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FANDOM

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Fandom is a sociocultural phenomenon characterized by the creativity, playfulness and productivity of its participants. The term refers to a rich terrain of discursive, affective and performative practices within which individuals explore agency, express identities, share feelings and thoughts, interact with others with common interests, and join and create communities (Duffett 2013:288). While some have tried to define and categorize different types of fandom (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998), others suggest that such attempts risk undermining the diversity that exists within this phenomenon (Busse and Hellekson 2006:6; Hills 2002:xiii–xiv). Drawing on the lowest common denominator across different communities, Sandvoss (2005:8) defines fandom as "the regular, emotionally involved consumption of a given popular narrative or text". Fans are not only consumers, but also "networkers, collectors, tourists, archivists, curators, producers and more" (Duffett 2013:21).

The agency of fans has historically been undermined and pathologized. Until the early 1990s, fans were largely seen as either obsessive loners or frenzied crowd members (Jensen 1992). Starting with the work of Bacon-Smith (1992), Jenkins (1992) and Lewis (1992), scholars have challenged these stereotypes and reclaimed fandom as a creative phenomenon by highlighting the imaginative and innovative practices involved in the production of fan talk, fanzines, fan fiction and various other physical and virtual fan artefacts. This paradigm shift has gone hand in hand with the rapid growth of fandom in the age of digital media convergence: following the development of networked digital communications technologies, content is able to flow much more effectively across media platforms and audience members have the tools required to share their own creative expressions on an unprecedented scale (Jenkins 2006a). Fandom has entered the mainstream and become a key shaping force in the construction of contemporary identities, social relations, culture, the economy and politics (Click and Scott

2018; Sandvoss et al. 2017). Although the Internet has transformed fan participation and interaction, scholars argue that the online performance of fandom is always complemented by fans' offline activities, and vice versa (Baym 2000:157; Bury 2005:205).

As this entry will discuss, fandom can be seen as an important locus for the production of citizen media, understood as the range of physical and digital artefacts, content and discursive formations produced by unaffiliated citizens in order to express personal desires and aesthetics or to seek sociopolitical change, without the involvement of a third party or benefactor (Baker and Blaagaard 2016a:16). The first two sections ('Participation, performance and pleasure' and 'Gender, sexuality and desire') illustrate how fandom functions as an alternative space in which individuals can voice their own opinions and feelings, construct and appropriate meanings, interact with others and celebrate playfulness. The second half of the entry ('Fan activism and civic participation' and 'Transcultural and intersectional fandom') then describes how fans explore and negotiate their agency as citizens to act in public space(s) and engender sociopolitical change in ways that reconfigure the power relations between media, public(s) and citizens.

Participation, performance and pleasure

The term participatory culture is used to refer to the widespread and active involvement of institutionally unaffiliated citizens in the creation of culture and content (Jenkins et al. 2006). As such, it has become a central concept in scholarship on fandom (Jenkins 2006b:41). Drawing upon de Certeau's theorization of the tactics and games through which audiences often engage with texts (de Certeau 1980/1984:175), Jenkins (1992:24–28; 2006b:37–38) conceptualizes fans as textual poachers who, although operating from a position of sociocultural marginality, actively participate in the production of culture by appropriating texts, unhinging their parts and creatively reassembling them in the form of fan talk, fanzines, fan fiction (fanfic), fan conventions (cons), music videos (vidding) and public performances.

When we trace the history of media fandom in the twentieth century from the arrival of cinema through rock'n'roll to television drama series, it can be seen that fans have always been active (Duffett 2013:5–17). For example, at the end of the 1920s, over 32 million fan letters, written to both male and female stars, were received by the Hollywood studios every year (Duffett 2013:7). Over the decades, fans have also frequently mobilized large-scale save-the-show campaigns, such as the letter-writing campaign initiated by the fans of science fiction television series Star Trek in the late 1960s (Jenkins 1992:28), and the offline petitions and

boycotting campaign organized by fans of soap opera Another World (1964–1999) (Scardaville 2005). These campaigns demonstrate that fans are not merely members of an anonymous and isolated mass. Fans' social identities, feelings and participation are connected to other realms of the offline world.

