



UNIVERSIDADE  
CATÓLICA  
PORTUGUESA

**UNDERSTANDING FAN CULTURE: CHARACTERISTICS,  
TERMINOLOGY AND LIMITS**

Dissertation submitted to Universidade Católica  
Portuguesa to obtain a Master's Degree in Culture Studies  
– Management of the Arts and Culture

By

Alexandra Tavares Agostinho

Faculty of Human Sciences

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## **Abstract**

Fan Culture has largely been discussed when linked with Media Studies – be it regarding the effects of television and/or the Internet, or its historical evolution. This study proposes to investigate Fan Culture by exploring how it works and which are its defining characteristics, terminology and limits.

Inevitably intertwined with Popular Culture, this dissertation will try to identify multiple fandoms and distinguish what unites them – as well as what separates them. Exploring topics like fan identification, as well as gender and violence (among others), will allow for a greater clarity on the impact of the phenomenon in both social and cultural life.

Fan Culture can be thought of as a wide spectrum. This investigation wishes to better define and analyze the phenomenon and its dynamics. Understanding fans as both cultural objects and active agents in the production of culture, this dissertation will make use of a qualitative analysis of fundamental texts, as well as a secondary data analysis of three quantitative studies to further define the culture produced for and by the fans.

*Key Words: Fan Culture, Popular Culture, Fan Identification*

## **Resumo**

A Cultura dos Fãs tem sido estudada sobretudo em associação aos Estudos dos Media - quer seja em relação aos efeitos da televisão e/ou da Internet, quer seja em relação à sua evolução histórica. Este trabalho propõe investigar a Cultura dos Fãs, explorando como funciona e quais são as suas características principais, respectiva terminologia e limites.

Inevitavelmente entrelaçada com a Cultura Popular, esta dissertação procurará identificar múltiplos grupos de fãs e distinguir o que os une - assim como o que os separa. O estudo de temas como a identificação dos fãs, o género e a violência (entre outros) permitirá clarificar o impacto do fenómeno tanto na vida social como cultural.

A Cultura dos Fãs pode ser pensada como um espectro amplo. Esta investigação visa definir e analisar mais a fundo o fenómeno e as suas dinâmicas. Fazendo uso dos fãs como objetos culturais e agentes ativos na produção da cultura, esta dissertação desenvolve uma análise qualitativa de textos fundamentais, bem como uma análise de dados secundários de três estudos quantitativos para definir melhor a cultura produzida para e pelos fãs.

*Palavras-chave: Cultura de Fãs, Cultura Popular, Identificação dos Fãs*

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A particular thank you to Prof. Diana Gonçalves for her restless help and knowledge. I would like to express my sincere gratitude for your patience and assistance during this entire process. Very early in my first semester I read your article *Popping (it) Up: an exploration on popular culture and TV series Supernatural* and decided that there was, in fact, a space in the academic world for fangirls.

A simple thank you could not be enough to all my friends – Sofia, Maria Gabriela, Gloria, Carolina, Mariana, Valentine, Myriam, Eva, Leonor, and Diana – near or far, your positive energy reached me and made me believe that this path was right.

An extra one goes out to my strongest supporter, my best friend, Catarina. Your trust made me forget my own self-doubt.

I could not write an entire dissertation on Fan Culture without mentioning the admiration, the love, the regard, and the esteem I have for Florence Welch. I have been a fan of Florence + The Machine for over a decade now. The songs she wrote have accompanied me throughout not only for a big part of my life, but also for the entire writing of this dissertation. Thanks to this admiration, I have bonded with so many other fans and created a wonderful community of friends in the fandom. From the ones I met standing alone in line for concerts in countries that were not my own, to the ones who I have regularly exchanged with online for the last ten years, this dissertation goes out to all of you. Simply, to all the fangirls out there, this dissertation is about us.

All my love goes out to my parents and my brother who, in their own ways, supported me from back home in Switzerland. All the good things that have ever happened to me were because of you. All the steps I take were made with you all in mind.

Lastly, I simply could not have made this without the unconditional support and love from my partner, Marta, and our cat, Mia. You provided me with a safe environment to not only write, but to learn and to grow.

## Dedication

For Her, with all my love.

For *never letting me go*.

*“In the arms of the ocean, so sweet and so cold  
And all this devotion, well, I never knew at all  
And the crashes are heaven for a sinner released  
In the arms of the ocean deliver me”*

Florence + The Machine – Never Let Me Go

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## Introduction

I am a fan. I have been a fan for as long as my memory serves me. I was a fan before I could put into sentences what this 3-letter-word meant. Around me, most people have an answer to the question “*what are you a fan of?*”. It is almost as if it is interlinked with one’s identity. The perception of oneself is defined, too, by our likings and tastes. “Everyone is a Fan”, says Booth (2010, 20), and “whatever we are fans of, we base part of our identity on our appreciation of that fandom” (20).

Quite quickly, I started to play around with this quote in my mind: “*Everyone is a Fan*”. The idea that such a simple word was used to easily describe so many people, coming from different backgrounds, in different parts of the world, of different ages, races and genders, and mostly, that all of them could be fans of something different, was intriguing. And yet, they are all fans. Avid football supporters are fans, the same way that pop music aficionados are fans, or that French cinema connoisseurs are fans, and the list goes on. This simple word is such a commonly used term in our day-to-day vocabulary. This is the exact aspect that sparked my interest.

Originally, the word fan is an abbreviation from “fanatic”. From its Latin origin *fanaticus*, it translates to “of or belonging to the temple, a temple servant, a devotee” (Jenkins 1992, 12). Quite instantly, it brings up negative implications, in relation to “obsession” and “delirium”. Yet, the term later grew to encompass a much wider group of people under its umbrella. Not only the “obsessive” and “delirious”, but anyone who has an interest, big or small, can be a fan. Thus, Fan Studies emerged – to study and understand the fans and their dynamics.

Fan Culture Studies (or Fan Studies) is a fairly recent academic niche. The scope of the field focuses on fans, fandoms, fan cultures, fan productions and activities. However, as we will further discover as we go along this dissertation, the plurality of definitions lies in the interdisciplinary junction of fields. The theoretical framework heavily relies on Media Studies and Cultural Studies, as well as Social Sciences, Literature and Communications Studies, but fields of the Humanities like Psychology, Anthropology and Ethnography and broader Media Studies field like Queer Theory, Television and Internet Studies can all be mentioned when talking about Fan Studies.

In academia, theories and discourses on *fan culture* have mostly gravitated towards the theme of fan fiction almost exclusively. In fact, and while this activity is heavily relevant to explore, it has possibly been over-defined in academic research. To explain this surge, Cristofari and Guitton (2017) theorize that most of the scholars in Fan Culture Studies originally come from Literature or Media Studies. In addition to that, fan culture has largely been discussed when regarding the effects of television and/or the Internet, as well as its historical evolution. While both aspects are vital to contextualize the state of the art and understand the issue investigated in this research, this dissertation proposes to bring an additional point of view to the investigation of fan culture by exploring how it works and what its defining characteristics are.

Fan Studies can be perceived as a marginal focus of interest. However, it should be understood that the value and importance that it holds is due to the way that fan culture has seemingly fully immersed itself in the day-to-day life of most individuals. A group of people that we used to “simply” consider and understand as an audience has recently gained an entire new set of definitions, hierarchies, rules and powers. It has evolved with time, by interacting on cultural debates and highlighting social problems. It is a direct representation of the society it engages with.

While everybody knows what a fan is, trying to land on a simple singular apply-to-all definition of fans is a difficult task. Fans have most commonly been studied as consumers, rather than having been conceptualized. Each group of fans has its own vocabulary and audience, creating a plurality of realities and classifications. However, some core common characteristics can be identified. A fan is an individual who has a passionate, nearly obsessive (Hills 2002, xi), connection with a popular media (Jenkins 1992, 12). More common characteristics are the production (Hills 2002, xi), participation and mastery (Jenkins 1992, 12) of the content around the shared liked topic.

While these aspects seem to give a premise of a definition for a fan, it remains that the term still englobes many other meanings under its umbrella. In other words, enthusiasts, followers, supporters, admirers and even believers could fit under that definition of fan. It is hence extremely important to define a spectrum of identities, to then be able to identify which would remain under the definition of the “fan”.

As a matter of fact, fans are not “bounded” entities. Defining fans in fixed terms is not only complicated to do because of the fluidity of the term, but also because of the performativity of it. Hills argues that “it is an identity which is (dis)-claimed, and which performs cultural work” (2002, xi). That is, depending on the cultural space and context, one can either claim (or not) the “definition” of fan. Hills further explains that being a fan is “never a neutral ‘expression’ or a singular ‘referent’; its status and its performance shift across cultural sites” (x).

It is important to mention that fans are part of a larger community. While individual fans and their behaviors are relevant, the interaction with others is an important core characteristic. Larger groups of fans then become what is commonly called “a fandom”, or a fan community. Fandoms are often depicted and thought of as homogenous groups. What this means is that these groups are seen as having a common characteristic that will define the individuals that partake in it. However, as this dissertation will show, fandoms do have common characteristics that will define them, but these do not always apply at the same level or with the same intensity to all the individuals that compose it.

Still regarding group dynamics, fan communities are traditionally assumed to be democratic and without ranks. In her fundamental 1992 book *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth Series in Contemporary Ethnography* on female-created fiction by a community of *Star Trek* fans, Bacon-Smith states that “the media fan community has no established hierarchy or profitmaking economy” (1992, 41). However, this theory seems to now be outdated as fan communities have their own levels of hierarchies. Based on longevity, reputation, and/or contributions, some fans gain a certain level of power that then goes on to create social and cultural norms within the fandom (Chin 2010, 1).

While defining fans remains something that is constantly reworked and in progress, Jenkins provides an interesting and quite simple way to understand fandoms. He states that the process of creating new shared meanings is the central characteristic of fan identity (Jenkins 1992, 23). In addition to that, and quoting foundational works by Amesley (1989) and Fiske (1992), he highlights the interpretative quality of fandoms (Jenkins 1992, 123). It is from the studies of fans that the broader concept of participatory culture has emerged.

The concept of participatory culture, which will be explored further in this dissertation, derives from the new characteristics of how mass media interacts with the viewers, and vice-

versa. In fact, the illusion of “face-to-face” relationships between the viewers and the performers is so striking that interaction is cued. That is, a response is expected and anticipated. In a fundamental text from 1956, Horton and Wohl illustrate this situation by explaining that:

[the] most remote and illustrious men are met *as if* they were in the circle of one’s peers; the same is true of a character in a story who comes to life in these media in an especially vivid and arresting way. [...] The more the performer seems to adjust his performance to the supposed response of the audience, the more the audience tends to make the response anticipated. This simulacrum of conversational give and take may be called *para-social interaction*. (1956, 215)

However, the break comes from the absence of viable reciprocity. That is, the viewer is not obliged to answer. The viewer is allowed to leave the interaction without warning. While this seems like it gives the audience power, the fact is that Horton and Wohl explain that “the audience is free to choose among the relationships offered, but it cannot create new ones” (1956, 215). Hence, the power disparity and the relationship imbalance is clear. Horton and Wohl’s theory is important in Fan Studies because it explains the basis of audience psychology. The way people see their relationship and position of power towards their subject of liking is the foundation of fan studies. Their research, however, stops whenever the audience tries to “make their feelings known to the performers and the technicians who design the programmes” (215). According to them, these interactions lie outside of the parasocial interaction paradigm.

The boundaries between the viewers and the producers are unclear, to say the least. Larsen and Zubernis (2012) push this theory even further by stating that, in fan studies, the boundaries between theory and practice are even more blurred. To define Fan Studies correctly and clearly without having a certain definition of the word “fan” to begin with seems like a complicated endeavor. However, as Jenkins explains, “fan cultures are the social and cultural infrastructures that support fan activities and interests” (2012, 1).

Fan studies often lack fan voices. The theory and research have been mostly focused on the aforementioned relationship between fans and producers, without much power given to the fans – as previously mentioned, this lies within Horton and Wohl’s parasocial interaction. However, this is changing. Fans are not only interacting with producers, but they are influencing the practices and evolving their collaboration (Larsen and Zubernis 2012, 2). This means that the way we look at fan studies is also changing.

Academics and scholars whose field of study is fan studies find themselves in a position that is worth not only mentioning but questioning. Aca-fans, or academics who identify as fans, is a term popularized by Matt Hills in his 2002 book *Fan Cultures*. Since then, it has become an extremely popular and commonly used term among fan studies scholars. The implications of that position come with the assimilations of critical distance usually demanded from academics. On the opposite side, fans are usually associated with proximity rather than distance (Cristofari and Guitton 2017, 725). This is not the only characteristic that distances fans and academics. Disparities and differences in language, knowledge, emotional and personal commitment are all attributes that seem to be on opposite ends when one thinks of the characteristics of fans versus academics. However, aca-fans make for the principal source of academic research in the field of fan studies (715). This can easily be understood due to the participatory aspect of fan studies. The object and the subject must be critically researched, and in this case, it is one and the same: the self, the aca-fan (Larsen and Zubernis 2012, 3). This junction is present in this dissertation too and, hence, it becomes a personal endeavor as much as an academic one.

Some objects of research entail specialists to have a specific level of proximity to become sufficiently reliable. It could be argued that this is true for fan studies. One must be a fan, in order to fully understand, research, and interact with fan communities. This now poses an ethical concern. In fact, a scholar, or an aca-fan, has a different position in fan hierarchies. Larsen and Zubernis (2012) question the ethics of fan studies by aca-fans not only due to the concerns of proper critical distance, but also due to the position of power. A scholar's work is seen as of value, and able to influence opinions (Larsen and Zubernis 2012, 4). On the other hand, a fan's opinion is quickly devalued and judged (Chin 2010, 116), usually pushed to the side on the ground of being too emotional or not rational enough. Both of these apply even when the audience (in this case, whoever is interacting with either the scholar or the fan) is or not a member of the fan community. In addition, the attention and validation of a work from a scholar is incomparable because it evolves in the public sphere (despite it being secluded to a niche field) of published work, when a fan's production might be contained to more anonymous spheres. The knowledge of the fans is not usually meant to leave the community (Cristofari and Guitton 2017, 717).

Knowledge could then be the factor that mostly differentiates academics from fans. Even more precisely, the structure of their knowledge. Academics rely on theoretical frameworks

and concepts. Despite their privileged position, Cristofari and Guitton argue that this does not make aca-fans to be the ones with the most knowledge:

[within] the fan community itself, knowledge is usually unevenly distributed: there is, indeed, a hierarchy where knowledge (of trivia concerning the object of the fandom, of the community members, etc.) often is a discriminating element (Fiske, 1992; McCudden, 2011; Williams, 2004). Hierarchies can be fluctuating, but knowledge is, as a rule, a valued currency in fandom. Fans particularly knowledgeable about the community itself or the object of fandom (which we will refer to from now on as fan-experts) can be important allies for aca-fans, as they can supply relevant background information. They often are highly involved but rarely structure their discourses according to academic norms. (2017, 717)

This research aims at offering a greater understanding of fans. Hence, it seeks to question how fan culture works and which characteristics can be perceived as fundamental to enact the role of fan. Departing from these two research questions, the research process itself led to two research propositions: Research proposition 1 (RP #1): Self-identification is an essential part of fan culture; Research proposition 2 (RP #2): Fan participation is an essential part of fan culture.

