her traditionally valued mother, her boy-crazy younger sister Lydia, and the budding relationship between her older sister Jane and the new neighbour, Bing Lee. The series, begun in April 2012, updated twice a week and paced the story in real time over the course of eleven months. The vlog format limits the amount of screen time for other characters, so Lizzie and her sisters often use costume theatre to dramatize events which happened off-screen, and all of the characters have social media accounts which update in real time – allowing the fans to see character commentaries on events as they happen before they are recapped on Lizzie's vlog. *LBD* also has additional vlogs running concurrently to the main narrative, which allow secondary female characters such as Georgiana Darcy, Charlotte's sister Maria and Lydia Bennet to tell their own stories and give their own interpretations to events.

The *LBD* fans call themselves 'the *LBD* Seahorses'[9] and they gather on various social media platforms such as Tumblr and Google+ to discuss the show and their responses to various story arcs. This chapter will focus on the relationship fans have with the narrative itself, how they interact with it, and how their transmedia-based interactions differ from their interactions with traditional mediums and affect the narrative. Fan interactions with the narrative itself are in the public domain, as are their blog posts and critiques. I have included in the scope of my enquiry all fandom reactions which are readily accessible on the internet, and excluded all interactions which require a password to access (Google+ and private blogs) unless those interactions are directly referenced in the *LBD* narrative.

During the show, characters actively invite fan participation. Charlotte Lu calls the fandom a 'nice little community' and offers to engage with fans personally at real-world events such as VidCon,[10] while Lizzie invites creative engagement by encouraging fans to write fanfiction about she and Darcy 'having epic adventures

together.'[11] This direct application to fans creates an added layer of immersion by giving them creative licence over the stories. Lizzie's untitled *Q&A* videos, which allow fans to ask questions of Lizzie and her family via several social media outlets, invite a different type of fan interaction which directly relates to how much of the characters are revealed to the fans,[12] and Lizzie's call for response videos at Christmas[13] introduced a creative element to fan interaction which places the fans on equal footing with the fictional characters in *LBD* by offering them the chance to respond to Lizzie in the same space where she communicates from.

The fact that characters are available on Twitter, Tumblr, YouTube and Facebook (and in some cases, Pinterest, This is My Jam, and other social media specific to the characters' interests) is in itself an invitation to engage with *LBD*, because these sites are interactive by nature and designed to allow for engagement across time and space. Jenkins wrote that the internet itself creates a participatory culture, and while he was referring to television shows being discussed in online forums,[14] this sentiment is perhaps more true of transmedia storytelling. By using transmedia to fill the gaps between episodes, the series invites 'viewer's participation as a minimal condition for comprehending the narrative.'[15] The distance between fans and *LBD* characters is the same as any other online relationship. Darcy and Lizzie have more Twitter followers than the actors who play them because, as far as online presence is concerned, the characters in *LBD* are whole and separate from the actors. This indicates the narrative's reliance on the online presence as the driving force of characterisation and plot, and establishes the narrative in the same virtual space as the fans who consume it.

4. Fleshing Out Secondary Characters

Foucault's heterotopia[16] is particularly pertinent to the discussion of *LBD* as an online space for multiple storylines, characters and objectives. As each character has an online presence, they each have the opportunity to tell their story beyond the main narrative told by Lizzie, creating alternative spaces for the characters and fans to engage. These secondary (or counter) narratives cannot be told through traditional media such as books and film because these mediums can only exist in a limited space. Obviously the lack of ability to engage with other spaces limits the abilities of traditional media to develop heterotopias, but *LBD* is in a unique narrative position because it allows the fans to approach a single narrative from multiple perspectives. All of the different transmedia avenues represent different, separate spaces through which the audience can experience *LBD*'s story. They are, according to Jay Bushman, transmedia producer and writer of *LBD*, 'separate spaces that exist in concert to create the illusion of a large, seamless story world.'[17]

The ability of heterotopia spaces or narratives with multiple points of audience entry, to provide additional layers of meaning and relationships to other spaces is particularly evident in Charlotte Lu's story arc. *LBD* takes the original marriage proposal offered to Charlotte Lucas by Mr Collins and updates it to an offer of

employment at his company which Lizzie initially rejected. When Lizzie confronts Charlotte over her acceptance of Mr Collins' offer, she appeals directly to the fans in an attempt to force Charlotte to turn down the job.[18]