Fans experience the pleasures of connection, appropriation and performance from engaging in fan practices (Duffett 2013:165–190). Vidding, for example, involves the editing, remixing and mashing up of a set of preexisting video clips to stage a new reading of a source text or to tell new stories through the interpretative lens of a musical soundtrack of the fan's own choice (Coppa 2008:1.1; Jenkins 1992:71). It thus not only creates new meanings for the source footage, but also enables fans to seek to develop their own artistic identities, connect with their fellow fans and acquire subcultural capital by disseminating their vids at fan conventions and/or online via Facebook and YouTube (Coppa et al. 2018:232). The performativity of vidding can also be observed in the playfulness of SuperWhoLock fans, who collate and combine clips from the television series Supernatural, Doctor Who and Sherlock in order to create and share pastiche GIF fics through Tumblr (Booth 2015:25–52).

Besides engaging in creative online activities, fans often participate and perform in offline physical spaces in ways that redefine publicness. For example, Duffett (2017) reconceptualizes female music fans screaming in public as a form of affective citizenship that rejects public disapproval of certain behaviours and modes of emotional expression enacted by female bodies. The embodied performance of cosplay (costume play) is the appropriation and actualization of stories in connection with the fan community. By engaging in this practice, fans enact and create new identity narratives, and hence transform the normative use of social spaces into spaces that are potentially playful and personal (Lamerichs 2011). Fans may also occupy and transform the existing meanings attached to a specific physical site. For example, in 2011, Bollywood dance fans in Mumbai performed a flash mob dance at one of the sites where a terrorist attack had taken place in 2008, in order to rekindle hope among their audience and to transform public memory of the site (Shresthova 2013).

Although it is evidenced that the relationship between audience and producer has been reshaped under participatory culture and media convergence, there are limitations in the extent of these changes. Power structures remain a strong influence on fandom, in particular at fan convention venues, where the hegemonic power of media corporations is naturalized and reinforced (Gilbert 2017). The concept of textual poaching is argued to be inadequate as a means of encapsulating contemporary fan practices and engagement, since the relationship between fans and commercial culture has become complexly entangled (Bennett 2014b).

Alternative modes of fan engagement, such as crowdfunding, further complicate the boundaries between fans and media producers, as well as between fandom and the commercial world (Bennett et al. 2015). Indeed, scholars such as Noppe (2011) have observed the development of a new hybrid economy for derivative works: in the case of fansubbing (fan subtitling) in anime fandom, for example, anime fans work with copyright holders and commercial distributors to co-create a transnational participatory culture through their voluntary fannish labour (Ito 2012; Lee 2011).

Gender, sexuality and desire

Fandom offers a space in which unaffiliated individuals can explore the possibilities of gender, sexuality and desire. As Jenkins (1992:284) famously suggests, "fandom celebrates not exception texts but rather exception readings". Much work in fan studies focuses on the fannish productivity of heterosexual women and members of sexual minorities in reading popular culture. The fact that more fan practices are found among women than men is argued to be attributable to the sociohistorical gendering of leisure, in which women were confined to the domestic reading and viewing of texts, whereas men traditionally occupy public space to engage in an alternative range of fandom activities, such as those pertaining to the realms of sports and politics (Pugh 2005:5; Sandvoss 2005:16).

These expressions of gender and sexual desire are not only personal but can also be considered political. Feminist audience studies have provided examples of female fans expressing their desires and discontent with patriarchy. Radway's seminal work (1984/1991) demonstrates how heterosexual, married women in the United States escaped from their daily household routines by reading romantic fiction and identifying with the independent heroines. Bacon-Smith (1992) explores how female fans of *Star Trek* and other genre television series materialize their pleasure and desire by producing and circulating fan fiction and fan art. On the other hand, fans who belong to or identify as sexual minorities may seek to queer these media by reclaiming and extricating expressions of all aspects of non-, anti-, and counter-straight cultural production and reception (Doty 1993:3). Queer fandom is always rooted in the specific social trajectories of how a marginalized identity is constructed. For example, before the start of the gay liberation movement in the late 1960s, American gay men, who could not publicly share their depressed feelings due to social stigmas and oppression, resonated strongly with actress Judy Garland because they drew inspiration from her invincible spirit that had enabled her to survive considerable suffering and failures (Dyer 2004:3). The Boston Area

Gaylaxians, a group of LGBT science fiction fans, protested and demanded more gays and lesbians represented in *Star Trek* through a letter-writing campaign and initiating dialogues with the producers (Jenkins 1995). They believed that an increased representation of LGBT characters in popular culture could help normalize non-heterosexual desires and empower marginalized communities. Furthermore, fandom offers a space in which gender boundaries become blurred and ambivalent desires are explored. Male fans of David Bowie in Stevenson's (2009) research expressed their sexual feelings towards Bowie; this suggests that fandom offers a space to unfix dominant masculinity and open up ambivalent possibilities for alternative masculinity.