This dissertation will heavily rely on current literature and research. This topic is a contemporary one, and there are multiple sources. However, few scholars have made this topic their niche. When it comes to contemporary names, Henry Jenkins and Matt Hills are two who will often be referenced. When it comes to Fan Studies, their expertise in this field of research is undeniable.

The literature review will function as the starting point of this dissertation. Before further exploring each subject, I will try to clearly define themes, key ideas, names, words of common usage, platforms, etc. that are linked to fan culture. It should nevertheless be kept in mind that fan studies are ever-evolving, and hence these definitions are by default not locked in place. Similarly, and albeit seemingly obvious, it is important to restate that no single individual fan or fan community will identify with all the definitions offered here or perform them at a similar level.

When it comes to a lot of the data used in this dissertation, it seeks to explore the different characteristics and powers at play in relation to fans and fandoms, rather than confirming any existing theory. This dissertation will examine fan studies under different perspectives. First and foremost, by looking at the core existing definitions and understanding the current state of the art, I will propose to define the fans through their historical and cultural

representations. By referring to foundational work, I will pinpoint common practices and terminology. Then, I will elaborate on the current discourse regarding fans, exploring the correlation between fan communities and the mainstream cultural value system, discussing aspects such as consumption, productivity (or production) and identity building. Lastly, I will combine these data with the conclusions of studies that used quantitative sets.

The first study was led by scholars Mina Tsay-Vogel and Meghan S. Sanders and resulted in an article published in 2017 called *Fandom and the Search for Meaning: Examining Communal Involvement with Popular Media Beyond Pleasure*. From that study, the Fandom and Meaning Scale was made.

The second study was led by scholars Cynthia Vinney, Karen E. Dill-Shackleford, Courtney N. Plante and Anne Bartsch and resulted in an article published in 2019 called *Development and Validation of a Measure of Popular Media Fan Identity and its Relationship to Well-being*. From that study, the Fan Identity Scale was made.

The third and final study was led by scholars Javier Lozano Delmar, Juan F. Plaza and Milagrosa Sánchez Martín and resulted in an article published in 2020 called *An Approach to Defining the Identity of a Media Fan*. From that study, the Fan Identity Questionnaire was made.

Before going into details about the methodology chosen for this dissertation, I wanted to bring to the forefront the topic of a *lack* of methodologies within fan studies. Scholars Adrienne Evans and Mafalda Stasi even go to the point of writing an entire publication on this: *Desperately Seeking Methodology: New Directions in Fan Studies Research* (2014). In that book, Evans and Stasi claim that “explicit reference to methodology or research methods [is] often missing [from published research in the area of fan studies]” (2014, 5). A reason for this is that Fan Studies, as an academic field, places itself within a much wider interdisciplinary space. Connecting ideas from different fields also means that the methodological perspectives from those fields are the most commonly chosen by Fan Studies scholars. However, this junction sometimes creates gaps (17), as well as a lack of precise methodology that is clearly defined within the scope of Fan Studies.

I elaborated Figure 1 below based on the Evans and Stasi’s extensive publication. Figure 1 demonstrates the current state of fan methodology (or lack thereof), describing the method

typically used and the resulting outcomes. Overall, Figure 1 permits to understand the limits of fan methodology and the lack of current discussions within academia to develop precise ways to research Fan Studies.

<b>Type of fan methodology</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Recurring outcomes</b>
<b>Ethnography</b>	Analysis of the lived experience	Presupposed unethical relationship between the researcher and the researched
<b>Literary criticism/ Textual analysis</b>	Analysis of the texts produced by fans	Risks of over-valuing the text, and de-valuing the fan/author
<b>Psychoanalysis</b>	Analysis of the audience from a structuralist approach	Overall successful but maintains the fan as a spectator and/or “Other”

*Figure 1 - Major fan methodological approaches (Own elaboration, adapted from Evans and Stasi 2014)*

Evans and Stasi explain methodology as “[an information regarding] the way research is practiced, and which in turn come[s] to influence the kinds of knowledge that is produced” (2014, 5). Furthermore, they do note that they “recognize methodology as distinct from ‘methods’, or the practice of using different tools, e.g. interviews, focus groups, and techniques of interpretation” (5).

Fan methodology places itself in the realm of qualitative research methodologies (Evans and Stasi 2014, 6). In the case of this dissertation, I decided to use a qualitative methodology approach as my primary and main methodology, combined with a secondary data analysis using quantitative approaches creating mixed methods research. Qualitative methodology is chosen as a methodology when the goal of the dissertation is not necessarily to confirm a hypothesis, but rather simply to “explore” it. In that sense, and according to Mack et al. (2005, 3), a qualitative research approach focuses mainly on describing variations, relationships, group norms and so on. Creswell (2002, 188) explains that mixing both a

qualitative and quantitative methodology brings an increased level of legitimacy to a particular research.

In this dissertation, the qualitative method will be understood as the exploration of fan culture through the different existing approaches and existing literature (referred to as “document data” in Figure 2 below) and later, making my own interpretation of that said data. The quantitative method will be understood as the secondary data analysis of three different studies on fan culture made between 2017 and 2020. The three studies mentioned all used numeric data and statistical procedures to test and support their predetermined hypothesis.

Quantitative Methods	→ Mixed Methods ←	Qualitative Methods
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre-determined</li> <li>• Instrument based questions</li> <li>• Performance data, attitude data, observational data, and census data</li> <li>• Statistical analysis</li> <li>• Statistical interpretation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Both pre-determined and emerging methods</li> <li>• Both open- and closed-ended questions</li> <li>• Multiple forms of data drawing on all possibilities</li> <li>• Statistical and text analysis</li> <li>• Across databases interpretation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emerging methods</li> <li>• Open-ended questions</li> <li>• Interview data, observation data, document data, and audio-visual data</li> <li>• Text and image analysis</li> <li>• Themes, patterns interpretation</li> </ul>

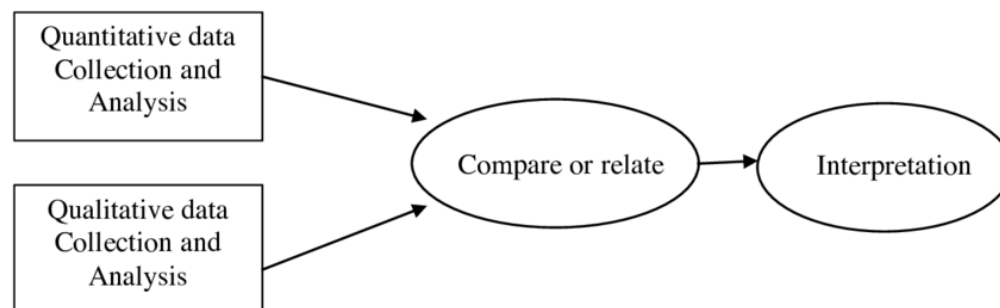
Figure 2 - *Quantitative, Mixed and Qualitative Methods (Creswell 2002, 32)*

To a less extent, this dissertation also uses an ethnographic approach, mostly digital self-ethnography, as methodology too. Digital ethnography is an extremely contemporary approach but has led to results of high interest. It permits a “deep immersion in a culture or community” (Evans and Stasi 2014, 15). In fact, I place myself as a participant-observant member, both as a fan and a researcher. Placing myself in that position in a (mostly) online environment, I explored both online fan activities and behaviors and offline fan activities and behaviors, all somehow shaped by digitalization and not bounded by geographical delimitations.

Secondary data analysis was chosen as a method for this dissertation as well. It is the “analysis of data that was collected by someone else for another primary purpose” (Johnston

2014, 619). The prime reason for the choice of this method is not only the lack of time or resources (albeit it still being relevant), but rather that it provides for a way to access “high quality larger datasets” (624). As a junior, unfunded researcher, this enables me to conduct a research with a larger sample, that will be more representative of the participants and reflect more valid findings in regards to the overall field (624).

As Figure 3 below shows, both the quantitative and qualitative data will be compared and then interpreted. Creswell defines this as “combining quantitative and qualitative data to best understand and explain a research problem” (2002, 20). This choice was made to incorporate a quantitative component to what is otherwise a primarily qualitative research. This does not, however, mean that the quantitative results are of less importance than the qualitative data. Rather, as Creswell explains, they are of equal priority. Simply, the qualitative data is more extensive in this case. The two data sets are combined to give a common overall conclusion (or interpretation, like stated in Figure 3).



*Figure 3 - Convergent Parallel Design (Creswell 2002, 541)*

Creswell explains that there are many ways to do the comparison of the data between the qualitative and quantitative sets of data. One of them, he explains as “[transforming] one of the datasets so that they can be directly compared with the other dataset. For instance, qualitative themes [...] are “quantified” and given a score as to their frequency” (Creswell 2002, 542).

Lastly, this research follows an interpretivism paradigm. Rogers (2020) explains interpretivism as a perspective that “holds that reality is subjective, socially constructed, and a composite of multiple perspectives. Through this lens, research is inherently shaped by the

researcher, who brings their own subjective view of observed phenomena based on their personal experience”. Interpretivism paradigms give space to the social context of the researcher and the participants and hence interpretivist researchers acknowledge how those might impact the results. In addition to that, it understands “results” as a plurality of truths, opposed to a single definite one.

In addition, I position myself as a feminist researcher and applied a feminist paradigm throughout the time that I was both researching and writing this dissertation. With this process, I decide to understand my research as to be directly impacted by social norms and situated in a context that includes concerns regarding gender, power, ethics (amongst others) and to seek to question those specific concerns. Hannell explored and exposed specifically the use of feminist methodology in the field of Fan Studies and how there is a need to recognize the importance of its use in the research:

Feminist methodology calls attention to the partiality, fluidity, and situatedness of knowledge and seeks new ways to approach the process of producing and interpreting knowledge. Feminist methodologies recognize that the researcher is engaged in a process of interpretation and representation which is intimately bound up in power relations and imbalances, and feminist knowledge production therefore seeks to address and interrogate these power imbalances (Collins 2009; Cook and Fonow 1986; Maynard 1994; Naples and Gurr 2014; Stanley and Wise 1990, 1993). [...] In an effort to recognize the political and social dimensions of the production of knowledge, feminist scholarship has long attempted to challenge masculine conventions of academic practice. (2020, 5)

In order to reach the goals of this investigation, the structure of this dissertation will go as follows: Chapter 1 will map the field, by laying down its foundations. First, in sub-chapter 1.1. by discussing parallels between Popular Culture and Fan Studies, and questions the legitimacy of such discourses. Then, in 1.2., by exposing Fan Studies thus far, to understand the current state of the art.

Chapter 2 will propose a first approach to what is a fan. In 2.1., definitions for commonly used jargon amongst fans will be presented. As it will be shown, language has a strong influence in identity building and the importance of fan terminology will be discussed. Then, 2.2. will go over six fundamental characteristics of fans. First, based on concepts such as the Social Identity Theory and the Parasocial Interaction, we will discuss fan identification and identity construction. Second, participation and repetition. Third, we will discuss the theory of affect. Fourth, possession and consumption will be developed. Fifth, we will expose fans

habits of productivity and production. Last and sixth, we will go over how entertainment and pleasure are a motivation for fans.

Chapter 3 will tackle the dark side of fandom. Questioning discriminatory characteristics, 3.1. will discuss who is *not* a fan. Focusing on the roles of sexism in 3.2. and violence in 3.3., all within fan communities, the limits of fan culture will be examined.

Chapter 4 uses three studies and their conclusions that resulted in characteristics backed with quantitative data. This chapter analyzes their findings and establishes a bridge with the theoretical framework discussed in previous chapters.

Finally, chapter 5 will expose the findings from the cross-analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data, which resulted in my own elaboration of the Fan Identity Cartesian Plan and the Fan Identification Matrix. Lastly, the dissertation will be concluded with the limitations of this research and which opportunities are still to be developed within the field of Fan Studies.

Fan culture, as we will begin to discover the deeper we get into the subject, is an ever-changing culture that, while taking part in and evolving by the rules of the global mainstream culture, also creates and defines its own. By defining the limits, themes, jargons, and habits of individuals that identify themselves as fans, this dissertation aims at testing if fandoms can even be defined. As already mentioned, this dissertation will find a solid base in both a qualitative approach from the literature review, combined with a secondary data analysis from three studies that used a quantitative approach. This will help answer our research questions and define key characteristics that are fundamental to the experience of being a fan. This research wants to propose definitions for ways in which individual fans interact with one another, for creating fandoms and for understanding how these interact with one another too. In short, this research proposes to further define what makes a fan *a fan*.

## 1. Mapping the Field

Fiske opens his essay “The Cultural Economy of Fandom” stating the simple, pragmatic, and direct relation that fandom has with popular culture: “Fandom is a common feature of popular culture in industrial societies” (1992, 30). At first glance, it seems like a much more elaborated version of Booth’s “Everyone is a Fan” (2010, 20) that was used to open this exact dissertation. However, Fiske then proceeds to explain how that “feature” came to be and what exactly it means:

[fandom] is typically associated with cultural forms that the dominant value system denigrates – pop music, romance novels, comics, Hollywood mass-appeal stars (sport, probably because of its appeal to masculinity, is an exception). It is thus associated with the cultural tastes of subordinated formations of the people, particularly with those disempowered by any combination of gender, age, class and race. (1992, 30)

It is easy to start with a widespread statement like “everybody’s a fan”, but it is a much harder task to funnel it or to narrow it down to a specific situation and system, and actually understand the process in-between. Fiske, basing his statements on Bourdieu’s theories, simplifies this by explaining that “[the] cultural system works like the economic system to distribute its resources unequally and thus to distinguish between the privileged and the deprived” (1992, 31). This idea and the relationship that exists between fandoms and popular culture will be our starting point too and is vital to the understanding of fan culture as it currently is lived, studied, and globally perceived.

### 1.1. Popular Culture, an Illegitimate Culture?

To further understand the relationship between fandom and popular culture, one needs to first define popular culture. Storey researches the topic extensively in his book *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture* and explains that popular culture is a “residual” term that always finds itself in opposition to something else, that there is a subjacent “otherness” that is implicit (2012, 15-20). In this case, popular culture finds itself opposite to a so-called legitimate culture. Bourdieu explains that what makes legitimate culture *legitimate* is the social conditions of the consumers of that culture. Taste (for legitimate culture) is the marker of the (high, or legitimate) class (1984, 1).

On the other hand, popular culture, in the most general and broader sense means “that is widely favoured or well liked by many people” (Storey 2012, 20). Popular culture refers to

“everyday culture (Fedorak, 2009) intended for mass consumption (Storey, 2009) that helps understand how cultures and societies work and individuals interact (Hoppenstand, 2003)” (Gonçalves 2015, 9). This is the explanation for popular culture that I will depart from and use throughout the rest of this dissertation.<sup>1</sup>

Some might use the terms “lowbrow” and “highbrow” to differentiate the popular culture from legitimate, high culture. These are quite common terms in academia. However, and due to their origin and explanations being simply and only rooted in racist “scientific” beliefs,<sup>2</sup> I will refrain from making use of them. In fact, the only mention I shall have of them is to use them as a further argument to expose the illogical (I would argue, absurd) intellectual reservations that can be held for products of popular culture. This distinction that is made is not of production, but rather of *perception* (Frith 1996, 114). What this means is that this duality in merit between popular culture and legitimate culture finds its base in the group that receives (or perceives) the object, rather than the object itself.