Lizzie's appeal to the fans does not discourage Charlotte. The fans learn through various Twitter conversations[19] that Charlotte spends the next few days packing and leaving for Mr Collins' company with her little sister Maria. Maria' vlogs begin shortly after Charlotte begins her new job, and feature Charlotte teaching her little sister how to vlog in a similar style to Lizzie.[20] This was an interesting narrative choice because, not only does it address Charlotte's side of the story which is only vaguely addressed in the source material and other adaptations, but it does so by prescribing agency to a frequently ignored or side-lined female character. This additional depth and agency in a minor secondary character is discussed and praised in fan commentary, but for the purposes of this chapter, Maria's vlogs will only be discussed as they relate to the narrative. Through Maria and her internship at Mr Collins' company, the fans see Charlotte in her new role, her adaptation to a new environment, and her attempts to simultaneously distance herself from Lizzie's vlogs and teach Maria to stand in for Lizzie and the experience Charlotte had filming with her. As Maria points out in her sixth vlog: 'you have me make these videos because you miss making the *LBD* with Lizzie.'[21] Fan responses to this new insight into Charlotte Lu's character and her approach to Lizzie's absence were positive.

Although Lizzie attempted to appeal directly to fans in order to limit Charlotte's ability to disagree with Lizzie, the fandom's ability to see Charlotte's point of view through her sister's vlogs adds an extra level of understanding to a character which, due to the restrictions of other mediums, could not have her story told as a secondary character in an overall narrative. Once the narrative migrated to the web and she became an online presence in her own right, she was able to tell her story in the context of the wider *Pride and Prejudice* adaptation. The fans see both points of view in the argument, and are therefore able to make an informed decision about Charlotte's decision.

Fan interaction and transmedia goes a step further in *LBD* by directly influencing the narrative and the character arc of Lydia Bennet. This is where *LBD* differs from other web series which do not use transmedia as a platform for active storytelling. Lydia, portrayed as a character conglomeration of Austen's party-loving, flirtatious Lydia and her insecure sister Kitty, responds to a fight with Lizzie by beginning a relationship with her ex-boyfriend, George Wickham. As Lydia's relationship with George progresses, the fans watch via Lydia's YouTube channel[22] as Lydia becomes increasingly pale, joyless, and emotionally dependant on George. George, in turn, manipulates Lydia by isolating her from her family, reminding her of what she owes him, and threatening to kill himself if she attempts to leave him.[23]

While most fans used Lydia's vlogs as a catalyst for discussions amongst themselves about relationship abuse, coercion and agency, some fans attempted to warn Lydia about the dangers of the relationship via Twitter. The resulting dialogue between Lydia and the fans indicates the deep level of attachment the fandom has to the characters. As stated above, fans interact with the characters of *LBD* as actual people because their online personas are as rich as the personas of real people.[24] While Lydia Bennet is technically a fictional character, by occupying the same virtual space as the fans she exists as a 'textual body'[25] just as they do, and her mental health and well-being is considered just as important as if she were a real human existing outside of the internet. During January 2013, at the height of Lydia's emotional arc, fans tweeted her messages assuring her of their support and love, while simultaneously urging her to leave George.[26] Lydia was established early in the narrative as a sensitive and insecure character, and when George offers her love and acceptance she trusts him completely. The fandom reaction only serves to further solidify Lydia's dependence on him by apparently proving that everyone, even her fans, are against her, and that only George has her best interests at heart. After responding to the fans, Lydia tweets to George: 'They're being so mean to you. Why? You're more important to me than them. You know that.'[27] In attempting to warn Lydia, the fandom pushed her further into herself and facilitated George's manipulations by making her less willing to trust anyone but him.

On January 30, 2013, a site went up promoting a sex tape staring Lydia Bennet, to be released on Valentine's Day. The fandom immediately began attempting to contact Lizzie and Charlotte via Twitter, Facebook and Youtube[28] to warn them, while other fans suggested getting White Hats (internet slang referring to ethical hackers who test security and occasionally crash sites for philanthropic reasons) to hack the site before the tape was released.[29] These attempts to actively influence the story reiterate the fandom's engagement with the narrative beyond identification and affection for the characters to the point of genuine empathy and responsiveness to the situations of the narrative as though they were actual events.

