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From Deviation to Mainstream – Evolution of Fan Studies

Abstract

Academic opinions on fans are changing rapidly. Not only is it difficult to define fans or to pinpoint their characteristics, but researchers also have many considerably different views regarding them. For example, there is a multitude of approaches to describing a fan and determining whether his/her activities are communal. If they are found to be so, then what is the strength of this communal engagement, and what enables fans to create communities? Despite the chaos that exists regarding methods of defining fans, one can distinguish certain descriptive similarities. Officially, there are no schools of fans, and therefore, this article does not wish to categorize them. Rather, the author's goal is to order fan studies and to pinpoint certain trends and changes. The author refers to these trends as research waves, waves that have been continually occurring since the inception of fan studies. This article details the chronological periods of these waves, their main assumptions, and identifies the prominent researchers in each stage.

Keywords

Fan, fans, fandom, fan studies, cultural studies, fan studies evolution.

To be labeled a "fan" is a common colloquialism. One can be a fan of a football team, good cuisine, a politician, or of particular mountain or seaside landscapes. In other words, we use the term "fan" to describe a variety of concepts or phenomena. However, this usage is incorrect, as fans are specific recipients of popular culture, a unique audience of various media. Fans are strongly engaged in reception. They hold in-depth knowledge of the product they are fascinated by as a result of their continuous consumption of said product. A fan is someone who, for example, reads a favorite text not once, twice, or three times, but several dozen times or more, obtaining pleasure from something that does not seem extraordinary to others (i.e., they could be fans of certain details or of particular characters in a story). A fan also strives to intensify his/her pleasure by creating amateur productions; "he/she is often not only a consumer but also an author of texts based on the original"[1]. Further, fans are socially

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[1] P. Siuda, *Polski antyfan. Patrząc na fanizm, nie zapomnijmy o antyfanizmie*, "Kultura Popularna" 2008, No. 3, p. 33.

minded people, as they often create and join fan communities with those who hold similar interests in particular media products[2].

It is probably most popular, or even avant-garde, to be a fan of a television series. A certain synergy of texts[3] is present in pop culture, hence, it is likely that fans of a particular television show will also be attracted to other products based on it, such as films, books, comic books, mugs, t-shirts, etc. Television shows have the most fans because series are original products that attract fans, and, based on these original concepts, other texts are later produced. Also, fans of books or films may, in turn, become fans of certain television series, if such productions are based on the original films or bestsellers. This is a common phenomenon.

This article will discuss how academic views on fans have changed over the years and how they have evolved. It is very difficult to precisely define the term "fan." The characteristic provided above is merely a general one. Different researchers have their own definitions of fans, which focus on various aspects. Despite the chaos that exists regarding the methods of defining fans, however, we can distinguish certain descriptive similarities. This paper will attempt to order fan studies and pinpoint certain trends and changes. These trends have been classified into different waves that have occurred successively, from early fan research to the modern day. This article will examine these waves in chronological order, discussing their general assumptions and also the main researchers associated with each. These waves, similar to ocean waves, are influenced by various factors and conditions and can be long or short, slow or fast, and they can overlap each other or not. Fan-studies waves are quite diverse. Let us examine them in more detail.

Deviation wave

This is the first of the waves, which appeared during the early stages of academic research into fans. In order to classify this wave, we must choose a symbolic date. This date should probably correspond with the inception of the first fan communities (fandoms), rather than with a specific publication studying this field. The first sci-fi fandom appeared in the United States in the 1930s. One of the pioneers of this movement was Hugo Gernsback, a writer and initiator of the first sci-fi magazine, *Amazing Stories* (1926). He encouraged his readers to

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[2] Cf. P. Siuda, *Fani jako specyficzna subkultura konsumpcji. Pomiędzy fanatyczną konsumpcją a oporem przeciwko konsumeryzmowi*, [in:] *„Czas ukoi nas?". Jakość życia i czas wolny we współczesnym społeczeństwie*, ed. W. Muszyński, Toruń 2008, p. 60–71.

[3] From this point forward, the term "text" is used in reference to films, television shows, books, etc.

send him letters commenting on the magazine's content. As a result, fans not only sent comments, but also began to exchange their addresses, which Gernsback published. Soon, they began to write letters to each other or, if they lived sufficiently close, to visit each other[4]. The year 1939 can be considered as the start date of the fantasy movement (and also the beginning of the deviation wave). This is also when the first International Science Fiction Convention took place[5].