Fiske, in his essay, uses the term “official culture” to talk about legitimate culture:

Official culture likes to see its texts (or commodities) as the creations of special individuals or artists: such a reverence for the artist and, therefore, the text necessarily places its readers in a subordinate relationship to them. Popular culture, however, is well aware that its commodities are industrially produced and thus do not have the status of a uniquely crafted art-object. They are thus open to the productive reworking, rewriting, completing and to participation in the way that a completed art-object is not. (1992, 47)

Referring to Bourdieu’s social map, Fiske explains how class and economics are the only discriminatory aspects. However, it is obviously lacking many other factors. Amongst some, also quoted by Fiske, we could name race, age and gender. Not only that but, by only regarding class, Fiske argues that Bourdieu has completely disregarded the cultural impact of proletarian culture (1992, 32). He reaches this conclusion by explaining how Bourdieu’s only regard is towards dominant culture and that it is the only one deserving of being categorized. Popular culture is left as an entity that has no role and/or impact towards the greater cultural capital.

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<sup>1</sup> For more specific ways in which popular culture is explained and explored, please see the rest of *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture* (2012).

<sup>2</sup> “Derived from the late nineteenth century fascination with phrenology, which regarded cranial volume and facial characteristics as ‘scientific’ indicators for the intellectual capacities of a ‘race’, the term ‘highbrow’ emerged first in the 1880s as a signifier for intellectual superiority. Shortly after 1900 ‘lowbrow’ came into use as its opposite, as someone or something lacking intellectual or aesthetic sophistication.” (Kaiser 2020, 4)

Following that rhetoric, Fiske makes a distinction between “acquired cultural capital” and “inherited cultural capital” (31-32). These are both mostly referring to legitimate culture. They are different ways of how one acquires that said legitimate culture:

Acquired cultural capital is that produced by the educational system and consists of the knowledge and critical appreciation of a particular set of texts, ‘the canon,’ in literature, art, music and now, increasingly, film. Inherited cultural capital is manifest in lifestyle rather than in textual preference – in fashion, furnishings, manners, in choice of restaurant or club, in sport or vacation preferences. (32)

The latter notion of inherited cultural capital leads to a notion of choice, as Fiske mentions. Choice implies the existence of options. Pushing this further, we now land on the notion of taste. “Good taste” and “bad taste” do not only lie within factual realms. In fact, they are too linked with these notions of legitimacy. “But all life is a dispute over taste and tasting” did Nietzsche once say (1917, 127). Criticism of popular culture hides itself behind the excuses of “it simply is not quite good” or “it is not of my taste”. Quality or taste is not what is questioned in this section of the dissertation. However, what we are in fact trying to explain is that not all taste is individually created. Some of it is inherited, it is shaped by our circumstances, race, class, and gender. It depends on access, language, and education. Hence, again, the disparate that is created between popular culture and legitimate culture.

Affirming that there is a higher value in a certain type of culture is wrong. This idea is constructed from social norms that maintain an already existing hierarchy that only praises a specific hegemonic culture. On the other hand of that, “[fan] culture is a form of popular culture that echoes many of the institutions of official culture, although in popular form and under popular control” (Fiske 1992, 33). The disconnection between the dominant and its “penchant” for legitimate culture lacks a certain understanding of popular culture.

Production that is born from popular culture is often provocative, communal, and sometimes unfinished. It is not always made to last and/or keep its shape forever. It is ever-changing, just like the community it emerged from. As Frith puts it, something should not be deserving of praise solely because it is “serious” or “functional” (1996, 119), and fans have not only understood that, they embody it.

By demystifying the norms that kept it from the space that was formerly only given to legitimate culture, popular culture has immersed itself everywhere. With its core fundamental characteristics of mass-production and mass following, popular culture can be

considered as the representation of the people and the society it finds itself in. Creations from popular culture are sometimes belittled by their initial popularity but, with time, it has risen in (academic, critical, literary, and more) value. Value, here, does not have to be quantitatively measured. There is no scale. However, it is the perpetuity and continuous existence of popular creations that give them their value. Smith says that “enduring stories share important messages about the people who perpetuate them, and these messages give [popular] culture value. Analyzing current [popular] culture can teach us valuable lessons about ourselves” (Smith 2022).

Fan culture is not only rooted in popular culture, it has redefined it as more diverse and multifaceted (Smutradontri and Gadavani 2020, 2). Fan culture emerged from within popular culture and, therefore, it is, too, a reflection of the people and the society it evolves with. As stated before, popular culture has seen a growing interest and legitimacy within academia since the late 1980s (Schudson 1987, 1), and more recently, so has fan culture.

## **1.2. Fan Studies Thus Far**

The first issue of the *Journal of Fandom Studies* and the first Fan Studies Network conference both only happened in 2013. While it could be argued that fans have existed since before research started characterizing and analyzing their behaviors and dynamics, contemporary fan studies have only been a topic since the early 1990s. In other words, and in terms of academic timeframes, it is a *very* recent field of research.

Prior to the early 1990s, research merely displayed quantitative results, mostly related to Sociology or Psychology, that would measure results rather than explore fan studies as its own field of research (Lamerichs 2018, 15). However, earlier accounts of research on audience reception and reaction date back to 1956, with *Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction* by Horton and Wohl investigating the relationship between audiences and mass communication. The influences of television, the radio and the Internet (i.e., mass communication) motivated the earlier research on fan behavior and fan studies. Historically, it is interesting to pinpoint the beginning of fan studies to the growing popularity of the mass communication devices. As the first televisions and radios made their way into the common

households, the entertainment these displayed on them also grew popular (Booth 2010). From then on, these audiences that shared a common interest were thought of as fans.

Works from the early 1990s such as Henry Jenkins's (1992) *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture*, John Fiske's (1992) *The Cultural Economy of Fandom* and Bacon-Smith's (1992) *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth Series in Contemporary Ethnography* largely laid the foundation for the current state of research on the topics of audience and fan studies, and fostered more qualitative methods of study. These texts opened the doors to current research and continue to be references today, including for this dissertation. These stand as the starting point of our investigation. It is, however, important to note and highlight how these do not mean to be the beginning of the existence of fans or of fandoms. In fact, something does not need to be thoroughly researched and understood to just *be*. Still, focusing on research does bring recognition and legitimacy to the topic, something fans have always seemed to seek.

Research has constantly evolved and distanced itself from the older scholarly texts and negative connotations surrounding fans – i.e., portraying fans merely as obsessive, lonely and/or deviant individuals (Lamerichs 2018, 13). Works done before the early 1990s focused on the study of fan reception. Since then, the scope has moved on to focus on forms of participatory culture practices within the fan activities (Jenkins 2012). This shift comes too with the growth of the digital world. Scholars commonly argue that fans were pioneers when it comes to new technologies and their practices (Jenkins 1992; Siuda 2010). This made for a stronger connection within the fandoms and between individuals, regardless of physical proximity. In fact, at that time, fan gatherings were mostly thought of as a “weekend-only world” (Jenkins 1992, 277-280). That is, physical meetings of fan clubs and not much else. These gatherings were seen as places where fans would discuss and (re-)appropriate the meanings of their subject of common likings (Chin 2010, 95). Jenkins's notion of “Textual Poachers” is based on this idea. In a few words, he explains how fans “borrow” and reconstruct meanings from the original subject, but actually remain powerless opposed to the producers (Jenkins 1992). This idea of resistance against the “original” source is something very common to all these early works (Chin 2010, 4). The relationship and stance that fans have with the “source” of their liking is often looked at when trying to find a common behavior for fans. However, as mentioned here, these processes vary and have evolved – both from a theoretical and practical standpoint. In other words, not only have the

actual behaviors changed, but so has the research. Now, fans not only mimic or copy their source, but they also transform and create (Lamerichs 2018, 112). The visibility of fans grew exponentially, as well as the complexity of the production of the fans. This relationship with creativity and artistry, as well as the connection with the fan's identity (and identification), will be further explored and explained in this dissertation. These fundamental works all marked the beginning of fan studies as a "valid" topic of research in academia. In fact, the close links between fan studies and popular culture made it for an overlooked field, as explained in the previous sub-chapter.

The scope of fan studies quickly broadened after that. There was a second shift in the field around the 2010s. Exploration and studies on how different social concepts – namely and most popularly, gender – could also influence fan activities, reactions, and participation, rather than exclusively looking at the fans' relationships towards the producers or the source of their likings, permitted to further explore fan identities and fan identification. Connecting ideas of gender (among others) to audience studies changed the paradigms in audience research and opened up to what we now call fan studies. This will be explored further in chapter 3.2 on groupies and gender-based violence amongst fans.

On top of that, the focus went from geographic and demographic communities to groups based on affinity instead. Research on soap opera fans is at the center of this. Brown's (1990) *Television and Women's Culture: The Politics of the Popular* and Seiter et al.'s (1989) *Remote Control: Television, Audiences and Cultural Power* were both pioneers in the investigation of the relationship between television and gender. This broadening of the field to a highly interdisciplinary scope made for fan studies to be explored under several lenses. Feminist and queer studies, religion,<sup>3</sup> performance, violence, technology,<sup>4</sup> as well as psychoanalysis<sup>5</sup> are all frequent concepts in contemporary research. More than interdisciplinary, fan studies are intersectional by involving social concepts such as race,

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<sup>3</sup> For more information and research on fandom as "pseudo-religion" see Sean McCloud's (2013) *"Popular culture fandoms, the boundaries of religious studies, and the project of the self"* and Andrew Crome's (2015) *"Religion and the Pathologization of Fandom: Religion, Reason, and Controversy in My Little Pony Fandom"*.

<sup>4</sup> For more information and research on the digital fan experience, see Paul Booth's (2010) *"Digital Fandom: New Media Studies"*.

<sup>5</sup> For more information on the growing theme of psychoanalysis of fan behaviors, see Matt Hills's (2017) *"Always-On Fandom, Waiting and Bingeing: Psychoanalysis as an Engagement with Fans' "Infra-Ordinary" Experiences"*.

gender, sexuality, age (among others) and understanding how these are interrelated and shape the field.

When it comes to this more recent research, in the last 15 or so years, social media and user-generated subjects are a major matter of consideration. In fact, the participatory and interactive factors of those platforms have created shifts especially in the “consumer culture” that fans were believed to fall under. Henry Jenkins’s works are once again exceptionally influential. His 2006 white paper *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century* focuses on the increasing involvement of the fans with the producers, which leads to an individual from a (fan) community possessing a greater sense of responsibility to participate and (re)narrate the story on media platforms. This gives a sense of power not only to the individual but also to the community as a whole. In that sense, the interdependence between fan studies and technology makes for each advance in the latter to bring a shift to the former too.

Today, the focus of fan studies mostly relies on the digital technology and media studies fields. Some of the most recent debates involve the opposing concepts of fan labor versus fan leisure.<sup>6</sup> These concepts were questioned when regarding the motivations of fans to produce any new forms of content merely for leisure, or for profit. The line is increasingly blurry, as these creations exist in a society that revolves around profit. Moreover, and this is something that will be further explored in this dissertation too, the collection of production from fans does create a certain hierarchy and provides ownership and legitimacy (Banks and Humphreys 2008, cited by Lamerichs 2018, 16).

The trends that apply to the development of Fan Studies are similar to those applied to the perception of fans by the general society. From a place of reticence to now joining what could be said to be the mainstream, the opinions on fans and fandoms have changed. They are now viewed as active, rather than passive. A fan is seen as multiple, usually interconnected with various interests at the same time. The archiving and preserving of fan productions is a lot more proactive and has made for a more rigorous conservation of

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<sup>6</sup> For more information, see Xiqing Zheng’s (2016) *Borderless Fandom and Contemporary Popular Cultural Scene in Chinese Cyberspace*, in which she explores how fan activities are usually seen as not for profit. Yet, fan labor is now used for profit (usually the producer’s (362), rather than the fans’).

everything. As a result, not only is the access to it easier, but the amount of fan-produced content<sup>7</sup> is extremely abundant.

Many of the concepts mentioned – from both early and more recent research – rely on a few (sometimes outdated, as we will further discover and explain) definitions of some of the topics that seem central to the discussion of identifying a single definition to the word “fan”. Despite their constant evolution and performative dimensions, some notions do need to be defined. Not many three-letter-words have caused such tribulations when trying to come up with a textbook definition for it. While everyone can understand the concept of fan, there are as many definitions as personal experiences. To counter the trend of definition loaded with negative connotations, many scholars have tried to come up with different categories of fans. Hence, defining distinctions rather than similarities.

One of the earliest distinctions made is between “fans” and “followers”. This comes from Tulloch and Jenkins’s (1995) research on science fiction audiences in particular. Tulloch and Jenkins state that the difference between the two lies in the level of engagement and involvement. Similarly, Brooker and Brooker (1996) have had the same approach regarding “admirers”, “fans” and “cult fans”. The same can be said of Abercrombie and Longhurst, who proposed to differentiate “fans” from “cultists” (1998, 138). They defined the former as “individuals who are not yet in contact with other people who share their attachments” (138) and the later as “[individuals who have] explicit attachments to stars or to particular programmes” (138).

Chin (2010) explains that these different terms assume the non-interchangeability of categories from fans and that each fan has the same engagement and contribution. However, and as she further exposes, individual fans have different levels of production and interaction. This even leads to creating what she calls “Big Name Fans or subcultural celebrities in their respective fandoms” (Chin 2010, 5). This hierarchical system of fans usually relies on the accumulation of capital (both physical or not) and is something that will be further explained in sub-chapter 2.2.4 on possession and consumption. Here, however,

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<sup>7</sup> Fan-produced content can simply be thought of as any form of content produced by fans. This can be material or not. Some examples of fan-produced content can be written texts (fanfiction), paintings and illustrations (fanart), cosplaying and more. See more definitions in sub-chapter 2.1.

this concept is used to materialize the idea that individual fans move “up and down” the ladder of fan hierarchies, blurring the lines between all of them.