Several fans also began tweeting Lydia to remind her that they had warned her that this might happen. The character favoured these tweets, among others, indicating that she had not only read them but that she had saved them and reread them.[30] The fandom's attack on Lydia was addressed on the next episode of Lizzie's vlog when Lydia quotes some of the fandom's reactions to her sex tape scandal before breaking down and reconciling with Lizzie.

Here we see a very interesting nuance to the relationship the fandom has with the narrative. As an adaptation, the plot and characters are known to the audience, but the online, transmedia nature of the narrative extends a level of power towards the fandom which is rarely seen. The fans attempt to use that power to warn characters of their impending mistakes and, when those mistakes take place, subsequently punish those characters for failing to address the fandom's concerns.

By using the audience as a secondary character in the narrative itself *LBD* places some of the responsibility for the story and character arcs onto them, trusting that the relative anonymity of the internet will bring out the best and worst in fans and push the narrative towards its intended goal. While discussion among fans tended to condemn tweeters who engaged in victim-blaming and slut-shaming, the narrative itself used the negative fan response to build on Lydia's and Lizzie's development. Lydia's favouring of hateful fan messages forced an introspection which later resulted in her reconciliation with Lizzie, and was necessary for her character growth and the resolution of the Wickham story arc.[31] The post-video fan interaction also facilitated Lizzie's character arc by mirroring her treatment of Lydia during the first half of the series and allowing her another opportunity to reflect on how her narrow understandings of people have threatened her most important relationships.[32] Without the interaction from fans, these narrative resolutions would have been difficult to pull off.

5. The Power of the Producers

The use of transmedia and online spaces brings with it complex issues of ownership and accountability, especially when creators and producers of transmedia narratives occupy the same online spaces as both the fans and the characters. Questions of authorial intent come up when fan discussions include participants who took part in the actual production of *LBD* and its transmedia narrative. During the latter part of the show, author Rachel Kiley who headed the production of Lydia's vlogs, came under fire for her responses to fan commentary and interpretations.[33] Many fans questioned the rights of *LBD*'s production team to enter fan spaces and engage in the fandom's dialogues. Fans responded negatively when Kiley and other producers of *LBD* began attempting to negotiate *LBD*'s meaning, themes, and underlying messages with them. The question of ownership, and faithfulness to an original narrative, will require a negotiation between fans and authors over how to use the spaces they create for the narrative, as well as the spaces used purely for fan discussions.

6. Conclusion

As the relationship between fans and the narrative changes, so too does the relationship between fans and the producers of the text, and the integration of more transmedia into storytelling and collaboration will naturally bring with it new questions of authorial intent and ownership. As *LBD* is the first narrative of its kind, the initial experiments made by the producers can be built upon and their issues addressed as fandom and texts continue to define their new relationship. To understand the wide-ranging effects of transmedia narrative, further study will be needed as genre becomes more mainstream.

Notes

[1] Henry Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture* (New York: New York University Press 2006).
[2] Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers and Gamers*.
[3] Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers and Gamers*.
[4] Kim Toffoletti, 'Gossip Girls in a Transmedia World: The Sexual and Technological Anxieties of Integral Reality,' *Papers: Explorations into Children's Literature* 18, no.2 (2008).
[5] *Pride and Prejudice*, dir. Joe Wright (Orlando, FL: Universal Studios, 2005), DVD.
[6] Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (London: Penguin Books LTD, 1995).
[7] *Lizzie Bennet: This is My Diary*, 9 April 2012.
[8] Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*.
[9] mamaleh6994, 'The LBD Seahorses: An Explanation.'
[10] 'The Semester is Over,' Episode 21, 18 June 2012.
[11] 'Nope! He Doesn't Like Me!' Episode 33, 30 Jul 2012.
[12] Bernie Su, *FAQ*.
[13] 'Merry Christmas,' Episode 75, 24 Dec 2012.
[14] Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers and Gamers*, 119.
[15] Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers and Gamers*, 120.
[16] Michel Foucault, '*Of Other Spaces*' Diacritics 16, no.1 (1986); The heterotopia contains spaces which have 'the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect.'
[17] Jaybushman, 'Ask.'
[18] 'Friends Forever,' Episode 42, 30 Aug 2012.
[19] Bernie Su, *Maria*.
[20] 'Maria Lu,' 7 Sep 2012, video clip, accessed 20 Feb 2013, YouTube. http://www.youtube.com/user/MariaOfTheLu.
[21] 'Employee Evaluation,' Episode 6, 25 Sept 2012.
[22] 'The Lydia Bennet,' 11 Apr 2012, video clip, accessed 20 Feb 2013, YouTube. http://www.youtube.com/user/TheLydiaBennet.
[23] 'Special Two,' Episode 28, 25 Jan 2013.
[24] Chris Ashford, 'Queer Theory, Cyber-Ethnographies and Researching Online Sex Environments,' *Information & Communications Technology Law*, 18, No. 3 (2009): 297–314.
[25] Ibid.,' 298.
[26] Bernie Su, *Lydia responds*.
[27] Bernie Su, *Lydia responds*.
[28] Bernie Su, *Lizzie's New Phone*.