During the deviation wave, fans were infamous because they were stereotyped. This generalization focused on their pathological receptive tendencies, and they were deemed to require psychiatric help. During this wave, fans were considered to be immature, senile, or seen as social misfits. They were viewed as deviants or antisocial people who had difficulty interacting with others, were unable to find work, or were generally incapable of leading a normal life. In other words, extremely negative opinions and press existed concerning fans.

Stephen Hinerman, in an article on fans of Elvis Presley, details several examples of radical behavior[6]. Among them, he notes tendencies to collect strange items related to the "King of Rock and Roll." His fans buy large quantities of gadgets and memorabilia. Aside from official merchandise, such as t-shirts, photos, mugs, etc., an underground market also exists (not supported by Graceland Enterprises, the official mementoes distributor) with much more intimate memorabilia, such as Elvis' sweat or fingernails[7]. Collecting the above is not, however, the most radical form of Presley maniac fanaticism. According to Hinerman, even more interesting are the fantasies that fans invent, such as having Elvis as their sexual partner, as a premonition, or as an adviser who supports them or chooses them as a contact. All of the above are common cases often described in literature. In his analysis of the causes of such behavior, Hinerman refers to Freudian psychoanalysis, which considers fantasies to be an escape from an oppressing superego or omni-oppressing culture. Humans, being unable to fulfill their desires and to curb their daily fears, turn to the world of fantasy. The creations of their imagination enable them to maintain a coherent personality and prevent lowering of their self-esteem, especially in traumatic situations. Fantasies in which "the King" is present during individuals' difficult life situations are very common. Hinerman gives the example of a

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[4] Cf. J.M. Verba, *Boldly Writing. A Trekker Fan and Zine History, 1967–1987*, Minnetoka 2003.

[5] Cf. P. Siuda, *Fanfiction – przejaw medialnych fandomów*, [in:] *Człowiek a media. Obserwacje – wizje – obawy*, ed. W. Gruszczyński, A. Hebda, Warszawa 2007, p. 143–157.

[6] S. Hinerman, *"I'll Be Here With You": Fans, Fantasy and the Figure of Elvis*, [in:] *Adoring Audience. Fan Culture and Popular Media*, ed. by L.A. Lewis, London–New York 1992, p. 128.

[7] J. Windsor, *Identity Parades*, [in:] *The Cultures of Collecting*, ed. by J. Elsner, R. Cardinal, London 1994, p. 58.

woman who imagined that Elvis was helping her to give birth. At the time of delivery she was in a serious predicament; she already had two children, her partner had left her during the pregnancy, and her own parents, being against another baby, also spurned her. It is apparent that she was traumatized and we can imagine that, at all costs, she wished to justify the birth of another child. She escaped into the world of fantasy and imagined that Elvis himself had blessed the child[8]. Obviously, similar cases exist concerning fans of other media phenomena. Cases of *Star Trek* fans imagining themselves having sexual intercourse with their favorite characters are quite common. Generally, Hinerman does not depict a favorable image of fans. In his opinion, a fan is someone who must compensate for his/her life traumas, someone who requires help, or is mentally ill. This conclusion must be accurate in his view, because when fans are unable to deal with difficult life situations, they escape into the world of fantasy.

John Tulloch and Henry Jenkins wrote at length concerning academic circles' opinions of fans during the first wave. In their work, *Science Fiction Audiences*, they consider science fiction fans as avant-garde in comparison to other fandoms. They emphasize that, since their appearance in the 1960s, fans have been viewed as deviants. For example, *Star Trek* fans were named "Trekkies," which was a derogatory term depicting all that was evil in mass culture, including blind consumerism, the obsessive interest in trivial matters, the lack of will to develop intellectually, and the endeavor to escape reality in favor of fantasy. The fans themselves opposed this stereotypical portrayal and the term "Trekkie," so they invented the name "Trekker." While the first term embodied stereotypes associated with fans, the second was considered to be more positive, although the fans themselves had created it. Meanwhile, academic studies on *Star Trek* fans were far from positive. Academics such as Robert Jewett, John S. Lawrence, and Harvey Greenberg used their scientific status to strengthen the pathological image of these sci-fi fans. Fans were portrayed as eccentrics only interested in banal content[9].