Notwithstanding, these distinctions and mobility between categories of fans do not make reaching a definition of fan any easier. What might make it so hard to find a single definition for the word “fan” is that a fan is seldom considered alone. It is very rare to find research based on a fan’s individuality. In fact, and in short, Jenkins says that “fans might be broadly defined as individuals who maintain a passionate connection to popular media, assert their identity through their engagement with and mastery over its contents, and experience social affiliation around shared tastes and preferences” (2012, 1). In other words, the existence of a fan presupposes the existence of a group it is a part of and with whom someone shares something. The name for a group of fans is commonly referred to as a fandom:

Fandom is a common feature of popular culture in industrial societies. It selects from the repertoire of mass-produced and mass-distributed entertainment certain performers, narratives or genres and takes them into the culture of a self-selected fraction of the people. They are then reworked into an intensely pleasurable, intensely signifying popular culture that is both similar to, yet significantly different from, the culture of more ‘normal’ popular audiences. Fandom is typically associated with cultural forms that the dominant value system denigrates – pop music, romance novels, comics, Hollywood mass-appeal stars (sport, probably because of its appeal to masculinity, is an exception). It is thus associated with the cultural tastes of subordinated formations of the people, particularly with those disempowered by any combination of gender, age, class and race. (Fiske 1992, 30)

The fandom is the “hive mind” (Busse and Hellekson 2006, cited by Chin 2010, 7) of the fans. Simply put, it is often thought of as the homogenous community of fans of a certain subject. It is a collective noun, used to describe one body of fans. In his book, *Understand Fandom*, Mark Duffett exemplifies the feeling of “commonplace moment where, as individuals, we discover something significant about our passion and identity” (2013, 22), and that would characterize an individual experience of being fan of a greater fan community, i.e., a fandom. However, as it is to be expected, fandom is a much more complex area of analysis.

It is worth mentioning that some scholars, including Mark Duffett, believe Fandom Research and Fan Studies to be two largely different fields of research. Duffett explains this stance by saying that Fandom Research is a much broader area (compared to Fan Studies) and encompasses “social attitudes to class, gender and other shared dimensions of identity” (2013, 23). In this research, as previously explained, the same dimension is given to Fan

Studies and, hence, will continue using the term as the specific area of study despite the existence of Fandom Research.

## **2. What (and Who) Is a Fan?**

The definition of “fan” usually revolves around how they behave in their community (Chin 2010, 35). As such, fans are often reduced to being seen as a “mass”. However, the role and characteristics of the individual fan are fundamental to get a correct vision of Fan Culture as a whole.

Duffet defines a fan as “a person with a relatively deep, positive emotional conviction about someone or something famous, usually expressed through a recognition of style or creativity. He/she is also a person driven to explore and participate in fannish practices” (2013, 18). Chin also explains that the a fan can be “multifaceted, fulfilling and playing different roles and identities” (2010, 36). A fan can be “both producer and consumer, community leader and member, author and reader, critic and fan, collaborator of official media producers and fan, as well as subcultural celebrity and fan” (37).

All the roles taken by fans must be observed with the two lenses – the individual and the communal one. What this means is that Fan Culture englobes the activities that fans do alone, such as reading or writing fanfiction or watching episodes of a TV show at home, and together, such as discussing feedback on the fanfiction or going to a TV show convention. This research will focus on both.

It is clear that fans have a tendency to connect and unite, creating their own communities and their own hierarchies (Chin 2010; Gerrard 2021; Hills 2002; Zheng 2016). Traditional fan clubs are a great way to look at these hierarchies. In those fan structures, roles are assigned (i.e., the president, the secretary, the treasurer, etc.), and that could lead to having specific privileges over other fans (e.g., a closer relationship with the person the fans adore, first knowledge of new information, access to some restricted events, etc.). However, more recent digital fan communities also maintain and continue to create intra-community orders, with administrators of online fan groups holding the power over who gets to enter these groups. The digital sphere has also created a space for “fans of fans” to exist. In fact, with the easy access to fan production, the more successful ones gather not only attention, but

respect and even adoration from other fans. These more successful fans begin to have their own following, with their own new sub-community of fans (Chin 2010, 23).

When the individual becomes the communal, then it is considered fandom. There are no real barriers to the entry or exit of these communities, and there are no limits to how many fandoms an individual fan can be a member of. It is solely based on the individual's decision rather than the groups'. This does not mean that fandoms do not have a right to an opinion. There are moments that could be identified as a fandom wishing for a member to exit. However, those could be said to be extraordinary moments rather than a norm. This "freedom of movement" is an interesting concept about fandoms that creates for a very intricate web of interconnected bodies of fans. That is, individuals will naturally gravitate towards other subjects that are similarly linked to the one of their affections, hence joining another fandom too. This is very easy to understand when fandoms are within a topic that involves different genres. For example, within the movie/television topic, it is not uncommon that fans of science-fiction will enjoy both *Star Wars* and *Star Trek*, considered to be two of the cult sagas. Another example of this could be music: fans of pop star Madonna might also love Lady Gaga and be members of both fandoms due to their similarity of sound and overall aesthetic. Fandoms are culturally created, and this means that the boundaries are extensive and meant to be redefined in perpetuity.

There are, however, some limits to fandoms. Rivalry is probably the biggest one. While similar topics might attract the same individual, this is not a universal truth. In fact, conflicts (and violence) between fans are something this dissertation will also focus on. Aforementioned franchises *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* actually have a history of comparison and rivalry. The same goes for fans of Madonna and fans of Lady Gaga. While there is a possibility for fandom crossing, this does not always apply. Pushing this concept even more, there could be a field in which there is no (or very little) fandom crossing and that is sports. Being a fan usually means being loyal and following the evolution of whichever topic your attention focuses on. Fans of sports teams might be one of the most extreme examples of this. In that aspect, they might be the most striking examples of limits to fandoms. Quite simply, and using here the example of Portuguese football teams, generally, a fan of *Sport Lisboa e Benfica* cannot, simultaneously, be a fan of *Sporting Clube de Portugal*. In other words, there is a mutually exclusive relationship between the two.

Historically, it is said that the word fandom emerged amongst fans of science fiction in the beginning of the past century, but was later specifically popularized by *Star Trek* fans in the 1960s (Jenkins 1992, 47). From then on, it was reappropriated and expanded to all sorts of subjects and genres. Fandoms are not stuck in time; instead, they are a sociocultural phenomenon that highly interacts with the specific conditions it finds itself in. In other words, “fandom originates as a response to specific historical conditions” (Jenkins 1992, cited by Duffett 2013, 27). Fandoms are culturally built, and hence move according to larger cultural shifts.

This part of the dissertation will focus on how these communities are built and will be based on previous knowledge, personal experience, and the current literature on Fan Studies. First, we need to go over some fan terminology and define some of the jargon. Then, I retrieve six characteristics that I believe to be the starting point on the discussion of reaching a definition of a fan.

### **2.1. Fan Terminology: Some Definitions**

This chapter intends to give some definitions for commonly used terms not only in the realm of fan studies but mostly within fandoms. It is important to understand the meaning of this “fan terminology”, as the words do not automatically translate to their most literal sense. These are always in English by default. That is, they do not have a translation to any other languages and are used as is. To explain this phenomenon, it is important to remember that the use of the Internet has made for a much more widespread connection between the fans. English, commonly, is used as a language for fans to engage in conversations and hence these words have become staples in the vocabulary of fans.

The lack of academic sources due to the internalized specifications of the use of this vocabulary makes for these to be my own definitions of the terms. As both a junior scholar and long-term member of various fandoms, I feel it is useful to make use of my background and acquired knowledge to propose different definitions for the most frequent terms. It should be kept in mind that these are words of common jargon. They were constructed by the fans, and it is their repetition that makes them of interest. They participate in the fan identification process and, from here on out, these words will be referenced in this

dissertation when relevant without the need to explain them again within the context of Fan Studies.

- **Canon:** The origin of the word canon is a reference to texts that were derived from the biblical texts and hence are accepted as scripture. Amongst fans, canon is something that is an official part of the source material. This includes anything that is acknowledged by the creators to be true. However, it is important to mention that in some universes that have spread across various sources, not every fan will agree on the definition of canon. Especially if the details come from “add-ons” (additional explanations that come *after* the original source, about the original source), “spin-offs” (a new format based on the original source), interviews, etc.
- **Cosplay:** Acclaimed fan activity of dressing up and role-playing to represent as close to possible the characters of the fans’ likings. The practice was initially popularized at science fiction and fantasy conventions, and with the increase popularity of the activity in Japan, later spread to fandoms of Japanese manga and anime. Nowadays, it has moved beyond that realm and has been adopted by various fandoms across the globe. Usually, this activity is reserved to specific events of fan gatherings.
- **Fan Talk:** The activity of talking about the topic that fans are interested in. Fan activities do not always imply fan productions. Arguably, one of the most popular activities that fans get involved in is just to *talk* about the object of liking with other fans. This does not have to be literal but can be textual too. In other words, activities such as writing on forums or sending Tweets<sup>8</sup> can also be included as fan talk.
- **Fanart:** Mostly drawings (but videos, paintings, and other forms of art can fit under this term) of characters from the original texts to put them in new situation, once again, creating a new set of meaning.
- **Fandom:** Community of fans.
- **Fanfiction (also, fanfic):** Fanfiction is the most copiously created fan production. As the name suggests, it is fiction written by fans about an already existing material source. Fanfiction is also, arguably, the most discussed topic of study when it comes to academia in Fan Studies. Its amount made for an interesting and valuable body of work to analyze. Some fanfictions have reached such a level of popularity that they

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<sup>8</sup> Tweets are posts made on the social media platform Twitter.

have eventually been turned into “original” pieces themselves, becoming then source material for other fans. For example, the books-turned-films *50 Shades of Grey* were originally *Twilight* fanfictions. However, not all fanfiction needs to be inspired by fictional characters. In fact, there is an entire sub-genre of fanfiction written about real life people. The ethical aspect of this is highly criticized, even among fans. Still, these are highly popular and some of them have actually been published. For instance, popular book series *After* was originally written as a fanfiction about the boyband *One Direction*. These productions by fans are originally thought of as a creation by and for the fans. This passage from a niche community of fans to the wide mainstream audience when turned into a new piece of content can be explained due to the popularity of the piece, but this is mostly a result of fans being seen as consumers.

- **Fangirl/Fanboy:** A fangirl is a fan whose gender identity is female and shows a particular enthusiasm. A fanboy is a fan whose gender identity is male and shows a particular enthusiasm.<sup>9</sup> These terms can also be used as a verb (i.e., to fangirl/to fanboy, fangirling/fanboying), which is the activity of showing extreme emotions that are triggered within the universe of their fandom (it could be from an interaction with their favorite actor, or from partaking in specific fan activities with other fans, etc.).<sup>10</sup>
- **Fannish:** Adjective from the word “fan”. Relating to a fan.
- **Groupie:** The term finds its origin in the late 60s, to describe young women who were devoted fans of male musicians, and who were allegedly more interested in having sexual relations with them than in their music (Gerrard 2021, 2-4). Now, it has spread to fans of other genres than just music. This term is often used in a diminishing way, to devalue the fans or their interest.<sup>11</sup>
- **Headcanon:** Information that is not supported or acknowledged by the creators or by the original source, but that will be heavily shared and maintained to be true by the fans, is said to be headcanon. Fans will create these parallel storylines in their

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<sup>9</sup> Due to these terms finding their origin in the gender binary, non-binary individuals have started to use the term “fanby” to refer to themselves. It is a combination of fan with “enby”, a term which stands for non-binary (or “NB”). A fanby is a fan whose gender identity is non-binary and shows a particular enthusiasm.

<sup>10</sup> The topic of the fangirl is explained in more thorough details in sub-chapter 3.2 in this dissertation.

<sup>11</sup> The topic of the groupie is explained in more thorough details in the sub-chapter 3.2 in this dissertation.

heads (hence the *headcanon*), outside of the canon. This can include changing some realities from the canon, as well as making up for parts, motivations, explanations, or details that are not (fully) described in the original source. These can become wildly popular within a fandom to the point that they sometimes can be referenced in the original source as an Easter egg.<sup>12</sup> However, this does not mean that the idea has become canon. It simply proves the power that a collectivity of fans can have. Fanon is a term similarly used to describe headcanon. To be more precise, headcanon used to be more individual (referring to stories created by individuals) when fanon was a term used for a more widespread community idea (referring to stories more commonly accepted within a fandom). However, fanon is a term that has lost in popularity and headcanon is now used for both cases interchangeably. Simply, it refers to anything that is not canon. Headcanons are a very common source for fan production, specifically for fanfiction, as a desire from the fans to continue and further extend the immersion in the universes.

- **Ship:** A pair of individuals (either fictional, or not) that are the source of the shipping. These do not always fall within the realm of the canon universe. In fact, they are quite often fan-created couples. These pairs are also sometimes referred to as “OTP”, which stands for One True Pairing. The opposite of this term also exists and is used as “NOTP”, describing a pair that is disliked.
- **Ship names:** Created by combining the two names of the individuals (either fictional, or not), ship names are commonly used when referring to a pair. For example, *The X-Files* main characters are called Dana Scully and Fox Mulder. Their ship name is commonly referred to as “Sculder”, a combination of their two last names. The notorious real-life couple, now separated, Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie were sometimes referred to as “Brangelina”, a combination of their two first names to make their ship name.
- **Ship wars:** Long debates in which fans argue over which couple (or ship) they like more. As the name suggests, it is a ‘war’ (or disagreement) between two or more groups of rival shippers. Usually, fans add to these debates by doing activities like

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<sup>12</sup> Easter Eggs are hidden messages left through a media piece (originally found mostly in video games, it then spread to film, television, etc.) that can either hint at commonly known fact within the fandom, or sometimes hides actions for the fans to take. It finds its origins in the Easter Egg hunt tradition.

drawing fanart, writing fanfiction and talking about it with other fans within the community, to prove which couple is more deserving. Ship wars are a commonly used trope in fiction writing, since they provide for engagement and attachment. Many series have had their own feuds. Twilight had the famous love triangle between Bella, Edward and Jacob, creating the commonly referred to as “Team Edward” (for fans who rooted for the couple Edward and Bella) and “Team Jacob” (for fans who rooted for the couple Jacob and Bella). This pattern is found amongst many other formats, in books (Hunger Games had Team Peeta and Team Gale), television (Buffy the Vampire Slayer, with Team Angel and Team Spike), and more.

- **Shipper:** A fan that wishes for a pair to be together. The term was originated by fans, of course. It emerged amongst fans of the science-fiction television series *The X-Files*, in which the two main characters interactions made for the fans to vehemently wish for the pair to become romantically engaged. These specific fans first called themselves relationshipippers, shortened to r’shippers, then ‘shippers and eventually the apostrophe disappeared, and the word spread to other fandoms too. Hence, a fan who partakes in shipping is a shipper.
- **Shipping:** Shipping is when fans wish for a pair to get into a romantic and/or sexual relationship. This includes both relationships that have already been hinted at or not in the original material. It sometimes involves fictional people, as already mentioned, but can also be used for real people. This latter example can be ethically questionable.<sup>13</sup> Lastly, shipping does not always remain a passive activity. A lot of art, fanfiction and overall fan production is usually made and shared within a fandom.
- **Spoilers:** Previously unknown pieces of information regarding a specific subject that are revealed before the development happens, hence reducing the enjoyment of the fans. The expression “spoiler alert” is commonly used among fans (and not only) as a warning before sharing such pieces of information. This way, fans who are not aware of that content yet, might avoid having their own experience affected.
- **Stan:** Originally used with an extremely negative connotation, some specific fans have now reclaimed the use of the term stan. Used as both a verb or a noun, a stan

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<sup>13</sup> After the release of *Titanic*, and to this day, the two actors that played the romantic interests of Jake and Rose, which were portrayed by Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet, are continuously being shipped together despite the actors never hinting at any romantic interest.

was originally the name of an extremely obsessed fan of American rapper Eminem in the early 2000s. A stan could be described as a combination of a fan and a stalker. The term was used to refer to devoted fans that would sometimes perform above-than-average loyalty. However, there has been a total cultural shift in recent years. This has occurred mostly online, where communities of fans have been referring to themselves as stans. It is now used in a more positive, protective, and loving, rather than aggressive or obsessive way. This difference in term, between a fan and a stan, does suggest that there is in fact a hierarchy amongst fans. Within a same community, there are various “levels” of fans. A stan, by definition, would be *just a little bit more of a fan* than a regular fan.