[29] Bernie Su, 'The iBetch: Thoughts on the Interactive Media Influence on the Lydia Situation.'
[30] Lydia Bennet, *Favorites* [n.d.]
[31] 'An Understanding', Episode 87, 11 Feb 2013.
[32] 'An Understanding', Episode 87, 11 Feb 2013
[33] rachelkiley, 'Dear *LBD* Fans.'

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Cosplay: The Affective Mediation of Fictional Bodies

Nicolle Lamerichs

Abstract
Fans of games and media have generally been analysed as social communities that invest in particular fiction.[1] This investment is often understood as grounded in social contexts rather than based on feelings or love.[2] Here I present my findings on *cosplay* (costume playing) in which fans dress up as their favourite fictional characters. I phrase this as an embodied and affective process, inspired by philosophical theories[3] and by Matt Hill's work on fandom as an affective space.[4] The affects that are generated through cosplay are multiple. First, the performance can be understood as an embodiment of a fan's affective relation to a text. Second, the player also chooses a certain character to represent what matters to him/her. Third, the costume affects the player, not only when wearing it, but also when preparing it in advance and cherishing it after it is worn. Creating the right circumstances for wearing the costume and embodying that character is central here as part of the aesthetic experience, comparable to Gomart and Henion's research on music fans.[5] Through dress up, fans create material objects that qualify the intense experience of the narrative. Affect will be analysed here as a form of meaning making and contextualizing. This will be related to its actualized emotions such as love, but also nostalgia or frustration.

Key Words: Affect, cosplay, dress up, fan identity.

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1. Ethnographic Introduction

As I sit behind my sewing machine, I feel the fabric run through my hands. The flower patterns are imprinted on it and feel rougher than I expected. I am working on my dress, inspired by the *Hunger Games* trilogy. The movie adaptation from 2012 interested me immensely and I familiarized myself with the books afterwards. Particularly Effie Trinket – a flamboyant, somewhat benign and ditzy lady – surprised me. At first sight, I even doubted her gender as her appearance was shaped by layers of make-up, a pink jacket and a frilly umbrella, signifying an exaggerated, almost queer femininity. Because the first shots of the movie were gritty, grey and realistic, her appearance stood out. As it turns out, she was a citizen of the Capitol, an oppressing nation that colonized the districts; a nation that prides itself on its high culture of haute couture and gourmet cuisine.

Throughout the movie I was intrigued by Effie who makes a sturdy introduction but is revealed to be somewhat naïve. The dresses that she wears throughout the movie are outrageous but fashionable in their own way. One of the dresses in particular strikes me – golden and pink with a flowery pattern. I decide

to make it myself and perform Effie at a convention to bring her closer to me, to show my attachment to the movie, and to challenge myself in the art of dress making. The design is quite difficult but in line with my skills. The hardest thing is finding just the right fabric because it is so specific. I cannot say that I completely succeed but as I sit behind the sewing machine, I feel comfortable.