Joli Jenson, in her article, *Fandom as Pathology*, states that fans were traditionally treated in one of two ways: they were either ridiculed, or considered to be pathological individuals with symptoms of uncontrolled behavior and almost madness. Jenson demonstrates that, as a result of the omnipresent criticism of modernity, this view was prevalent in academic (and media) circles of the time. Fans, therefore, embodied everything

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[8] S. Hinerman, *"I'll Be Here With You"...*, p. 107–134.
[9] J. Tulloch, H. Jenkins, *Science Fiction Audiences. Watching Doctor Who and Star Trek*, London–New York 1995, p. 14–15.

that should be feared. Hence, they were considered the dangerous "others" of modern reality. "We" are serious, while "they" are fanatical and hysterical. "We," professors, students, and educated people are healthy, while "they," the fans, are socially dysfunctional people. "We," the representatives of the upper class, are interested in high culture and things worth interest. "We" are rational and sensible, while "they" are interested in pop culture and are overly emotional when expressing their feelings. Jenson describes how, in an attempt to maintain a division between classes, fans were treated as pathological recipients. "We," the representatives of the upper class, in contrast to "them," the representatives of a lower class, are more resistant to threats connected with modernity[10]. John Storey, summarizing Jenson's paper, focuses on the main points: according to academics, "the fan movement is a clear (pathological) sign of cultural, moral and social impotence which is a result of the transformation of peasant and rural societies into industrial and urban ones"[11]. Academics feared modernity, claiming that it would lead to alienation, the atomization and dispersion of social ties, and the forming of a fragmentary, incomplete human self. Jenson shows that this mentality influenced what was written about fans. It described the various criticisms of modern society, emphasizing that being a fan of something is a hopeless attempt to compensate for personal deficiencies in modern life[12].

The deviation wave was very negative. Bernard Scharratt, writing about extensive fan knowledge of favorite texts[13], calls it "pseudo knowledge," which exists in place of an understanding of social and economic structures, and generally manipulates and exploits people. For fans, pop culture texts are a remedy, a calming instrument, which allows them to understand the forces controlling the world. However, in reality, they are far from that, which further blurs this opinion[14]. Jay Goulding is even more critical. In his work, *Empire, Aliens and Conquest,* in relation to science fiction fans, he directly refers to Theodore Adorno's theory. What he discerns in sci-fi series is pseudo-individualization based on standardization with only one goal in mind, that is, to support the pop culture industry. These shows are part of an even bigger scam system, with the goal of rationalizing the inequalities and contradictions of modern societies and maintaining the status quo of the ruling elite. The texts promote sexism, capitalism, individualism, and consumerism. In this sense, they enslave the

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[10] J. Jenson, *Fandom as Pathology: The Consequences of Characterization*, [in:] *Adoring Audience...*, p. 10−16.
[11] J. Storey, *Studia kulturowe i badania kultury popularnej*, Kraków 2003, p. 117.
[12] J. Jenson, *Fandom as Pathology...*, p. 16−18.
[13] The term text is understood to mean all types of pop culture productions such as films, TV series, books, etc.
[14] J. Tulloch, H. Jenkins, *Science Fiction...*, p. 16−17.

viewers, preventing them from rebelling. For instance, in Goulding's opinion, *Star Trek* is a text rationalizing American imperialism[15].

How did fans come to be described in such a negative light? The most likely answer is because it was easy to write in this way and, at the time, popular to share such beliefs concerning pop culture. Many were inspired by the Frankfurt School, represented by Theodore Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Herbert Marcuse, which viewed audiences as victims manipulated by the industry. The goal of this industry was to reinforce existing social inequalities and to convince people to meet false needs – those of consumerism[16]. The Frankfurt academics were of the opinion that pop culture promotes consumerism to an absurd extreme. Adorno wrote about popular music, presenting it as entertainment for the immature and infantile, i.e., the so-called "regressive recipients." According to him, this type of music is based on simple and repetitive patterns and merely appears to be individualized (similar to what Goulding indicated regarding sci-fi series). All of the songs appear to be different but, in reality, they are all alike. He contrasted pop music with classical, which was original, unpredictable, and truly artistic. In other words, it was fit for the elite class. From the Frankfurt School, Herbert Marcuse elaborated on the concept of false needs[17]. According to him, people have a need to be creative, independent, and to autonomously control their lives. However, this requirement cannot be realized because of the existence of false needs – those created by the pop culture industry, based on market fetishism, which can be met through the endless purchasing and exchanging of goods. For example, the requirement of freedom is a real need, but in modern, capitalist society it is replaced by a fake one – the requirement of a free choice of a variety of consumer goods. This is obvious brainwashing for the purposes of the industry. It is impossible to overcome the dictation of false needs, as manipulated individuals cannot see the advantages of freeing themselves from the system.