- **TPTB:** Acronym for “The Powers That Be”, a term that was used by *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*’s creator Joss Whedon when referring to the powerful beings that were in charge of maintaining balance in the supernatural drama television series. Next, this term was later reappropriated by the fans of the show themselves to mention its own creator, Joss Whedon himself. The term is now used by fans in multiple fandoms to broadly refer to the original creators (directors, producers, writers, etc.).

Much of this terminology and jargon predates the naming of the terms themselves. These words make for a linguistic network that supports discourses and practices that are interlinked with the experience of being a fan. Language, here, creates and supports the space that fans hold in a social reality. It goes way beyond the semantic value of the words. That is, by creating this vocabulary and fan terminology, it interacts and validates the experiences of individuals (i.e., the fans) and connects them to their community (i.e., the fandoms).

As a result of this, the conversation on fandoms, experienced both individually or in a community, has been an interesting topic when it comes to discussing language and identity – both at an academical level, or not. Broadening that to the even more general audience, it further establishes the power of fandoms.

Fandoms have gone from extremely niche marginal (and sometimes hidden) groups to becoming a considerable movement in the mainstream society (Jenkins 2006, 10). The way these collectivities have constructed new cultural meanings for their own identities as well as for the way society has perceived them is central for this dissertation. Fandoms are more

than a conceptual group that fits within societal norms, they are communities that have pushed the boundaries and reshaped the marginal norms.

## **2.2. Fans United: Some Characteristics**

Fans possess, express and present a special attachment with the object of their likings. From these, they connect, interact and create with other fans. To put it quite simply, fans tend to come together, to unite. A collectivity is created. The base of what constitutes a fan is the pursuit of unity - with other fans and/or, ultimately, with the source of the liking. Unity means that there is a common ground of affection. Something has a force of connectivity that leads individuals to engage in certain behaviors. Unity in fans does not have to solely be expressed by the collectivity. Whether or not one individual identifies with all descriptions made in this dissertation does not compromise the fact that *some* of these behaviors are being reproduced enough by fans that make them relevant. This unity is rather an exemplification of why and how fans align and interact.

There are two significant relationships when it comes to research within Fan Studies that must be distinguished. First, there is the obvious identification and relation created between a fan and the object of their liking. Second, there is the relationship created with other fans within the community. While it may seem that the motivation for both is similar, they can sometimes differ. This dissertation will explore some characteristics and variables, and how that could translate to the way fans unite – or divide (Vinney et al. 2019).

This part of the dissertation will now focus on the following question: Which characteristics can be perceived as fundamental to enact the role of fan? Departing from personal experience and curiosity and backed up with extensive research on the current literature of Fan Studies, I established a starting point of six characteristics: 1) Fan identification and identity construction, 2) participation and repetition, 3) the affective process, 4) possession and consumption, 5) productivity and production, and 6) entertainment and pleasure.

### 2.2.1. Fan Identification and Identity Construction

I remember very distinctively the first time I heard a song by British indie music band Florence + The Machine. I remember sitting on my couch at 14 years old, watching a Portuguese *telenovela* on television with my mother, when a song came on during a scene and instantly hooked me. Since that moment, it has been a whirlwind of adventures following the band through their songs and albums, all mixed with my own life experiences and construction of my own identity. Discovering this band has led me to attend concerts in countries other than my own, to create deep and meaningful connection with other fans (online, through social media platforms and Tumblr<sup>14</sup> mostly, and offline, waiting in line and at the venues), to get a tattoo of the lyrics of the band, etc. Over a decade has passed, and I still consider myself a fan. This connection that I have created between my own identity and the product that is this music band is at the core of the idea for this dissertation. How did it come to happen? Which processes did I, myself, follow over the course of this journey? I became obsessed with trying to understand how this was constructed and which mechanisms were put into action. If one cannot settle for a definition of fan, one might then explore those said mechanisms. What exactly made me stay a fan for so long? When did I start identifying as a fan? Do I still do? Will I ever stop? What could make me stop being a fan? Where are the limits? And most importantly, my most repeated question: am I the one who has the answers to these questions?

This introduction is not just because I made a bet with myself and wanted to prove that I could somehow insert talking about Florence + The Machine into my own Master's dissertation, but rather it is used here as an example. A sort of methodology of self-ethnography. I am, too, the subject of this research. Hence, I am both in the position of the observer and the observed. I am interested in the way this double identity is going to make me able to identify patterns and have a greater understanding of the way the creation of my personal identity was (or not) linked with the way I identify as a fan.

There are different trends of thought when it comes to identity and what pushes individuals to behave a certain way. Stuart Hall, a Jamaican-British scholar who belonged to the

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<sup>14</sup> Tumblr is an American blogging networking website founded in 2007. Tumblr offered a platform where fans could easily share their fan productions as well as interact with each other in a way no other social media platform had quite done for fans until then (or since) (Hillman, Procyk, and Neustaedter 2014). The past tense is used here because the popularity of the platform drastically decreased in the recent years.

Birmingham School and founded the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies, is a fundamental reference when it comes to the concept of identity, especially within the scope of Cultural Studies. Hall explains the process of identification as “constructed on the back of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation” (1996, 2). To explain this, Hall distinguishes identity into three different notions. First, the Enlightenment subject, which he refers to as identity being based on reason and one’s “inner core” as the center (1996b, 275). Second, the sociological subject, which is seen as identity being a reflection of the world, the culture and others. Hence, one’s “inner core” is not singular, but rather is formed out of those interactions, bridging between the “inside” (the personal) and the “outside” (the public) (276). Third, the post-modern subject, which he explains has “no fixed, essential or permanent identity” (277). Hall states that “the subject assumes different identities at different times, identities which are not unified around a coherent ‘self’. Within us are contradictory identities, pulling in different directions, so that our identifications are continuously being shifted about” (277). This understanding of identity as a construction and as a process is fundamental to fan identification.

Considering the abovementioned continuous and growing debate, we could say that identity is often used as an umbrella term. It refers to many paradigms, perspectives, labels and even concepts. It incorporates awareness, self-rationalization and construction, all of which mixed with knowledge, relationships, roles and emotions. Experiences, as well as social and cultural norms forge identities too. Conde explains that identity lodges itself in “collective patterns” (2011, 6).

Simon Frith, a British scholar who focuses on sociology and musicology, has become an expert on popular music and a key reference in the academic research related to that field. In his essay *Music and Identity*, Frith opens his text with the following statement: “The academic study of popular music has been limited by the assumption that the sounds must somehow ‘reflect’ or ‘represent’ the people” (1996, 107). Frith’s statement serves to illustrate the presupposition that music taste is representative of one’s identity and that one’s social identity is connected to one’s consumption of culture, in this case music. Hence, following that assumption, certain genres may be related to certain classes, races, genders, age and even nationalities. This is not to undermine that certain works are created for certain people and these are as deserving of praise and space in the general society. For example,

still talking about music, it is important to remember that rap has long had a history embedded in Black Culture. This does not indicate that white individuals cannot perform rap – world-famous American rapper Eminem being a case in point – but it is fundamental to understand the social relationship between rap music, social identity and a more global mainstream society. This means that, oftentimes, subgenres have been undermined because they have been assumed to be made for a certain demographic. Another way that this can be exemplified is the tendency to diminish certain subgenres because of the target audience they are made for. Suddenly, composers are not “artists” anymore, but mere “pop stars”. The debate between the value of the music made by Taylor Swift versus the music made by David Byrne – both artists generally considered as “pop” artists, but not necessarily popular artists<sup>15</sup> – does not solely base itself on notions of sexism (we will come back to those), but classism.

Conde reflected on a contemporary approach to identity that reflects the current globalization situation and technological advances. She states that there is “a whole new outlook of hearing less about the uniqueness or personalization of individuals and, actually, about the fact that they are modelled by global culture, the media and consumption” (2011, 6). In that sense, fandoms fit perfectly within that realm of identity and participate actively in the construction of new identities. Tsay-Vogel and Sanders (2017) also explore the link between identity building and fandom and connect it with the “role-identity theory”. They explain the following:

Role-identity theory (McCall & Simmons, 1978) suggests that individuals strive to behave in ways that adhere to how they prefer to see themselves and how they prefer others to see them. While this theory focuses on individual roles, Tajfel and Turner’s (1979) social identity theory argues that self-perceptions are inherently based on both personal and social identifiers, emphasizing the importance of group processes and intergroup relationships. Based on the fundamental premise of social comparison (Festinger, 1954), people identify with those who are similar or slightly better than themselves. In essence, social identity is a function of the value and emotional attachment individuals place on group membership, and such relationships within a group meaningfully represent their sense of self. In the context of fandom, it is clear that identity plays a critical role, particularly as members of a fanbase develop strong social identities based on the degree to which they perceive themselves to share personal

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<sup>15</sup> The case of Taylor Swift was not used trivially. In fact, Swift has been the focus (and example) of many discussions regarding her validity and status as an artist (and even a person, simply). A specific example of this happened during the 2009 MTV Video Music Awards. Swift was nominated in only one category, MTV Video Music Award for Best Female Video, and won. When she attempted to give her acceptance speech, American rapper Kanye West jumped on stage. After taking the microphone of Swift’s hands, West said: “*Yo Taylor, I’m really happy for you. I’mma let you finish, but Beyoncé had one of the best videos of all time! One of the best videos of all time!*”. By stating so, he explained how he did not see Swift as deserving of the award. Even more, he claimed she was inferior.

interests and values with other fans in the community. (Tsay-Vogel and Sanders 2017, 3)

Fan identification is a multidimensional construct that relates to the motivations and reasons for individuals to become (and stay) fans. Identification relates to commitment – a personal and emotional dedication to the object of affection (Murray 2019, 7) and it can be experienced both at an individual and social level. In fact, as Tsay-Vogel and Sanders explain when talking about fan identification specifically, “identification can occur with both characters in the narrative and other audience members who experience the narrative” (2017, 2). Both can happen at the same time, or not. That is, the individual level is when “identification can take place when they share a character’s perspective and vicariously participate in his or her experiences” (2). The social one is rather about how fan interactions within a collectivity define their own fan experience. Tsay-Vogel and Sanders claim that “identification can also be associated with ritualized fan practices. [...] Such practices within a fan community may foster stronger mutual connections within the group, and increase involvement in ritualistic social practices of identification” (2).

These practices (be it via consumption, production, or any other aspect) can vary in motivations and do not necessarily have a direct correlation to a real representation of the levels of devotion. There is also a separation that can be made at a more individual level. In fact, this is a topic that American scholar Gayle Stever has largely focused on. As a professor of Psychology, she has focused a great amount of her work on parasocial theory, in particular in how that applies to fans and their interaction with their object of liking. In her work, Stever (2009) creates a separation between two different groups of fans. Those two groups are the interactive fans and the isolated fans. While the names used are relatively self-explanatory, it is important to go over the key characteristics that differentiate these two groups and the individuals who find themselves in each of those.

First, the isolated fan interacts solely with their object of liking. In practice, this means that there is arguably close to no fan production coming from fans who fall in this category. Still, regardless of their level of production, of how many (or little) times they go to a football game or buy a band’s new album, these fans still identify as fans. This process of self-identification is the only component that matters. On the other side of the spectrum we can find the interactive fans. Interactive fans are the social fans. These fans are the ones that compose fandoms, that join online forums, write fanfictions and share them – in short, they

are involved to a higher degree in their fannish activities. These two groups aren't always mutually exclusive, however. Going back to the idea of Bourdieu's map, we must understand fan identity as an identity in movement. Individuals can go back and forth in this scale and vary in levels of involvement. (Vinney et al. 2019, 6). The constraints that can be at the source of this movement are volatile and ever-changing too. In that sense, these all participate in the construction of a fan's identity and both a personal and social identification.

Once again, this section relies a lot on Psychology aspects. In fact, narratives of self-definitions usually do. In this case, we are trying to define and understand the process that happens in between the starting point of the "personal/self-definition" all the way to the "social/participatory" (Vinney et al. 2019, 10) aspect. What this means is that there are several factors that impact (and are related to) fan identification and fan enthusiasm.

Hills was maybe the most direct when he stated that to become a fan, one must self-identify as a fan (2002, 43-52). That is, fans are not given the identity by outsiders; instead, it is a self-defining process. Even though identity is also formed out of the interactions one establishes with others, and as such the perception of others can play a role in identity construction, we cannot ignore that the way we see ourselves does not always match the way others might perceive us. As Hall suggests, identity is "a construction, a process never completed - always 'in process'" (1996, 2). It is, therefore, not fixed (either internally or externally), and it is often built in relation to what it is not (the different, the opposite, the *constitutive outside*) (Hall 1996a, 4). Nevertheless, it is a process that starts from within. This means that, even if someone ticked all the boxes on the habits and common practices we mentioned, if they stated "*but I would not consider myself a fan*", then they simply are not. Since they do not identify with that group, they see themselves as different and not being part of it.

In short, a key factor to fan identification is self-determination and self-identification. As discussed by Hunt, Bristol and Bashaw specifically in relation to sports fans, but applicable to other types of fans:

[an] important aspect of understanding [...] fans comes from their own determination that being a fan is a necessary part of defining themselves and of presenting to others their self-identity. So, the activities in which fans engage [...] are a result of the fans' acting out their own identity – an identity which they have given themselves. (1999, 442)

Lozano, Plaza, and Sánchez (2020) go even further by stating clearly that individuals constructing their identity by self-defining themselves as fans is the main focus. In fact, they conclude that self-definition is the main behavior or action to take into consideration (Lozano, Plaza, and Sánchez 2020, 8).

Identity, and especially identity construction, is something that is heavily researched in the field of Queer and Gender studies. In part due to their intrinsic relation to the Self, these theories and discourses are fundamental to understanding how fan culture helps build identity. Butler's notion of gender as performativity is a theory that can be applied here too. In fact, Butler defines performance as "constituting the identity it is purported to be" (1999, 25). Identity is how one presents oneself to the world, repeatedly. In that sense, identity is a process that is always in motion and always redefining itself.

In short, being a fan is used as a characteristic for how individuals define themselves. In fact, I would even go further and say it is *often* used. For example, after meeting someone new, that person might refer to themselves in relation to their role of being a fan. That is, after stating their name, age and profession, this new person might mention that they are a big Taylor Swift fan too. Research has actually shown that fans have a greater tendency to use their fandoms when describing themselves (Groene and Hettinger 2016, 7). What this means is that there is an entanglement between what one is a fan of, and who one is.

The aspects that lead fans to connect and link with one another is central to the understanding of the social identity of fans. It has been established that a one-fits-all definition does not apply to fans. With the plurality of identities, comes the plurality of definitions. However, there are some aspects, motivations, common practices and key ideas that can be connected to fan culture. These are central to the way single individuals might (or might not) relate to the experience of fan identity. The process of highlighting them in this dissertation intends to further the general understanding and study of fans.