The sewing itself is an integral part of the experience and so is the media bubble that flourishes around it. Pictures of Effie are shown on my laptop – though I do not find the perfect reference material as the movie has just been released – the *Hunger Games* soundtrack plays non-stop. On the floor, I have spread fabrics and materials that belong to the costume and its creation process. I measure myself. I try to envision what I can do with my body and make-up so that it resembles hers. I love Effie and the actress that plays her. Looking at her is no crime but furthers my desires for the actress and the character herself. Cosplay becomes an active way of mediating what I love, an affective process that is intensely constructed and clearly related to the character, the movie franchise, my own felt body and the convention space. One way of phrasing fandom to insiders and outsiders is by starting with my own experiences and investigating these self-reflexively. In this chapter, I suggest that fan scholars have much to learn from the recent shifts in cultural studies towards affect.

2. Methodology

My work on cosplay and fandom combines cultural theories and ethnography to find out how fans appropriate existing narratives. These past few years it has been my goal to write an account of productivity and narratively in fandom with increased attention to the transmediality of today's television content and audience cultures. The exchange of narrative content and form between and across media platforms is vital in my study. I have been to Japan, The States and Europe to explore this deeply social and interesting culture.

My traditional ethnography focuses largely on fan conventions as field sites where I conduct formal and informal interviews and engage in participant–observation. My research on 'cosplay' or costume playing is intimately related to this ethnography as I research the creative practice in which fans dress up as existing fictional characters. Fans make their own outfits and model in these dresses, though increasingly these outfits are also bought through different channels or commissioned from other fans. This particular chapter is the outcome of thirty informal interviews at the Dutch convention Abunai 2011 and five in-depth interviews that were conducted as a follow-up.

Moreover, my study showcases online spaces where fan practices such as cosplay flourish. The social culture around cosplay is important to bear in mind here, just like its relevant sites such as cosplay.com, and the different creative products that fans upload online such as photography and videos. Finally, I also make use of my own experiences as a fan that has been active in the scene for

almost ten years. Cosplay has been a passion of mine since my late teens and I have been interested in making this practice more visible within the field of fan studies. I believe that there is much to learn from the personal, affective and embodied dimensions of cosplay.

3. Affect in Fandom

Fans of Japanese popular culture in particular are associated with the practice of cosplay, even though the practice is older and can be traced back to science fiction conventions from the seventies. My studies have focussed largely on fans of video games and Japanese popular culture. I am interested in finding out how contemporary popular culture enriches the emotional lives of people and how narratives are appropriated, lived and materialized. I have published peer reviewed work on the dimension of gender and sexuality in cosplay and its performativity.[6] However, I felt that theories on performativity did not quite allow me to touch upon what matters in cosplay – the agency of fans, their feelings and their bodies.

Theoretically, fans of games and media have been analysed as social communities that invest in particular fiction.[7] However, the key to fandom is the combination of social, affective and creative moments that all interrelate. Increasingly, social studies have up fronted the social and participatory regimes of fandom.[8] However, I would suggest we focus more on the affective structures of fandom, as feelings are integral to the experience of fandom. With a recent attention to 'anti-fans,' such a discourse may fit well within fan studies as it tries to distinguish between negative and positive affects as forces of community-formation. I suggest that cosplay is a fertile testing ground to view affect in fandom and understand its complexity as an embodied and affective process.

I am inspired by philosophers as Massumi and Deleuze in my voicing of affect who have been picked up in cultural theory the last years.[9] However, I do not discuss affect as an ontological power. A Deleuzian scholar/approach would undoubtedly voice affect as such a force that cannot be signified but manifests in 'sparks' like goose bumps. I understand affect more colloquially – I view it as an intensity that produces meanings. Emotions are its conscious result in the way that affect is digested and understood. These emotions are both easier to look into and my ethnographic focal point, but I do not view them as separate from the affective process. Rather, they are its result and aftermath. Particularly within fandom, this aftermath is important as affect is re-iterated consciously and productively.

Theoretically, there is already a good fit between cultural theories on fandom and on affect. The creative practices of fans, such as writing and drawing, have often been understood as affective engagement or investment. Fans themselves also capture their activities as a 'labour of love,' signifying that textual love predominantly inspires their activities. Matt Hills has captured fan communities as 'affective spaces,' characterized primarily by love for the fictional product.