A well-known example of fans negotiating gender and sexuality is the practice of slash reading and writing. Slash is a fanfic genre that puts two (presumably heterosexual) male characters into a romantic or erotic relationship (Green et al. 2006:78). The term originated from the convention of using the slash punctuation mark to signify a same-sex relationship between two male characters in a series (Jenkins 1992:192). An example would be Kirk/Spock (K/S) in *Star Trek*. Jenkins (1992:194) observed that many female fan writers, who were mainly heterosexual and white, regarded slash as an uncensored expression of female sexuality. Slash writers that Jenkins contacted have argued that slash stories are liberating, since the pervasive trope involving male characters' having to overcome obstacles rejects the normative construction of male sexuality and symbolizes the transgression of gender and sexual hierarchies (Green et al. 2006:67–68; Lamb and Veith 1986:254). Taking the homoeroticization of male characters further, the practice of shipping entails reimagining erotic and/or romantic relationships between male characters in dramatic texts or between male public figures. For example, the Alexter fandom that celebrates a fictional male samesex romance between student leaders Alex Chow and Lester Sham of the 2014 Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong is said to have drawn young women's attention to the prodemocratic movement and offer a counterargument to masculine narratives of political participation (Lavin and Zhu 2014).

Parallel to slash in Anglo-American fan cultures, *yaoi* or BL (boys' love) fandom has begun to receive attention in English-language fan studies. Originally a Japanese manga and anime genre portraying male same-sex relationships, BL fandom has become a significant global female-oriented erotic subculture in which women reject normative femininity and mainstream heteronormative romance (Levi et al. 2010; Wood 2006). However, BL consumption requires the precarious management of fan identities. In Japan, female fans of BL, who are known as *fujoshi* (rotten girls) avoid publicizing their identities in everyday life to

avoid stigmatization, which renders BL a "uniquely oppositional but self-denigrating feminine subculture" (Okabe and Ishida 2012:221–222).

As well as the original slash, there is also the genre of femslash, which refers to female writing on romantic or erotic relationships between two female characters (Russo 2014:452). In contrast to slash, the majority of participants in femslash fandom are characterized by the "presumed synchronicity between its participants (primarily queer women) and its content (queer relationships between women)" (Russo 2018:156). Examples include the fandom of Xena/Gabrielle in *Xena: Warrior Princess* (1995–2001) and the first multi-fandom femslash fan convention TGIF/F (Los Angeles, February 2016) (Jones 2000). Russo (2018:161) argues that queer women obtain particular pleasure not only from encouraging media producers to create explicit onscreen lesbian characters and relationships, but also from engaging in creative interventions themselves in ways that reshape the relationships between the characters inhabiting a particular storyworld.

Fan activism and civic participation

Besides expressing personal desires and aspirations, fandom can be seen as an important instance of citizen media because of its potential to effect sociopolitical change and to redefine the boundaries between formal and informal political engagement (Baker and Blaagaard 2016a:16). That said, it should be noted that the reasons lying behind fans' civic engagement are often ambiguous. Fans are more likely to be driven by the parasocial desires of star–fan intimacy and the affective sociality within (imagined) fan communities, instead of formal political motives or principles. Thus, the effects on social justice and institutional politics can be seen as a consequence rather than the driving force of fans' civic participation.