#### **2.2.1.1. Fan Identity Performance**

With fan identification comes fan performance. As Hills explains in *Fan Cultures*, "[thinking] of fans as performers means displacing an emphasis on the text-reader interaction, and focusing instead on the myriad ways that fans can engage with the textual

structures and moments of their favored cult shows, reactivating these in cultural practices of play” (2002, 16). The participatory nature of fan behaviors relies on performance. Simply, it too depends on the interpretation of social norms and contexts. However, these norms are still being collectively built. There is an ever-changing process of building structures and social norms, done by the fans themselves through their participation and performance (Boyd 2008).

The study of fans primarily involves and evolves within the realm of Cultural Studies. Hence, the dialectic between culture and choice is central to the discussion of fan identity. Fans live their performances within a world of cultural meanings already established. There can be no perception, understanding and fan experience without cultural and social mediation, for perception and experience necessarily involve cultural interpretation. To put this simply, fans act (or rather, perform) according to cultural expressions. However, they not only receive those norms, but they also produce and innovate them too.

The space fans have been able to secure in the wider mainstream landscape has made the performance part of the experience a more visible and approachable event (Bennett and Booth 2015, 67). What used to be restrained to a specific community is now more acceptable for the mainstream eye. Performativity, according to a more traditional approach, is merely an act – or an action (70). However, the relevant part of performativity is when understood within a certain context that beholds a certain meaning. Navigating everyday tasks, rituals, or roles and how these consist of different performances gives a certain perspective on the relationship between fandom and performance. There could be a suggestion that fannish performance is constituted by a specific comportment, but what is more relevant here is to highlight the parallels between this performance and fan identity. There is a distinction to be made between performance and representation. In this case, fan performance can be understood as “communal act(s) of identity construction” (101).

Fan practices can be an extremely embodied experience – literally, and figuratively (Lamerichs 2018, 30).<sup>16</sup> The relevance of performativity in fan identity is to understand that rather than a restricted and limited practice, it is “an ongoing process of intersecting behaviors” (Bennett and Booth 2015, 2.4) in which fans will build, interpret and preserve

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<sup>16</sup> Lamerichs (2018) provides examples in this case: cosplay is a literally embodied fan practice, when reading is a more figuratively embodied practice.

their identities. In fact, fan practices can even be used to enhance (read, perform) gender, sexuality and even race (Kloet and Zoonen 2007, 330). These can be seen in the behaviors that are more embodied, like cosplay, and that will enhance certain behaviors. For example, this can be seen in the way masculinity and/or femininity are performed when some fans do cosplay.<sup>17</sup>

Fan practices include both individual and collective ways of performing. The relationship of the singular with the multiple is something that is constant when one talks about fans. A “paradoxical simultaneity of togetherness” (Nancy 2000, 7). An individual fan practice can be the example of writing fanfiction. Once that fanfiction is published, it becomes a collective belonging. Discussing that fanfiction with other fans can then be understood as a collective performance. Other examples of collective performance are when groups of fans get together: at concerts, singing all the lyrics; at sport events, wearing the colors of their team; or at conventions, following panels with their favorite actors.

Kloet and Zoonen explain that fannish performativity and its relationship with identity challenges the desire of differentiation of the fans from an what they see as an “inauthentic other” (2007, 326). There is a desire to be distanced from the “non-fans”, the mere followers, and the individuals that do not view themselves as fans. These practices and behaviors include a process of legitimization of a common experience, in which the meanings and collective understanding are not subversive of the hegemonic norms (Bennett and Booth 2015, 2.5). In a way, the level of credibility is heightened by the intensity with which the fan identity is performed.

Bennett and Booth conclude that a fan’s performance, through the internalization and then re-creation of a source, “creates its own unique performance” (2015, 2.9). This conclusion connects with the idea that fans are active participants, rather than passive ones. As such, fan practices become ways of questioning the pre-existing societal norms, by receiving them from the original piece, absorbing them and then interconnecting them with individual narratives to eventually create and give them entirely new meanings. In this case, performativity in fandom moves the focus away from the long-held dialectic of compliance

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<sup>17</sup> For more information on the co-relation of gender performativity and cosplay, see Nicole Lamerichs’s chapter “Embodied Characters: The Affective Process of Cosplay” from *Productive Fandom* (2018).

versus resistance and turns it towards a more plural understanding of fandom as a shared cultural practice.

### **2.2.1.2. The Social Identity Theory**

One's social identity is directly influenced by all the interactions one establishes with a specific social group one is a part of (Groene and Hettinger 2016, 7). Frith explains that a social group is not only a group that shares common values and expresses those through their cultural actions but also that social groups "get to know themselves as groups (as a particular organization of individual and social interests, of sameness and difference) *through* cultural activity, through aesthetic judgement" (1996, 111). Taking these two statements as a foundation for the argument this dissertation wishes to build, fandoms can then easily be understood as social groups and hence they are a constituent of one's social identity. When individuals take part in fandoms, they are thus partaking in a portion of one's social identity.

The Social Identity Theory (sometimes referred to as SIT) is a concept first elaborated by Polish psychologist Henri Tajfel in his 1978 book *Differentiation Between Social Groups: Studies in the Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*. This theory largely proposes to understand the impact of belonging to a group on an individual's notion of self (Tajfel and Turner 1986, 14). Tajfel and Turner define a group "as a collection of individuals who perceive themselves to be members of the same social category, share some emotional involvement in this common definition of themselves, and achieve some degree of social consensus about the evaluation of their group and of their membership in it" (14).

This theory incorporates more than simply the definition of social identity. In fact, it finds its base on the human desire to feel connected and accepted (Baumeister and Leary 1995, 499-501) and the implication that might have. That is, the way one participates in social groups influences immensely the psyche of individuals. Research has shown that, on the one hand, when that desire to be accepted has been met with inclusion, it has led to positive implications for the individuals; on the other hand, when met with exclusion, it can lead to negative implications for the individuals (Twenge, Catanese, and Baumeister 2003, 419-422). How this can be transposed to fans is relatively easy to understand. In fact, it explains why fans want (or even need) to find a group to be a part of. It is, actually, the most basic

wish that explains the creation of fandoms: fans wish to feel connected to people who understand (and share) their affection.

Sandvoss (2005) and Reysen and Branscombe (2010) asserted that fans perceive themselves as members of a group, even when (as in most cases) they are not part of an organized group – rather, fans are part of an “imagined” (Wertsch, 2002, p. 64) or “virtual” community (Bird, 2002), a group of individuals who do not have physical interaction with one another, yet who presuppose the existence of a community of individuals who share common beliefs, values, and purpose (Kashima, Klein, & Clark, 2007). Furthermore, Obst et al. (2002) found that despite the fact that science fiction fandom “operates on an international basis with fewer geographic connections than other relational communities” (p. 97), these fans perceived a strong sense of community with one another. In addition, Gabriel and Young (2011) demonstrated that Harry Potter and Twilight fans meet belongingness needs through assimilation with their respective fandoms, with fans forming a collective fan identity and benefiting psychologically in terms of positive mood and life satisfaction from this social surrogate. (Groene and Hettinger 2016, 8)

Groene and Hettinger not only propose interesting observations regarding fan engagement and the social identity theory, but they go as far as to test their hypothesis that fans of a specific fandom (in this case, *Harry Potter*) can feel threatened when their knowledge is questioned. In short, the results of their study show that “there was a positive relationship between strength of identification and performance” (Groene and Hettinger 2016, 23).

### **2.2.1.3. The Parasocial Interaction**

In 2016, I took a year off from school and work to simply travel. I, of course, have strong memories from that year – but one in particular impacted me in such a manner that, I believe, has led to the germination of the idea for this dissertation. I was off in Australia on January 10<sup>th</sup> when the news broke out that British musician David Bowie had passed away from cancer at the age of 69. The way this day has been stuck in my mind is not necessarily because of how much of a fan of Bowie I am. In fact, while I do hold him in high regards for everything that he did for music and non-conforming individuals, it is the memory of the response to his death that has marked me and changed the way I see fans and their impact. After Bowie’s death, uncountable amounts of memorials were put together across the world. In fact, one was held in Sydney – the city I found myself in – with an estimated total of 6000 people joining (Moskovitch 2016). Flowers were left at every apartment he had lived in - New York, Berlin, and London. Thousands of parties and flash mobs were held. There is, indeed, an entire Wikipedia page dedicated to the “Death of David Bowie” and the reaction

from the fans. In short, everywhere across the world, fans were not only paying tribute in their own way to their idol who had just passed, but they were really grieving. All together, they participated in this common movement that created not only feelings of grief (expected after a death, be it of a celebrity or not) but a greater community feeling that I found to be of such interest. And of course, I am not the only one who has thought of that.

Many scholars, particularly of Media Studies and Psychology, have explored and studied this phenomenon. To all intents and purposes, this response takes form in other moments, not only when the death of a real human being that many people admire occurs, like Bowie's death did. Rather, it has been found that grief might be just as intense when it comes to the death of a fictional character, the end of a beloved TV series (Tsay-Vogel and Sanders 2017, 6), or when a band decides to split up (Kretz 2020, 4). The name that has been given to this phenomenon is the parasocial breakup, stemming from the wider experience of the parasocial interaction (Horton and Wohl 1956). Parasocial interactions, sometimes referred to as parasocial relationships, were first introduced by Horton and Wohl in 1956. They represent relationships that are one-sided, between individuals (i.e., in our case the fans) and characters from mass media (1956, 215).

The parasocial breakup is the mark between the “before” and the “after”. Kretz explains that the “after” comes when “no new associated media will be released” (2020, 4). When that happens, the fandom shifts to a new phase called the post-object fandom (4). This is a concept that Kretz borrows from scholar Rebecca Williams. Williams theorized this period “when a fan object moves from being [...] ongoing into [...] dormant” (2011, 265). Research done by other scholars (e.g., Adams et al. 2014) have shown that fans have two reactions when it comes to the post-object fandom. A part of them has a tendency to reinforce the connection with the lost object by reliving it – either by continuing to listen to the music, rewatching the episodes or deepening the connection with other fans (Kretz 2020, 19) – or, some decide to fully reject it and break that bond. Hence, the parasocial breakup. Kretz pragmatically exposes that “[on] the whole, these fandom studies indicate that responses to losing the object of one's fandom may vary from context to context and fan to fan” (2020, 4).

Parasocial breakups function extremely similarly to the way real relationship breakups do. Some scholars have actually used comparisons to real breakups to form their hypotheses on

parasocial breakups. For example, Cohen (2003) looked at how fans would react to a hypothetical end of their favorite television show. This research used a self-definition factor. First, the participants (i.e., fans) exposed the way they believed they would react. Then, Cohen compared those statements to reactions observed from real breakups. Cohen explains his reasoning by saying that “[viewers] judge characters along the same criteria as those they use to judge the people they meet (Perse & Rubin, 1989), and [hence] there are similar patterns in the development of social and parasocial relationships (Rubin & McHugh, 1987)” (2003, 192). The expected results are the same as when a couple splits: feelings of solitude, sadness, frustration and resentment can all come out and take shape.

When it comes to the death of a figure (be it fictional or real), there are other layers to take into consideration. In fact, grief is something that is extremely specific and personal to one’s own life experiences. It is often thought of and described as a multi-stages process. This process involves five stages of grief, a theory created by Swiss psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross in her 1969 book *On Death and Dying*. Also known as the “Kübler-Ross model”, it describes grief as a process going through 5 different feelings and emotions. Those are, in order: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and, finally, acceptance. Similarly to the way Cohen (2003) used research on real-life breakups for his research on parasocial breakups, research on grief after the loss of a real person has been the base for the research of media scholars when it comes to the death of a beloved figure (be that one real or fictional).

Research on the passing of a real person, like already-mentioned David Bowie, has commonly found that fans do go through the denial, depression, and acceptance phases. However, as Kretz (2020, 6) argues, sustained by previous studies carried out by Sanderson and Cheong (2010) and Radford and Bloch (2012), it is less commonly the case for anger and bargaining. As these scholars demonstrated, and I too could observe following Bowie’s death, there is an extremely vehement response immediately following the death of a person with a big community of fans, with an incredible rush to buy objects related to the person.

In fact, Bowie’s record sales not only have been at an all-time high since his death (Gates 2018) but his last album *Blackstar*, released only two days before his passing, became his first ever album (out of his previous 25) to reach the #1 position on the Billboard charts two weeks after his passing (Billboard 2016). It was not only his last album that ranked up in sales: nine of Bowie’s albums made the Billboard chart that same week. However, as much

as these reactions are intense, they are also short lived (Kretz 2020, 6), potentially being the biggest difference between real life grief and parasocial grief.

When it comes to the passing of a fictional character, like (spoiler alert) *Game of Thrones*'s Jon Snow or *Grey's Anatomy*'s Derek Shepherd, it has been observed that fans seem to go through the same five stages of grief. In the case of these examples, however, these deaths take place, of course, in a fictional world. What this means is that, there, the rules of life can be bent and rewritten. In other words, in fictional universes there is always a thin possibility for the characters to come back to life. This was the case for Jon Snow's character, for example. Fictional deaths can be non-permanent, and this important component can influence the way fans experience their grief and their response to the fictional character's death (Kretz 2020, 6-7). Once again, the results "[on] the whole, [...] indicate that fans may experience parasocial grief even when the target of their [Parasocial relationship] is fictional. However, fans' responses may vary based on the circumstances surrounding the character's death" (7).

The parasocial breakup and the parasocial grief, as explained earlier, both stem from the parasocial interactions that are formed between the fan and the figure they love. The latter can either be real (i.e., a living being, like a particular actor, a music band, a football player, etc.) or fictional (i.e., a fictional character of a TV show, movie or video game, and so on). The component that is observed here is the way those interactions lead to the way that an individual will feel regarding that said figure:

Through multiple and ongoing interactions with mediated characters or personae, (what are now called parasocial interactions) viewers come to know mannerisms, behaviors, sense-of-humor, facial expressions and other personal details associated with an individual or character through the media (Stever, 2013). Over time, as the number and quality of those interactions increases, a person may feel that they have developed a relationship with the mediated character or persona. (Kurtin et al. 2019, 33)

What differentiates them from interpersonal relationships is that they are one-sided. Despite the growing connectivity from mass communication, social media's particular interactivity and the blurring of the boundaries between the fans and the object of their liking, it remains so that a relationship is parasocial until the feelings are made known to the object of liking. According to Horton and Wohl (1956), once that is done, it lays beyond the parasocial interaction. Fans constantly seem to navigate the space that exists between these blurred lines.

### 2.2.2. Participation and Repetition

We know fans are very participatory. They wear their favorite sports team's jerseys, sing all the lyrics at their favorite band's concert, recreate dialogues from their favorite shows, and the list goes on. Participatory culture is a concept that blurs the lines between "forms of cultural productions and forms of social exchange" (Jenkins, Itō, and boyd 2015, 35).