Hills' study looks at fan communities through the lens of Anderson's 'imagined community,' that supposes that communities, such as the nation, are constructed because people envision their membership based on a shared affinity with the group.[10] Hills, however, explains that fandom is a community of imagination in which fans direct their affection towards a text first and foremost, and not the community itself or its members. By dividing text and social context, Hills neglects many affective relations in communities (e.g. the relation between fans; the recommendation of texts to each other). Though these relations are mentioned in the article, they should also be embraced in this affective theory. Moreover, Hills is not very concrete about how affect functions in practice. He only mentions that it thrives on 'attachment rather than desire.'[11] He implies, like Grossberg, that affect in fandom operates in the domain of identity.[12] Similar to other types of fan affect, it appears that affect through dress up is highly constructed, fostered and learned. This is comparable to the findings of Gomart and Hennion on music audiences who demonstrated that fans actively disposition themselves to be overwhelmed by their listening experiences.[13] Affect does not emerge out of an encounter with objects or subjects, but is nurtured.

4. Affective Process

Especially in cosplay, affect is a more complex play of intensities than current theories suggest. Based on my empirical data, which I present in the next sections, I am convinced that a new idea of affect is needed to account for the diversity in fan practices. Thus, I speak of an 'affective process': a range of emotional experiences that can lead to investments in the world through which we constitute our identity. The emphasis is on process rather than on space or practice because it is both something we undergo and socially construct at the same time. Process also highlights the dynamics of our relationship with fiction, in which some elements matter more at one point in our life than at another. We constantly work through our beloved narratives again through references and re-reading. This understanding of process comes close to Grossberg's 'mattering map,' which suggests that we can chart different intensities at different points of our life through which we make sense of the world and ground ourselves in it.[14]

I found that affect in cosplay is more complicated – a highly intersubjective, interobjective process that is dependent on time. Throughout the process, the relationship towards the media text is solidified. This affective process has several phases with different objects of devotion. First, the player chooses a certain character to perform that matters to him or her, for instance Zelda. In this phase, media reception often matters deeply, though friends may recruit you to engage in a duo or group cosplay with them. Second, the costume creation itself is an affective stage as cosplayers interact with the fabric. Relationships with the characters are solidified as cosplayers study their outfits and interpret their dress and personality to give a good performance. The social is often very relevant here

as well, as many fans make their outfits together or with their family. Even those that work individually will upload pictures on Facebook or perhaps even detail their process in a tutorial. Obviously, negative emotions can also be part of this process when the costume does not turn out as well as the cosplayer had hoped or when s/he feels that it does not suit him or her. Negative or ambiguous responses from the social environment can cause doubt, insecurity or jealousy.

The moment supreme is when the outfit is worn at a convention. If the outfit is designed for a competition, it may raise different emotions than a more casual outfit. My informants often shared positive experiences with me when their outfits were appraised or valued, but also emphasized that it is not always happy. Some of them have worked hard on their outfits and are hardly noticed; others bump into the character that they perform and feel jealousy towards a different player; some have gone to the gym for weeks and are still uncomfortable with their body and again others are criticized, for instance on their weight or ethnicity. The affects that are raised are difficult and often very problematic. They often reveal social protocols and heteronormative discourses in fandom. These may also lead to fan hierarchies that are not solely based on creative skills, but also on gender, embodiment and difference. In other words, some cosplayers are perceived to be good cosplayers because they are better looking than others.

The costume also has an afterlife. After its debut, it may be worn several times and finally, the costume is lovingly put in their wardrobes or on display. The costume becomes a fan memorabilia, connected to a past performance. The object is rife with nostalgic feelings. Throughout the years, it may become an object of pride as the cosplayer realizes how much his or her skills have developed or an object rife with negative sentiments when the cosplayer has advanced well beyond his or her crafts. This sometimes urges cosplayers to reprise a character and create the dress anew on a higher level. Some cosplayers may sell their outfits which creates a unique relationship with other fans but can also be the source of friction as the costumes are made to fit, and in intimate connection with, one's own body.

5. The Affected Object

Affect in cosplay thus cannot be limited to negative or positive feelings towards the media text. The affective process consists of various situations in which feelings are amplified in relation to the media text, the costume itself and the social spaces in which it is created and performed. Affect and feelings may have a different role in all of these stages. Creating the right circumstances for wearing the costume and being that character is central here as part of the aesthetic experience. Sometimes the experience can be confusing or uneasy – not quite right – because the dress has not turned out properly or does not fit the body well, or because insecurity is increased when the fan comes into contact with other players. Cosplay is precarious and dynamic – in every phase the body and emotions are constructed, nurtured or unexpectedly clash with other fans.