Dwight MacDonald represented similar opinions; he focused on the lack of free will and the atomization of mass audiences. The British researcher Richard Hoggart, in his famous work, *Aspects of Working Class Life,* published in 1957, wrote about the influence of American pop culture on the British working class[18]. He called it barbarism and the root of all evil. Once again, pop culture audiences were portrayed as a manipulated and indoctrinated populace.

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[15] J. Goulding, *Empire, Aliens and Conquest*, Toronto 1985.
[16] Cf. D. Strinati, *Wprowadzenie do kultury popularnej*, Poznań 1995, p. 15–49.
[17] Cf. H. Marcuse, *Człowiek jednowymiarowy*, Warszawa 1991, p. 13–27.
[18] R. Hoggart, *Spojrzenie na kulturę robotniczą w Anglii*, Warszawa 1976.

Another reason why fans had such a poor reputation was due to their low visibility. This means that there were not many media phenomena that attracted fans. During the first wave, fans were not viewed as members of communities but rather as individuals. Describing them as pathological individuals was easier because, initially, fandoms were not organized as efficiently as they would be in later decades. In the 1960s and 1970s, considerably fewer conventions were arranged, and less fan fiction existed than would appear during the subsequent wave.

Resistance wave

Representatives of the resistance wave did not consider fans to be manipulated and pathological individuals, but regarded them as active and creative people, not subject to producers' ideas, but members of communities that created their own culture. The year 1992 is believed to be the beginning of this wave, as this was when its key works were created.

It should be noted that the representatives of this wave would probably have had little influence if the fans themselves had not changed and become more visible. In the 1980s, it became clear that an increasing number of media products were attracting their own fans. Additionally, literary works created by fans became more complex as, now, they were frequently tied to more than one text. Fans began to create so-called "crossovers"; these are stories mixing two or more films or series together. Since the early 1990s, fans began to be influenced by the Internet. They could now interact through it, instead of being limited solely to communication through fanzines (fan papers). Fans began colonizing cyberspace, creating new locations for the development of their interests. They used the Internet to discuss their favorite texts and to exchange their work[19]. As an increasing number of fans of various media products resisted, they could utilize the most up-to-date technology and organize themselves more efficiently. As they began writing and producing large quantities of amateur work, academic researchers decided that fans' behavior could not be as eccentric and deviant as previously assumed, and that perhaps they were not such manipulated recipients of pop culture as had earlier been believed.

Representatives of the resistance wave used entirely different sources for their work than their predecessors. For instance, consider the research of Dick Hebdige, which states that these audiences were not passive and thoughtless but, in fact, active. For example, American

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[19] Cf. F. Coppa, *A Brief History of Media Fandom*, [in:] *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet. New Essays*, ed. by K. Hellekson, K. Busse, Jefferson, N.C. 2006, p. 41−59.

laborers used pop culture to contrast themselves with the culture of the middle and upper classes, treating it as a defense against their own subordination[20]. Hebdige's opinions certainly differed from those who considered pop culture to be stupefying and its audiences to be manipulated marionettes. With this theoretical reflection on pop culture and its recipients, more proponents of the movement appeared. Barker's approach placed viewers somewhere in the middle, as a group who were somewhat influenced by the pop culture industry, but who also influenced the industry themselves[21]. Generally, over the last three decades, there has been an increasing amount of literature published that focuses on audience resistance to media and media products. Ien Ang, in her renowned work, described how American soap operas such as *Dallas* are open to multiple audience interpretations[22].