For a community to be a prosperous place for participatory culture to thrive, Jenkins, Itō, and boyd explain that there is a notion of the self that leads to a shared understanding of what individuals are participating in. That is, they argue, fans have a clear notion of how their participation (via their productions, behaviors and broadcasting) contributes directly to their own shared well-being (Jenkins, Itō, and boyd 2015, 36). This leads to an interesting observation: a fan is well aware that they are a fan. Even more, they self-identify as a fan. Participatory culture can only thrive in an environment where this identity of the self is aware. Fandoms can only exist if the people that constitute them know they are in them and how their behaviors are being perceived. Fans understand that they are part of a community (i.e., a fandom) and are able to identify if other individuals are too. In short, fans recognize fans.

Tulloch and Jenkins describing fans as "active participants within fandom as a social, cultural, and interpretive institution" (1995, 23). These differ from what they call followers, who are merely "audience members who regularly watch and enjoy [...] programmes but who claim no larger social identity on the basis of this consumption" (23).

This portrait of fans relies on two extremely important aspects: 1) The social identification, rather than the self (or personal) identification of fans (Vinney et al. 2019) and 2) the participatory aspect of fandoms. The latter aspect is accompanied with the increased visibility of fan practices and critically examining those can begin to give a certain understanding of fan dynamics.

In his 2007 white paper, Henry Jenkins defines participatory culture as follows:

[a] culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one's creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices. A participatory culture is also one in which members believe their contributions matter,

and feel some degree of social connection with one another (at the least they care what other people think about what they have created). (2007, 3)

This position is interesting because it links with the process of creation of fandoms. It also hints at the existence of a hierarchical formation within fan communities. It is not only about knowledge possession, but the unfolding of knowledge sharing is an entire ritual of its own. Understanding participatory culture and its strong implications in fan behavior creates a deeper perception of the freedom and voice fans sense they have. In fact, participatory culture has built more focus on the involvement of community, which eventually does lead to individuals possessing a greater sense of responsibility to participate and (re)appropriate the narrative of the original piece (this could be the lyrics of a song, the dialogue between characters of a TV show, or even the development of an entire plot).

The participation of fans is often mentioned together with repetition. Repetition is something that is crucial to fan unity and identity. Fans will rewatch their favorite episode of a particular TV series countless times, listen to an album on loop or attend multiple games in a championship. This “returning” to the same place or object is one of the important characteristics of fans. In fact, through interviews conducted with music and sports fans, Sandvoss (2005) concluded that rather than the level of intensity being the indicator of difference between a fan and an individual that is not a fan, it should be the regular repeated consumption of information about their liking.

Similarly, repetitive and enthusiastic fan talk between fans generates curiosity in outsiders. Let’s say, during school recess, a group of young students always comments on their favorite sports teams wins and losses. That conversation might lead a newcomer to gain interest in that team simply to fit in. Fiske claims that “many fans report that their choice of their object of fandom was determined at least as much by the oral community they wished to join as by any of its inherent characteristics. [...] Many people become drawn into fandom as a means of joining [a] particular social group” (1992, 38).

Participatory culture is also often discussed in regard to fan productions, consumption and labor. Hence, it is easy to understand that fans are a group that has an extreme tendency to be participatory. They create an abundance of new productions, making them very active participants. This is something that is explained further in chapter 2.2.2. Beyond the value for their community, there is a monetary value hidden in these productions. While fan communities might be self-created and self-identified communities, that does not mean that

they do not interact with the capitalistic society they were created under. In fact, Jenkins himself questions “whether meaningful participation can occur under corporately controlled circumstances, when our ability to create and share content is divorced from our capacity to participate in the governance of the platforms through which that content circulates” (Jenkins 2016, 1).

Questioning the economic relationship between fan production and profit is fundamental. The reason for this is to correctly pinpoint the justification and the end goal – or if there even is any – for fan creations. Making profit is usually a collateral reaction, rather than the original goal. But what does this mean exactly? In the recent years, we have observed an astronomical growth in content mostly due to the common usage of the Internet. From this, a market has been created. Fans have always showed interest in owning objects that relate to their likings: think of the posters that would cover a young girl’s wall, t-shirts from tours of music bands, official merchandising sold by the artist, collectable figurines, and the list goes on.<sup>18</sup> While there exists a fan cultural capital that cannot be converted into economic capital (Fiske 1992), there similarly is one that can. The sentimental value of these objects is turned into monetary value, and their circulation (by selling them) is a form of economic capital gain.

A participatory culture is one which embraces the values of diversity and democracy through every aspect of our interactions with each other – one which assumes that we are capable of making decisions, collectively and individually, and that we should have the capacity to express ourselves through a broad range of different forms and practices. (Jenkins, Itō, and boyd 2015, 2)

In short, if there is a defining characteristic that fits in with the behavior of fans, it is its participatory one. Expressed in a community or through a single individual, it gives power of action and decision to both.

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<sup>18</sup> Auction houses know the business of celebrity memorabilia extremely well. While some specialize in the sector (like Julien’s), others also sell Queens’ diamonds and Picassos (like Sotheby’s and Christie’s). These auctions have been the stage for some of the most memorable sale records of celebrity memorabilia. Notably, Marilyn Monroe’s “Happy Birthday, Mr. President” dress sold for nearly \$5M in 2016. The story of the dress does not finish here as, in 2022, reality-TV star Kim Kardashian caused a sensation by wearing it at the Met Gala, proving that celebrities can too see the value in holding these items. Auctions also include more bizarre items. In 2013, one of Lady Gaga’s lost fake nails was sold for over \$12k to a fan. Similarly, a Vegemite toast half-eaten by ex-One Direction member Niall Horan was sold to a fan on eBay for \$100k.

### 2.2.3. The Affective Process

There is a special element that makes for an almost unique feature that is permanently recurring in the fan experience: the emotional attachment of fans. Emotional affiliation, or the affective process (Lamerichs 2018, 205-209), of fans is maybe the strongest element used to showcase the difference between individuals in the spectrum of fans. It is used to differentiate loyal fans, from mere general consumers (Samra and Wos 2014, 265). It is interesting to share that recent research has been conducted in that field, including one of the studies used in this dissertation, and results have shown a “positive association between the strength of one’s personal fan identity and appreciation for a fan object [...] suggesting that the cognitive and affective components of appreciation may be especially pertinent to the development of a personal fan identity” (Vinney et al. 2019, 7).

Affect theory is an approach originally placed within the frame of philosophy by Baruch Spinoza (1677) and later theorized by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987). It has since been transplanted into many further scholarly fields and is of great interest for Fan Studies. It creates a basis to understand more intangible or immaterial parts of fans, namely their emotional and performative aspect. Affect is the deep and intense state in which one finds him or herself when something “touches” them – not physically, but rather bodily. Affect precedes emotion, it is almost an anticipation state. Deleuzian theory further differentiates affect and emotion, explaining the former as a force. For Deleuze and Guattari, affect “[goes] beyond the strength of those who undergo [it]” (1987, 164).

Lamerichs explains Deleuze’s thoughts by giving them an order: “affect is understood as an intensity that allows the subject to produce meanings. Emotions are its conscious result and the way in which affect is digested and understood” (2018, 205-206). Deleuze theorized affect as a merely non-reaction action. That is, it simply “happened”. Brian Massumi, a Professor in the Department of Communication Sciences at the University of Montréal and one of the major contributors to translating Deleuze and Guattari’s work from French to English, explained it as a “purely autonomic [reaction]” (2002, 24). However, as Lamerichs elaborates, affect can be seen as a conscious antecedent stance, “in which the subject prepares to be overwhelmed and invites a loss of the self” (2018, 206). Lamerichs also cites Grossberg’s work on the relationship between affect and fandom: “Affect is not the same as

either emotions or desires. Affect is closely tied to what we often describe as the feeling of life” (Grossberg 1992, cited by Lamerichs 2018, 207).

The way fans connect goes beyond “simply liking something”. Rather, some fan practices are entirely lived through affective investments – socially, creatively, and emotionally (Lamerichs 2018, 21). Lamerichs goes even further by explaining that fans are the ones that allocate and generate the emotional connection, she calls it the *affective reception* (2018, 30). The fan experience is so emotionally deeply felt that it is an “embodied experience” (30). This affective relationship can be viewed usually when there is a strong wish to deepen the connection with the source, and when this leads to the production and “recontextualization and reimagining of the source text” (30).

Connecting everything, the theory of affect circles back to how grounded in social environment and norms the fan experience is. More than that, it is grounded in fan identity. The affective process of the fan experience essentially relies on how fans identify and engage with some of the narratives created by what they like. Still using Grossberg’s work, Lamerichs explains that affect “gives meaning to our lives and provides a lens through which to view the world and ourselves. Fans are connected by these affective structures” (2018, 207-208). Affect makes us wish to participate, get invested, belong. Lamerichs concludes by saying that:

[the] emphasis is on process rather than on space or practice because it is something that we simultaneously undergo and socially construct. Process also highlights the dynamics of our relationship with fiction, in which some elements matter more than others at different points in our lives. We constantly work through our favorite narratives again through references and rereading. (2018, 208)

The affective process is interesting to understand because it provides for a plural understanding rather than a fixed determination of fans. Making it a process implies that it can develop and change in value over time, have different start (and end) points, and can be lived and experienced differently by each individual – while still following a common consensus of affect.

Affect goes beyond taste or feelings, because fans can carry those (for themselves, or the object of their liking) beyond positive feelings. Oppositional taste, or negative feelings, are commonly carried by fans too. If we were to look at fans exclusively by the emotional

spectrum then, there would be a discordance. By explaining it with the affect process, the entire spectrum of emotional experience is included (Lamerichs 2018, 208).

#### **2.2.4. Possession and Consumption**

While we have been exploring and further understanding how the behavior of fans interacts with ideas of identity and performativity, the relationship between fan behaviors and consumerism should also be considered. This does not automatically need to be translated into a marketing or economic research but deciding to look further at the way fans consume is not an idea that seems so farfetched. Consumption behaviors are intimately weaved into the formation of identity too. Surely, it is fairly easy to understand that consumption is actually central to many fan practices.

In fact, Cristofari and Guitton point out that the phenomena these practices depend on “are consumer industries in their own right” (2017, 714). Fiske undertook a more in-dept approach in his book *The Cultural Economy of Fandom* (1992) by researching exactly which dynamics composed the main factors of fan behavior. Possession and consumption are two of those that are central to understanding fans. Fiske stated in a quite simple manner that “fan knowledge helps to distinguish a particular fan community (those who possess it) from others (those who do not)” (1992, 42-43). In other words, possessing (knowledge and/or material goods) marks a way to differentiate between who is a fan and who is not.

As always with fan behaviors, it is important to note that the economics of fan communities and their material consumption practices do not follow a linear correlation with the level of loyalty that fans engage in pursuing their activities. Many variables impact the access to possession, and it does not exclusively have to mean monetary barriers. In fact, some of the factors that could make access to fan consumption difficult are geographical space (i.e., physical distance), language barriers (i.e., translations are not available), race (i.e., fandom racism<sup>19</sup>), age (i.e., restrictions of access for minors), gender (e.g., culture in which women’s rights might still be highly restricted) and many more could be mentioned here. These

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<sup>19</sup> Fandom racism is a term used in non-academic settings, mostly used by fans on social media platforms. It refers to a greater issue of race amongst not only fandoms, but the field of Fan Studies itself too. For more information regarding fandom racism, see Mel Stanfill's (2018) “The Unbearable Whiteness of Fandom and Fan Studies” and Rukmini Pande's (2020) “How (Not) to Talk about Race: A Critique of Methodological Practices in Fan Studies”.

difficulties, which will be explored in more detail further on in this research, can be the source of breaches in fan communities. However, observing the motivations and habits of fan consumerism leads to understanding recurrent habits of fans and prove a common interest.

If the rules of the traditional economy are already quite blurred, the economics of fans are an even more complex system. This hybrid parallel system develops in a space where monetary consumption/compensation cohabit with the “gift economy” that fans base their exchanges on (Cristofari and Guitton 2017, 714). This bases itself on the fact that fans tend to exchange their productions for no monetary value but rather that this possession translates into a knowledge capital that “[results] in individual increases of social capital amongst the community” (714). This idea does not fall far from the description Bourdieu gives of cultural capital, in which he describes the latter as an economy in which people invest and accumulate capital (Bourdieu 1986, 19). Bourdieu’s idea is interesting too because of its depiction of the relationship between cultural taste, economic status, education (and educational levels) and social space (Bourdieu 1984, 1).

Kloet and Zoonen, quoting Hills, touch on the duality of fandoms when it comes to their economy: “Fans are both commodity-completists and they express anti-commercial beliefs or ‘ideologies’” (Hills 2002, cited by Kloet and Zoonen 2007, 329). It is this balance between consumption and resistance that creates an interesting factor. The economics of fans oscillates, on the one hand, with the internal creation and formation of its own rules in contrast to the ones of the mainstream; on the other hand, it continues to transpose to its own system characteristics from the exact mainstream format it wants to oppose itself to. As argued by Kloet and Zoonen: “[The] identity [of fans] is constructed in the never-ending dialectic inside and outside commodification” (2007, 329).

However, the possession of fan capital constitutes a uniting process, instead of a divisive one – regardless of the exclusionary prospects that it involves – because it only applies to fans. In other words, if a fan follows these system characteristics, then these economic rules apply. That would not be the case for other communities. The specifics of these are that because the possession of fan cultural capital is so exclusive, it means it is not only excluded from the “official cultural capital” (Fiske 1992, 43) but it cannot be converted into any monetary capital. Fiske gives the concrete example that no amount of fan possession will

give access to new education or career opportunities (42). This creates then a bubble that is so exclusive to fans that it explains why this resulted in a uniting factor: to put it quite simply, it is unique to fans.

Essentially, fans will behave like consumers (Samra and Wos 2014, 264). Many scholars have established a co-relation between the repetition of a purchase with the identification of an individual as a fan. This recurring pattern has been pointed out by people who self-identify as fans (Sandvoss 2005). It is then an interesting factor when related to involvement levels – not only emotionally, but monetarily too. In short, it can be used to indicate loyalty and commitment.

When it comes to possession, one could not talk about fans without mentioning the habit of collecting. In this specific sense, it relates to the activity of beholding as much material goods as possible to express and show the level of commitment to the subject. It is where the economic capital and the fan/cultural capital intertwine. As Fiske puts it: “Knowledge, like money, is always a source of power” (1992, 43). The author emphasizes how “the distinctiveness [of collecting] lies in the extent of the collection rather than in their uniqueness or authenticity as cultural objects” (44). In short, he explains that quantity surpasses quality.