Fan activism refers to "fan-driven efforts to address civic or political issues through engagement with and strategic deployment of popular culture content", most often through existing fan practices and networks (Brough and Shresthova 2011:2.3; Jenkins 2012a:1.8; Jenkins 2014:65). Since the 1980s, it has been observed that the younger generation in the West has increasingly sought to influence civic and political life by engaging in social networks and cultural activism enacted through informal, non-institutionalized and nonhierarchical networks on the Internet, instead of by means of electoral politics (Bennett 2012; Brough and Shresthova 2011:3.2; Jenkins 2012a:2; Jenkins and Shresthova 2012). Highly organized fan activism, such as online petitions, boycotts and email and online letter-writing campaigns, have been found to be prevalent (Earl and Kimport 2009). Fans' use of social media to communicate across

extended networks by liking Facebook pages and through hashtags and retweets on Twitter has enabled them to reach large numbers of people who share the same values (Bennett 2012:3.3)

The Harry Potter Alliance (HPA) offers an example of large-scale media text-driven fan activism in which fans' personal narratives and affective sociality has been collectively mobilized in struggles for social justice. The HPA is a nonprofit organization first established in 2005 (Jenkins 2012a; Jenkins 2014). Calling itself 'Dumbledore's Army for the real world', HPA re-appropriates and deploys the Harry Potter story as a keystone to draw fans' identification and engagement with its various local and global campaigns, such as those pertaining to disaster relief, fair trade, workers' rights, literacy and LGBT rights (Hinck 2011). For instance, the HPA donated more than USD 123,000 to nonprofit organization Partners for Health in response to the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. Fan activism driven by celebrity has also emerged with the help of social media. In 2010, American pop music diva Lady Gaga used public and social media to publicize her protests against the policy of Don't Ask Don't Tell (DADT), which dismisses or refuses openly gay or bisexual citizens from serving in the military (Bennett 2014a:144–148). Her fans, whom she names the little monsters, mobilized themselves in further collective actions, such as filming and uploading videos onto YouTube to publicize the protest and calling their senators to express their views. Having had the values of active citizenship instilled in their minds, fans felt empowered and further connected to Lady Gaga (Bennett 2014a).

Fan-initiated philanthropy is another form of fans' civic engagement. While celebrity charity in the Anglo-American world has been criticized for its capitalist ideology and depoliticizing tendency (Kapoor 2013), it has been suggested that fan-driven philanthropies in East Asia encourage more participatory and public-oriented youth cultures. For example, the fans of mainland Chinese pop music diva Li Yuchun (Chris Lee) have set up a charity fund and volunteer groups under her name, and have been actively engaged in domestic disaster relief and literacy campaigns, leading to endorsement from both the party-state and the celebrity herself (Jeffreys and Xu 2017:251–253). In South Korea, it has become common for K-pop fans to send rice sack mock-ups (known as dream rice) to show their support for their stars instead of sending wreaths of flowers (Jung 2012:2.2). For example, in 2010 fans of U-Know Yunho (a member of boy band TVXQ) sent 3.15 tonnes of rice to various welfare facilities under his name in order to celebrate his musical theatre debut.

Nonetheless, fan activism has its limitations and a number of criticisms have been voiced. Fans' participation in volunteering and philanthropy is often seen to be largely driven by the parasocial star–fan intimacy and the motivation to promote the public reputation of their

stars rather than constituting an active or genuine form of civic engagement (Jeffreys and Xu 2017; Jung 2012). Moreover, the social networks and mobilization tactics that could have been used to influence existing power relations and lead to progressive social changes can work in the opposite direction. Queer fandom may not necessarily lead to fans' direct civic engagement with struggles for LGBT rights. For example, fans of a local queer singersongwriter Denise Ho in quasi-democratic Hong Kong preferred heteronormative readings of her queerness (Li 2012; Li 2017). In more extreme cases, we must recognize that fans may mobilize themselves through nationalistic discourses in order to express blunt racist ideologies and engage in cyber vigilantism (Chen 2016; Jung 2012).