Representatives of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham also disagreed with the opinion that fans are passive consumers of mass culture. Early research by the CCCS on subculture groups focused on their abilities to object to, and to question, dominant ideologies. This approach was certainly contrary to earlier models that had criticized pop culture[23]. Stuart Hall, with his model of counter decoding, and David Morley, in works such as *The Nationwide Audience* and *Family TV: Cultural Powers and Domestic Leisure*, did not agree with the concept of passive recipients[24]. Audiences are conscious and they use media for their own purposes. They resist the official ideology and re-interpret the content broadcasted by industry producers for themselves.

Amongst second-wave researchers, Michael de Carteau is particularly influential. He distinguished two powerful forces; on the one hand, pop culture media producers, and on the other, resistant consumers with their own creativity and amateur productions. de Carteau stated that consumers are always in opposition to producers, and this creates a battlefield. On this field, producer dictations regarding items of importance and their interpretation are juxtaposed with consumer activities, as they re-interpret texts in their own way. Hence, the result is the creation of a variety of unauthorized versions of the original texts, which are not produced by the original creators, critics, academics, etc. According to de Carteau, recipients are like "poachers" who travel wherever they wish and take whatever they want for their own

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[20] Cf. D. Hebdige, *Hiding in the Light. On Images and Things*, London–New York 1988, p. 75.
[21] Cf. D. Strinati, *Wprowadzenie do kultury popularnej*, Poznań 1995, p. 200−202.
[22] I. Ang, *Watching Dallas. Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination*, London 1989.
[23] Ch. Harris, *A Sociology of Television Fandom*, [in:] *Theorizing Fandom. Fans, Subculture and Identity*, ed. by Ch. Harris, A. Alexander, Cresshill, N.J. 1998, p. 42−43.
[24] Cf. A. Szkudlarek, *Cultural Studies – brytyjska teoria krytyczna*, [in:] *Nauka o komunikowaniu. Podstawowe orientacje teoretyczne*, ed. B. Dobek-Ostrowska, Wrocław 2001, p. 182−191.

purposes. Recipients adapt texts for themselves, are active, and create their own culture from elements they have chosen and re-processed from official media broadcasts[25].

The opinions of resistance-wave academics were largely based on the above theories. They regarded fans not only as individuals but also as members of communities. Researchers focused on activities that demonstrated that fans were no longer considered docile dogs on the producers' leash. They emphasized that fans organized conventions, wrote fan fiction, published zines, and organized protest actions. All of these were accomplished as part of social and critical productions of content, which differed from the interpretation producers wished to impose on them. For representatives of this wave, fans were an embodiment of partisan style "guerillas," questioning the offerings of the producers. The act of researching fans was now regarded as being supportive of the "better" side of the conflict, i.e., the fans were seen as opposing a regime that wished to dominate and manipulate thoughtless and affirmative audiences, who would accept all that was offered to them.

Representatives of the second wave demonstrated that fans were not all thoughtless. One such example is John Fiske's article, *The Cultural Economy of Fandom*, part of *Adoring Audience*, published in 1992. This was an important publication, fresh with new ideas. Fiske is an influential and distinguished cultural studies researcher; his works are a primary link between earlier Birmingham research on television audiences and subcultures and fan studies. In books he published prior to 1992, Fiske repeatedly wrote of the resistance of pop culture consumers. In *The Cultural Economy of Fandom*, he does not focus on resistance to producer pressure, as he did in his earlier works, but attention is still devoted to the division between those "up high" and those "down low," and the constant struggle between them[26]. The article's influence is undeniable as Fiske "presented a wide range of tools which can be used to go beyond pathological models of fandom, and the movement toward a more affirmative approach to fan cultures and their practices"[27].

In the same positive tradition, there was Henry Jenkins' work, *Textual Poachers*, published in 1992[28]. This author is considered to be a guru, the most influential researcher of fan culture. He also plays a role in the third wave but, at this time, it can be said that he was the key representative of the resistance wave. Jenkins had somewhat different views to Fiske,

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[25] A. Ćwikiel, *Między narracją a serializacją: fenomen Star Trek*, [in:] *Między powtórzeniem a innowacją. Seryjność w kulturze*, ed. A. Kisielewska, Kraków 2004, p. 266–268.
[26] J. Fiske, *The Cultural Economy of Fandom*, [in:] *Adoring Audience…*, p. 34.
[27] H. Jenkins, *Kulturowa ekonomia fandomu szesnaście lat później*, "Kultura Popularna" 2008, No. 3, p. 31.
[28] H. Jenkins, *Textual Poachers. Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, New York–London 1992.