The stages in the affective process are by no means chronological. In some cases, the process can be entered at different levels. For instance, fans may not have felt great affect towards a media text, but get recruited by friends to cosplay a particular character. Through this practice they familiarized themselves with the text. Sometimes, they work the other way around: the initial impulse is targeted towards the social environment or character's design first and then is amplified through the media text. The costume itself and its creation process become dynamic ways of exploring relationships towards media texts.

Thus, I found that affect could be directed at many things, not just the text, but also the community and the costume as an object of fandom and selfhood. In fan studies, affect is often perceived as related to the source text but in cosplay it is actively constructed towards other objects (e.g., sewing machine; fabric) and subjects (e.g., friends, fellow-fans, characters). However, during my interviews and participant-observations, I also found that affect could be directed at different aspects of the text or game.

While it lies beyond the purpose of this short chapter to chart my interview data in-depth, what I found overall is that choosing a certain cosplay depends on the different modalities of a media text that initialize affect: visuals and designs; storytelling and even auditory material, such as the voice or the soundtrack. In media texts, the bodies of actors and game characters are perceived as their voice, behaviour and performance. These features are often crucial for cosplayers in determining whether or not to cosplay a character.

Moreover, my informants often revealed the heteronormative values within cosplay, as some were hesitant to perform certain characters whose bodies they do not match. Others also made it clear that they may love some characters but seek a creative challenge as well and will ultimately settle for interesting visual designs. While cosplayers tend to be liberal with gender and appreciate 'crossplay' or cross-dressing, they do perceive age and size to be critical identity markers in a choice of cosplay. Cosplayers are often highly aware of these norms, and their resulting status, that is partly constructed through their own body and modelling.

Current debates on the fraught cosplayer or 'geek girl' – who only engages in fandom for the kink and the attention, not for the texts themselves – have also led to female cosplayers identifying themselves differently and reflecting on the designs of their choice.[15] Especially gendered and hypersexual designs are more and more subjected to critique within fandom. This promises new emancipative dimensions as fans try to raise their concerns about the representations of gender and diversity in the media industry as well.

6. Conclusion

I have signalled that affect for popular culture is highly dynamic and cannot be understood at face value. To chart the results of affective and aesthetic processes, we need to dive into the emotional lives of fans themselves. I have given you a

glimpse of my ethnography and theoretical framework which charts the affective process of cosplay and raises awareness for the felt body and the media text as it is lived. In cultural theory, the discourse on affect tends to phrase the concept in abstract terms and ontologically, but I found it to be very specific and workable to signify the emotional culture of fandom. I believe that there is still much work to be done on affective processes in fandom. These structures may be unearthed through engaging, offline methods that still hold relevance today, even if fandom has shifted radically to performances on new media. Fandom cannot be understood without its relation to offline contexts and their entwinement with new technologies.

Within fan studies, our emphasis on the social and participatory culture on fandom has led to a neglect of the personal, the embodied, and the emotional life of fandom. The lived culture of fandom, and its complicated entwinement with media technologies, should be central in any investigation of contemporary fandom. To further the field, we need to investigate the very feelings that ground fandom and that are actively constructed in relation to different media texts and each other.

Notes

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[3] Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992), 23-45.
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FAN STUDIES: RESEARCHING POPULAR AUDIENCES

This volume brings together a variety of critical perspectives in the rapidly growing field of fan studies. We have engaged with multiple disciplines and theorists in order to explore the various methods of fan production and research. Whether fans engage in the real-world, online, or define themselves by their lack of engagement, the ability of fans to participate and share their enthusiasms with one another is one of the most striking and intriguing features of the fandom phenomena. Fan communities have directed their remarkable fervour towards charitable causes, bringing television shows and book characters back from the dead, and honing their creative skills before pursuing fandom-worthy material of their own. We explore fandom as a social space and constructed identity, fuelled by talented creators and enthusiastic consumers, and building on the global connectedness born from the digital age.

Alice Chauvel is a recent graduate of the University of Warwick's Centre for Cultural Policy. Currently an independent scholar, her dissertation delved into the motivations behind fan activism. Her research interests are strongly centered around the links between popular culture, media, and political engagement.

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