Transcultural and intersectional fandom

Since 2010, there have emerged two further interrelated strands of research that seek to unfold the operations of power and inequality in and beyond fandom. The first strand calls for a more transculturally oriented fan studies discipline. Researchers critique the work of English-language media fan studies scholars for dominating the debate and privileging assumptions in the field that tend to exoticize fan cultures originating in other parts of the world (Chin et al. 2018:300; Morimoto and Chin 2017). The shorter lag time between the domestic and international distribution of popular culture and greater accessibility facilitated by the Internet have further helped to contest the assumption that fan culture operates within a homological national/linguistic context (Chin and Morimoto 2013:104). Transculturally oriented fan studies aim to contextualize transnationally circulating media and to remain attuned to the nuanced sociohistorical, political and economic trajectories of consumption (Chin and Morimoto 2013:98). The term transcultural is employed to "allow for a transnational orientation, yet leaves open the possibility of other orientations that may inform, or even drive, cross-border fandom" (Chin and Morimoto 2013:93). In response, work that focuses on non-Western transcultural fandom has begun to emerge (Chen, L. 2017; Lavin et al. 2017). Chin and Morimoto (2013), for example, have explored the assimilation of media texts by fans in their close textual analysis of a Japanese fan text centring on Hong Kong star Leslie Cheung, which juxtaposes the star's persona, his film roles and fan artists' own Japanese cultural contexts. Fraser and Li (2017), on the other hand, have excavated the mediated cultural memory of Kowloon Walled City in Hong Kong, which was once known as "one of history's great anomalies", by tracing its fandom and global and regional flows of representation. Finally, studies are increasingly focusing attention on the fact that the West is by no means a

homogeneous entity, as suggested by the language barrier experienced by Italian fans of American television shows, which discourages them from participating in English-language online fandom or communicating with producers (Benecchi 2015).

The second strand of scholarship calls for an intersectional approach that concerns race issues in particular. While fandom has always been a site for expressing intersectional identities of gender and sexual orientation, discussions of race remain under-theorized and have been "frequently treated as an add-on or as something that should be addressed somewhere later" (Wanzo 2015:1.6). Pande (2016) urges scholars to decolonize fandom studies by theorizing cyberspace fandom as a postcolonial space of contention and conflict. She problematizes the term fan of colour and challenges the default whiteness in fandom by examining fan campaigns that foreground diversity by non-white fans, such as those around the television series *Avatar: The Last Airbender* (2005–2008). On the other hand, social media platforms such as Twitter have offered non-white audiences a new counterpublic against which to define their own politics. For example, Chatman (2017) studies the online dynamics between black fans and anti-fans of ABC's primetime drama *Scandal* (2012–), which features a black woman in the lead. Warner (2018) explores how the release of preproduction news about *The Flash* movie by Warner Bros. led to the formation of 'The Iris West Defense Squad (IWDS)' on Twitter by a group of black American women. For the members of this squad, their collaborative efforts to protect the blackness of this television series character as well as the actress who portrays her serve a dual function: Iris West represents not only the object of their fannish love but also an identificatory model for their black female selves. De Kosnik (2018), on the other hand, delineates the concept of forced fandom, in which hegemonic cultural consumption is imposed on subordinate groups, with reference to American Filipinos' protests against television's stereotypical representations.

Transcultural and intersectional approaches to fandom aim to further unmask power relations and critically explore the infinite diversity of fan practices as citizen media. As Jenkins (1992:3) suggested, "there is nothing timeless and unchanging about this culture; fandom originates as a response to specific historical conditions". Those conditions emerge as shifting power relations among fans, between fans and media texts, and between fans and media producers. Through the lens of fandom, we are thus able to re-examine the intersectionality of power and reconceptualize the relations between individual citizens, communities, media, corporations and public(s) in the age of global media convergence.

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Recommended reading

Click, M. A. and S. Scott (eds) (2018) *The Routledge Companion to Media Fandom*, New York: Routledge.

A comprehensive collection of essays that explore critical issues relevant to the study of media fandom. Key themes include methodology and pedagogy, ethics, technologies, identities, race, transcultural fandom, the media industry and the future of fandom studies.

Gray, J., C. Sandvoss and C. L. Harrington (2017) *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, second edition, New York: New York University Press.

While the first edition, published in 2007, summarized and elaborated on the key themes that have shaped scholarship on fan phenomena, the second edition adds further to the ongoing discussion. It explores the materiality, spatiality and temporality of fandom, and includes essays on fan activism as well as on the hybrid and intersectional interactions between fan labour and fan producers.

Jenkins, H. (2006) *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring participatory culture*, New York: New York University Press.

Contains a collection of essays by Jenkins, one of the pioneers of the field of fan studies. Of particular note is his discussion of the notion of intervention analysis in which Jenkins explores the divided loyalties between fan communities and academia that scholars working on this topic are invariably forced to negotiate.