who was of the opinion that fan activity illustrates, in a sense, how we all consume media content. Undoubtedly, fans are much more resistant than average recipients, but the tendencies that are observed in fandom reflect those of general people. Jenkins' opinion of fans is that they are an avant-garde group, engaged in innovative methods of reception, a collection of people who are different from the general public and characterized by extensive resistance radicalism. Fans are much more social, critical, and productive in regard to their reception. Camille Bacon-Smith, another second-wave researcher and author of *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth*[29], wrote a report based on ethnographic research that assessed the social character of fan activity. Other representatives include Roberta Pearson, editor of *Cult Television*[30], Constance Penley with *NASA/TREK: Popular Science and Sex in America*[31], and John Tulloch.

It should be noted, however, that the onset of the second wave was partly a result of the fact that many of the researchers representing this movement were also active fans and members of various communities. Jenkins was a fan of *Star Trek*, Tulloch, of *Doctor Who*, and Penley loved all kinds of sci-fi productions. Engaged in academic activity as much as their fandoms, these were researchers who were of the opinion that fans should be allowed to speak for themselves. This could be called an internal approach, listening and focusing on fans' own views on themselves and their interests[32]. Jenkins coined the term "aca-fan," an abbreviation of "academic-fan." An aca-fan is someone who writes, both as an academic and as a fan. As a scientist, Jenkins had access to various academic theories on pop culture, literature on the subject, and academic workshops, which allowed him to research fandom in depth. As a fan, he also had access to fan communities and their traditions and knowledge, which also facilitated his research. Jenkins was aware of the disadvantages of being both a fan and an academic, for example, the danger of excessive identification with those being researched. He was of the opinion, however, that any researcher can be influenced by the subject of their study.

Generally speaking, during the resistance wave, fans began to be regarded as more than simply excessive consumers and fanatics. The label "fan" gained a positive connotation; it signified membership of both a group with a goal and a community that interpreted media

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[29] C. Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Woman: television fandom and the creation of popular myth*, Philadelphia 1992.
[30] *Cult Television*, ed. S. Gwenllian-Jones, R.E. Pearson, Minneapolis–London 2004.
[31] C. Penley, *NASA/TREK. Popular Science and Sex in America*, London–New York 1997.
[32] Cf. P. Green, C. Jenkins, H. Jenkins, *Normal Female Interest in Men Bonking: Selection from The Terra Nostra Underground and Strange Bedfellows*, [in:] *Theorizing Fandom…*, p. 9–38.

content differently to the producers' wishes. Therefore, research on fans became more ideological. They were now seen as audiences resisting dominant ideologies. Exasperated with first-wave researcher views and opinions, representatives of the second wave decided to oppose the old perceptions. Frequently, as they were fans themselves, they wished to defend their interests and environment, finding inspiration in theories contrary to those of the first wave, opposing media moguls, and supporting growing fan visibility. They represented the radical approach, contrary to earlier existing views, which considered fans to be "different," manipulated, and infantile individuals. For representatives of the second wave, radicalism seemed to be the best method of contradicting and fighting the common views of the time. Instead of radical manipulation, there was radical resistance. Instead of a polarized division into oppressors (producers) and the oppressed (fans), the victims were now viewed as successful combatants within the system. It can be said that, during this wave, opinions on fans changed fundamentally.

Mainstream wave

The third wave, the mainstream stage, was certainly not as radical as the previous two. It came after the second wave, although it is difficult to state when it began precisely. It can be said that these two waves overlap somewhat, as they use similar sources and are represented by some of the same researchers. The year 2006 can be considered the advent of the third wave, as this was when Jenkins' work, *Convergence Culture*[33]*,* was published.

As mentioned above, the mainstream wave was less radical than the other two. During this wave, researchers attempted to remove the oversimplified division of "evil" producers and "good" fans. Fans were no longer regarded as freedom fighters or rebels in opposition to media moguls. There was no reason to be at war with producers, as they had learned from their mistakes and had decided to change. The producers did not wish to force any action upon fans or exert any pressure on them to accept all that they were offering. Today, producers have learned to listen to audiences. They consider fans as mainstream and regard them as their priority audience. PR specialists consider fans to be prosumers who, as a result of their activities, can support a media product in a way that no advertisement ever can. Today, fans, as loyal and faithful consumers, are valued and regarded as targets for whose attention and favor producers should strive. Fandoms are now praised and almost placed on a pedestal. Jenkins accurately described the above in *Convergence Culture.* It can be said that

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[33] H. Jenkins, *Kultura konwergencji,* Warszawa 2007.

this researcher has considerably softened his approach since the second wave and has smoothly moved into the third wave.

