

The question of the Internet's impact on fan cultures is a complex and difficult one to address. Do digital and broadband technologies give media fans a larger and stronger voice with which to negotiate dominant ideologies? Or, does the corporatization of fan cultures we are seeing through the processes of convergence and affective economics (as described by Henry Jenkins) render any resistance by fans futile? On the one hand, it is tempting to read the recent explosion of fan-created digital media flowing across the World Wide Web strictly as a technologically-enabled trend that empowers media consumers by extending them access to the means of production and distribution. After all, new media technologies and broadband Internet access are facilitating an unprecedented expansion of fan communities into the public sphere and legitimizing some consumption and production practices previously characterized by cultural theorists as subversive and ideologically threatening. On the other hand, the fact that fan production practices are now being encouraged, facilitated and (arguably, in some cases) controlled and exploited by corporate media producers calls into question the very possibility of resistance in these creative endeavors. So which is it?

I want to suggest that the answer is neither and it is time to move beyond a definition of fandom that hinges on this binary of incorporation versus resistance. Struggling to fit contemporary media consumption practices nicely within the cultural studies paradigm of incorporation/resistance limits what we can learn about the relationship between media and the construction of identity for several reasons—I would like to focus on three. First of all, the mainstreaming of fan-associated practices that has resulted from the proliferation of Internet technologies and access troubles the notion that there is a distinct category of media consumers called 'fans' that consists largely (though not exclusively of course) of those disempowered by the hegemony and can be easily distinguished from 'average' consumers. However, fandom's swift and complicated migration into cyberspace has shined a light on many of its previously ignored or disavowed media consumption practices, specifically textual production practices like fan fiction (especially slash), vidding, and machinima-making. The massive amounts of consumer produced media content now available online, arguably makes it increasingly difficult to separate what have been considered the behaviors of fans from those of 'normal' audiences in the so-called mundane world.

Secondly, the movement of media fandom from the basement to the Internet—where texts are produced and consumed largely in *private* but distributed to a potentially global *public*—has altered the location space of fandom. This is important because, throughout media history, fans have shared their love of media and circulated fan-produced texts at annual conventions and the homes of fellow fans—thus placing them and their communities effectively within the private sphere. The relegation of socially stigmatized fan activities to the private or semi-private sphere has not only been a fundamental part of the association of fan practices with resistance, but also one of the ways in which fans have often been distinguished from other types of media consumers. The 'private but public' space of the Internet as the central location for the production, consumption and distribution of media by both fans and corporate producers further blurs the distinction between the fandom/mundane binary by simultaneously legitimizing and exploiting many practices associated with fans, including textual production.

Lastly, although what some fan scholars have dubbed 'first wave' fan studies have done a wonderful job of legitimizing the semiotic, enunciative, and textual productions of media fans as well as cementing the academic importance of studying these productions, it has not properly addressed the consistent existence and proliferation of hierarchies within and between fandoms, specifically, those associated with gender. Going back as far back as the 17th century, what could be considered fan texts by women have been consistently criticized, marginalized and excluded both within fandoms and in their representation. As a solitary television fan, a feminist scholar and a gamer, my interests lie in exploring gender-based hierarchies and exclusion within television and video-gaming fandoms. What I would like my own work to address are the ways in which contemporary media consumption practices

(including those we may categorize as specific to fans)—as constitutive of daily life, are not necessarily acts of either resistance or capitulation to ideological norms. Rather, that consumption practices as diverse as media choice itself, forum discussion, blogging, fan fiction, vidding, or machinima can be studied as examples of identity performance—specifically, that of gender and sexuality.