This wave occurred as a result of the evolution of opinions regarding pop culture recipients. Fans continue to be viewed as active rather than passive or manipulated audiences. As a result of the Internet, fans have become even more visible and more active. With the advent of the World Wide Web, they have gained a tool that greatly simplifies their lives[34]. Previously, in order to become a member of a community, one was required to attend a convention or be introduced by an existing member. Now, one is simply required to find the appropriate Internet website, to join a group or a bulletin board, or to begin reading the available fan fiction.

Today, we encounter fan intermingling, which makes these groups more visible. It is currently possible to be a fan of multiple phenomena at the same time. Additionally, this can also be demonstrated through one's creativity or attitude. This mixing is largely a result of the appearance of the Internet, where it is easier for an individual to find fandoms with similar interests and to become a member of new communities. The Internet is very convenient as it allows an individual to join multiple groups and intensify their activity. Therefore, fans are currently more productive than ever before. The Internet has many forms of stories and e-zines, and there is also a multitude of productions such as films, video clips, and music, which are strongly linked to the development of modern digital technology. By using dedicated programs, fans can manipulate photographs and graphics, thereby creating sophisticated visual art compositions. Moreover, fans have acquired the ability to "connect" with the object of their fascination, allowing them to participate with its development. This was unheard of before the appearance of the Internet. In essence, fans have become a key part of the productive Internet community and, therefore, mainstream recipients of pop culture. It can be said that Fiske was correct when, disagreeing with Jenkins, he stated that, in reality, we are all fans representing common strategies of dealing with pop culture content.

Second-wave researchers focused on fans as members of communities and emphasized their resistance to producers. Conventions, collective protest actions, and fan fiction were also researched. Among fans, it is rare for an individual to be fascinated by certain content, to discuss it with others, and not to engage in any other activity. However, third-wave academics state that this kind of activity is also an imperative element of being a fan as not everyone

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[34] Cf. P. Siuda, *Wpływ Internetu na rozwój fandomów, czyli o tym, jak elektroniczna sieć rozwija i popularyzuje społeczności fanów*, [in:] *Media i społeczeństwo. Nowe strategie komunikacyjne*, ed. M. Sokołowski, Toruń 2008, p. 239–256.

must participate in conventions or be an amateur creator. The research performed up to this point had focused only on very narrow groups of fans only, ignoring those who were less involved. In the mainstream wave, the research field was expanded and became more complex and, thus, encompassed broader horizons[35].

The third wave (similar to the first) focuses on fans as individuals and divagates into their motivations and psychology. More on this can be found in Matt Hills' work, *Fan Cultures*[36]. Cornel Sandvoss, on the other hand, in his work, *Fans: The Mirror of Consumption*[37], discusses the issue of fans' specific emotional involvement with the objects of their attention and ponders its influence on the construction of their identities. Sandvoss narrowly defined a fan, considering him/her to be someone who is engaged in emotional consumerism, which then becomes the basis of his/her relationship with particular media content. The individual approach to fans is, once again, connected to the Internet. Through the Internet, one can be a fan on an individual basis. It is sufficient to simply consider oneself a fan of some product. An individual is not required to actively participate, but can simply be a "lurker" (someone who only watches, not disclosing their presence). Moreover, one is not even required to be aware of like-minded fans on the Internet, as it is possible, but not imperative, to be a member of any community. In other words, there is a limitless number of options. The era of Internet individualism has been reflected in fan research.

In conclusion, third-wave achievements mainly concern in-depth analyses of fans as individuals and the influences on their personalities of their attachment to their objects of interest. On a macro level, the latest research does not focus on the issues of class hegemony, manipulation, and the stupefaction of defenseless mass audiences. Today, the imperative role that fans play in the social, cultural, and economic transformation of our times is acknowledged. Research aims have changed completely and fans are no longer the sole subject, as a large number of viewers now consider themselves to be addicted to one or more products. In many ways, fans represent all consumers. Through the scientific discovery of fans, we can identify the laws governing modern pop culture and individuals' daily lives. For these reasons, fans have never before been such attractive subjects of analysis.

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[35] J. Gray, C. Sandvoss, C.L. Harrington, *Why Study Fans?*, [w:] *Fandom. Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, ed. by J. Gray, C. Sandvoss, C.L. Harrington, New York–London 2007, p. 7−10.
[36] M. Hills, *Fan Cultures*, New York 2002.
[37] C. Sandvoss, *Fans: The Mirror of Consumption*, Bodmin 2005.

Conclusion

The first wave, labeled the "deviation" wave, was the longest running, and extended from the first scientific reflection on fans to the early 1990s. This phase was relatively calm; in comparison to later stages there was little interest in fans and there were few publications on the issue. This was also due to low fan visibility. Most importantly however, fans were written of in a negative fashion. Inspired by the Frankfurt School, first-wave researchers presented fans as social misfits or alienated eccentrics manipulated by the omnipresent mass culture industry, which, wishing to make ideal consumers of them, interested them in trivial, banal content.

The second wave, the "resistance" wave described fans in a completely different manner. Its representatives were inspired by different literature than their predecessors. They emphasized the capabilities of individuals and groups to resist, fight, or to negotiate pop culture. These researchers believed that replacing the content offered by the industry with their own interpretations could result in the strengthening of fans' positions, and that it also could be a remedy against the oppression and hegemony of dominant ideologies. This shift had a significant influence on fan studies. Fans were no longer viewed as unusual or considered to be eccentrics with psychological problems. They were now acknowledged and appreciated as recipients who opposed producers in their own ways, for example, by creating their own meanings and even their own culture. Growing fan visibility played a role in the onset of the second wave.

In regard to its intensity, somewhere in the middle, between the first and second waves, is the third, "mainstream" wave. It emphasizes the great diversification and development of fandom. It places fans in the mainstream of popular culture and focuses on their importance as barometers that indicate general viewer attitudes. This emphasizes their immense importance to industry producers, mainly from a marketing point of view. Fans have become acknowledged as a key audience. Additionally, third wave researchers indicate that, in the future, fans' importance will further increase and it will become more difficult to distinguish them from average recipients. Therefore, in a sense, we will all become fans.

The mainstream wave, although it is the most recent, is considered to be superior to the previous stages. It is also the most difficult to characterize and assess. The first and second waves are sufficiently dated that it is much easier to analyze their assumptions and to identify their representatives and chronological frames. A certain amount of time must pass before we can gain a similar perspective on the third wave, which will allow us to adequately describe it. We can probably safely predict that it will not last indefinitely. As can be seen in this article,

there have been dynamically changing and quite contrasting attitudes and approaches to research on fans. If there were to be a new wave (which would probably not occur for some time, however, as the third wave is relatively new), it would most likely be the result of an, as yet, unheard of transformation. It would then be easier to gain a perspective of the current mainstream wave and assess it accordingly.

The fan history described above is strictly connected to the increasing visibility of fans, mainly as a result of technological development, i.e., the Internet. It should be noted that this history has been discussed predominantly from the American and British perspectives. The processes described above and the changes that occurred reflect what is, and has been, occurring in other countries. In particular, modern history, which is connected with the onset of the Internet, accurately reflects the nature of the changes that fans have been experiencing worldwide. In Poland, fans have existed since communist times, but they have become more visible since the transformation into the digital era. Similar to their Western counterparts, they have been predominantly active through the Internet. In regard to academic research, it is scarce and mainly related to the second wave. It can be said that, during communist times, practically any form of academic reflection on the subject was non-existent. Even today, there are still very few researchers of fan studies.

Internationally, there are various popular notions concerning fans. Often they are imprecise, vague, or indistinct. Academic research on fans is also impeded, because it offers various interpretations and methods of considering this specific audience group. This does not simplify the issue, as some waves are currently more popular while others are considered to be passé. It can be said that, on some level, all of these waves somehow coexist, interpenetrate each other, or overlap. The third wave is currently the most dominant, but this does not mean that there are no influences from older theories. It should be noted that researchers ought to avoid single-mindedness, which would cause them to base their research solely on one wave. We must be aware of the fact that fans can be analyzed from various, multiple perspectives, through all three waves.