As with everything, there are exceptions, and some more well-off (economically speaking) fans will get to invest on more expensive and unique objects. It is no secret that fans are known to invest quite a lot of money just to own some (even bizarre) object that their favorite singer, actor or athlete might have used once. It is even easier to visualize the horde of people surrounding celebrities feverously asking for an autograph or a photo because they know some fans will spend large amounts of money just to own such items. In that sense, possession in fan culture is connected to not only cultural value, but a definite economic one too. These even evolve and get exchanged in their very own markets. Fan conventions are a hub for buying, selling and exchanging all sorts of memorabilia. Fiske summarized this specific aspect regarding material possession by explaining that:

[capitalist] societies are built upon accumulation and investment, and this is as true of their cultural as well as financial economies. The shadow economy of fan culture in many ways parallels the workings of the official culture, but it adapts them to the habitus of the subordinate. A habitus involves not only the cultural dimension of taste, discrimination, and attitude towards the cultural objects or events, but also the social dimension of economics (and education) upon which those tastes are mapped: a habitus

is thus both a mental disposition and a ‘geographical’ disposition in the social space. So the differences between fan collections and art collections are socio-economic. Fan collections tend to be of cheap, mass-produced objects, and stress quantity and all-inclusiveness over quality or exclusivity. Some fans, whose economic status allows them to discriminate between the authentic and the mass-produced, the original and the reproduction, approximate much more closely to the official cultural capitalist, and their collections can be more readily turned into economic capital. (1992, 45)

The key differentiation in this remains the possession of non-material capital. In other words, possession of knowledge. “It is the exclusion of popular or fan cultural capital from the educational system that excludes it from the official and disconnects it from the economic” (Fiske 1992, 45). Possession of knowledge is only relevant within the communities. It does not positively differentiate the fans from the ones who are not fans because of its lack of economic value and cannot be converted into any form of extra value for the fans outside of the fandoms.

### **2.2.5. Productivity and Production**

Booth puts it quite plainly: fans create because it is “fun to share” (2010, 12). This is not to take away from the seriousness or intricacy of the works that are created, but rather he explains that there would be no fan productivity if it wasn’t for the “playful pleasure from the act or existence of their fandom” (12). The full experience of fandom seems to extend to the need for fans to participate in the creation of new texts (fanfiction), fan drawings (fanart), cosplaying and the list goes on. These productions are essentially thriving and flooding the Internet. This new content is a way to engage with the community, but it maintains the connection that the fans have with their object of liking.

In fact, fan productions have become so prolific that it could be considered the main fan activity – if one were not to include fan talk, which is an extremely hard activity to quantify or translate into values. To explain this statement, I would argue that this activity is not only the one that is the easiest to have access to, but it is also one that can be done in parallel to many others. Its cumulative aspect makes it so that it is often a chosen activity on the sideline of other ones. It goes without saying that its extreme popularity simply keeps on attracting new fans, creating a snowball effect.

In this day and age, fans are producers too (Kloet and Zoonen 2007, 326). The linear progression and scale from fan to producer the way old scholars used to define these two

groups is nowadays not only blurred but also overlapping. In fact, it is the inherent productive nature of fans that interests us here. Production is not exclusive to fans, of course. However, it is a recurring enough behavior that it makes it so that it is interesting for us to highlight it. Again, recurrency is not enough to make it a component but “what makes fandom distinct is the socio-cultural nature of this production and its relationship to other forms of cultural creations” (Lanier and Fowler 2013, 286).

The relationship between fan production and “levels” of dedication does not necessarily need to be an equally growing one. That is, individuals that do identify with the need to express their dedication via means of production do not automatically need to fall out of the definition of a fan. The interesting aspect to observe here is rather the way in which these traditionally marketing and economic concepts interact with the socio-cultural concepts we have been exploring until now (i.e., community, identity, etc.).

If we spend a short moment on the definitions of the words, there is a curious dynamic to be explored. Production related to the process. Creation would be the most proper synonym. It does not relate to any form of qualitative analysis. It is merely the process of making something come to life. Opposed to that, productivity does relate to the measurement of a certain defined component. It can relate to the quality, the efficiency and/or the quantity. In that sense, productivity presents a quantitative factor. However, and this is not uncommon in any sociological and cultural studies, it is important to repeat that quantitative factors do not always give a true to life result. Effectively, fan levels of devotion are hardly measurable. A case in point would be one of the studies used in this dissertation, which looks into “devoted fans of the *Harry Potter* series” (Tsay-Vogel and Sanders 2017, 2) as participants, but fails to necessarily measure that devotion. Here, the fans self-identify as devoted fans and that is the only measure available.

We now understand that fans are very active in the way they interact with their subject of affection, thus leading to the creation of new content. That can turn into many different forms of production. However, it is relevant to note that production does not necessarily equal the literal creation of a physical (or not) object. Rather, it can include the production of meanings, concerns and interpretations. In fact, Fiske defined three separate modes of fan production: semiotic, enunciative and textual (1992, 37-39).

- *Semiotic productivity* consists of an extremely personal, “essentially interior” (37) behavior. Semiotic productivity is entirely non-physical. That is, it consists in the creation and production of “meanings of social identity and of social experience” (37).
- *Enunciative productivity*, despite its name, does not only include verbal production. While fan talk is the activity from which the name derives, it is important to note that it also includes non-verbal communication such as more performative behaviors. Some examples could be cosplaying, wearing a certain team’s jersey, etc.
- *Textual productivity* is extremely straightforward in the sense that it consists of content that is text-based, like fanfiction for example.

Fans typically seem to like or relate to pieces of content because there is a pre-existing connection and/or affinity between the individuals and said content. What this means is that the life of the individuals has some sort of “compatibility [of] meanings” (Lanier and Fowler 2013, 286) with their object of affection. However, this also implies that those compatibilities can be of more negative feelings. For example, annoyance, bitterness and friction can also be reasons that lead to fan production. Specifically, this specific form of creation supports the idea that fans create their own forms of meanings. It is easy to understand that negative connotations might want to be changed, rewritten, or deleted all together. This is the bubbling start for ideas to emerge and for the creativity of fans to come to life.

Still, within the reality realm of the original content, there is another aspect that is worth exploring: there is a peculiar wish from fans to resist, and even contradict, the original producers of the content (Hills 2002; Jenkins 1992). Due to their accumulation of knowledge, fans begin to feel a sense of ownership. Fiske states that “[the] reverence, even adoration, fans feel for their object of fandom sits surprisingly easily with the contradictory feeling that they also ‘possess’ that object, it is their popular cultural capital” (1992, 40). Circling back to the resistance aspect of fans, this means that fans almost feel like they “know better”: the celebrities, the fictional characters, the songs, or the sports clubs, among others. Examples are easy to think of: sports fans criticizing the coach of their favorite team, music fans stating that the new song their favorite artist came out with “does not quite sound like

them”, or TV show fans openly claiming they would do a much better job than the writers. This is a very common trait that can be seen throughout, regardless of the fandoms.

This viewpoint leads to an extreme amount of fan productions that incorporate many of the original content, but with twists and changes. Fiske quite beautifully says that it is “a form of cultural labor to fill the gaps left by legitimate culture” (1992, 33). The fans, wanting to create what they believe to “be better”, produce a lot of side content. This generated new production accumulates itself in the pursuit of a much deeper connection from the fans, for the fans. This is not necessarily a very straightforward thought process but to put it simply, the fans love the original piece well enough that they wish to create an even deeper meaning and relation with it. For that, they create it “better” themselves. Once again, Fiske explains phenomenon by saying that “[fandom] offers ways of filling cultural lack and provides the social prestige and self-esteem that go with cultural capital” (33).

This sort of circular, “in-house”, economy is something that John Fiske was a pioneer in researching and explaining. His essay, “The Cultural Economy of Fandom”, which first appeared in the book *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, edited by Lisa A. Lewis in 1992, laid the foundation for many observations on the behaviors of fans. The essay finds its source in Bourdieu’s conceptual idea of cultural capital and “culture as an economy in which people invest and accumulate capital” (Fiske 1992, 31). However, it goes beyond that by adding the way gender, race and age affect it too. This work is not only central to grasping the reasons that push fans to produce, as we have mentioned in this dissertation until this point, but also to get a wider perspective on how this production is perceived by the mainstream culture. It gives us a greater understanding on how it can be used to give a sort of status (higher or lower) to the individual fan.

The valorization of fan production in the “scale” of fan status is the economy of legitimization. What this term means is that, through the exchange of this fan-made production, an added value of legitimacy is given to the fans. In simple terms, their status of fan is legitimized through their participation in this economy of production. Not only that, but this economy of legitimization supports the different status amongst fans by giving or taking legitimacy. Lanier and Fowler provide a fairly synthesized overview in this regard:

First, fandom is based on a distinctive mode of reception. In particular, fans refuse to maintain and openly resist a separation or critical distance between themselves and the products of popular culture. This directly challenges dominant culture, which needs to

maintain the division of text and reader in order for the status quo to possess and defend their economic or cultural capital (Fiske 1989; Jenson 1992). Second, fandom constitutes a particular interpretive community (Jenkins 1992a). While all consumers actively engage in semiotic production (i.e., the production of meaning) (Grossberg 1992), fans also engage in enunciative production (i.e., the social communication and interpretation of meaning) (Fiske 1992). That is, fans share and debate their co-created meanings with others who possess a similar interest in the particular cultural text (Bacon-Smith 1992; Kozinets 2001). Third, fandom constitutes a particular art world (Jenkins 1992b). Although fandom can be viewed in terms of its relation to the production, distribution, and consumption of the commodities of popular culture, it also constitutes a creative world of its own that moves beyond simply consuming pre-existing texts and engages in the production, distribution, and consumption of its own texts (Fiske 1992). Fourth, fandom constitutes an alternative social community (Jenkins 1992b). Having been denied access to official economic and cultural capital, fandom establishes a community that is not based on the traditional markers of status and success, but on what fans directly and openly contribute to the community (Kozinets 2001). (2013, 286)

The way fans participate and receive their own economic and cultural systems give us an insight into not only how fan communities work but what makes them so attractive as well. Recognizing that this is a system with its own set of rules in terms of production, reception, distribution and consumption is only the starting point for understanding why people want to join said system.

### **2.2.6. Entertainment and Pleasure**

*De gustibus non est disputandum*, or in English “In matters of taste, there can be no disputes”, is a phrase often used to signify that everyone has their own preferences and that there is no point in arguing about them. While the phrase is typically used in a light-hearted way, there is some truth to it. Everyone does have their own unique taste, and it is often difficult, if not impossible, to say that one person’s taste is better or worse than another’s. This, of course, also applies to fans. This dissertation has never made its purpose to discuss or argue about the taste of fans, or even to classify it in terms of “better” or “worse” – be that between genres, or within the fandoms themselves. Instead, it wants to understand fan culture horizontally and explore how motivations are built and how the spark is initiated.

In that sense, one cannot talk about fandoms without mentioning their base in entertainment and pleasure. It is quite an interesting correlation to make, especially when one focuses a bit more on the words: a fan is a person that really enjoys something, or another way to say it would be that they are usually quite entertained by it. Pushing it even further, and looking at

entertainment as a form of activity, rather than as the experience of being provided with enjoyment, makes for thinking about the position (and motivations) of the audience (in this case, fans).

Pleasure as motivation for fan identity is a recurrently researched characteristic in academia, especially in the field of Psychology. It is not surprising, as the study of fan behavior (i.e., Fan Studies) overlaps with the study of human behavior (i.e., Psychology). For centuries, philosophers and scientists have debated the nature of human beings and what motivates them to act, from Plato's Cave to Maslow's hierarchy of needs. In a much narrower scale, this is what this dissertation focuses on – except it is only for a specific part of humans, it is for fans only.

Not only Psychology scholars, but academics in the field of Media have too long been interested in understanding how different types of media can produce different experiences for audiences (Bacon-Smith 1992; Cherry 2002). In recent years, this line of inquiry has been invigorated by new theories and methodologies, as we have already mentioned and theorized in this dissertation. Another characteristic that continues to be a focus point for these scholars is entertainment. In this case, entertainment is thought of as the experience of enjoyment. It results in a “pleasurable affective response” (Tsay-Vogel and Sanders 2017, 4). With that in mind, we can open up the box of the “paradox of the enjoyment” (Oliver and Raney 2011, 985). This refers to the gratification, or enjoyment, of negative-inducing media. For example, rather difficult-themed movies or sad music being enjoyed.

To start to make sense of that phenomenon, Tsay-Vogel and Sanders (2017) explain that there are two types of motivation when it comes to the consumption of media: the hedonic and the eudaemonic. The distinctions between hedonic and eudaemonic motivations is one that has been only recently applied to audience motivations. Whereas the former is considered to be essentially driven by pleasure or diversion (i.e., “likes”), the latter finds its source in a strong wish for meaning and real values (Tsay-Vogel and Sanders 2017, 3). Accordingly, the motivation and appreciation for the consumption of a certain piece of content can be “characterized by both positive and negative affect” (5) due to the fact that it can be originated by a desire to find a greater meaning or value, and yet still be categorized by the fans as entertainment and/or pleasure.

In light of motivational differences between the search for pleasure and meaning from media, eudaimonically driven individuals are perhaps interested in more cognitively involved media experiences that enhance psychological wellbeing (i.e., the search for meaning in life), rather than media offerings which solely provide excitement, delight, and escapism. Eudaimonic motivations, thus, are connected closely with more serious entertainment fare such as documentaries/nonfiction, dramas, and science fiction, and are directly related to mixed affect (Oliver & Raney, 2011). (Tsay-Vogel and Sanders 2017, 3)

In that sense, we can argue that enjoyment does not always derive from positive and pleasurable content. Furthermore, the limits of enjoyment do not end here. As we have established, fandom implies that single fans get together. Therefore, it is sensible to say that “members experience enjoyment not only in sharing their passion and devotion toward the media entity with other fans, but also in experiencing the narrative and universe—the foundation of their fan community and social identity” (Tsay-Vogel and Sanders 2017, 5). The entertainment does not have solely to come from the original content itself, but rather it can be cultivated by the community or by a search for a greater meaning and/or sense of purpose (13).

Oliver and Raney (2011) conducted research on the motivations for seeking entertainment (specifically in movies), based on four studies conducted with 268, 533, 36 and 1,029 participants. The scholars explain enjoyment as not just pleasure, but also as “metaemotions”, as they word it (Oliver and Raney 2011, 985). Metaemotions can be described as emotions about emotions. This means that a secondary emotion will be created from the first primary emotion. As an example: a primary emotion of compassion deriving from watching an overall sad movie will then metamorphose into a secondary emotion of gratification and/or pleasure. In short, Olivier and Raney mention that “moving or meaningful entertainment [can] be gratifying” (985).

Similarly, and connecting with Tsay-Vogel and Sander’s explanations of hedonic and eudaemonic motivations, Oliver and Raney (2011, 985) explain that a dimension of “meaningfulness” is part of the component of enjoyment. Furthermore, they propose to use the term “appreciation” rather than “enjoyment” (984-985). This discussion continues to highlight the paradox of seeking negative (i.e., sad, scary, somber, etc.) entertainment, and enjoying it. Oliver and Raney’s research demonstrated that “in addition to [...] purposes of fun and pleasure, individuals also [seek] purposes of greater insight and meaningfulness” (1001).

### **3. The Dark Side of Fandom**

Fandom is often thought of as a relatively harmless pastime, but fans can be ferociously protective, and even vicious. In fact, “[fans] discriminate fiercely: the boundaries between what falls within their fandom and what does not are sharply drawn” (Fiske 1992, 34). Anything that is perceived as being outside of those bounds can be met with a certain hostility, and to a certain degree, even violence. This can be seen in the way fan communities often police their own members, enforcing strict rules about what can and cannot be discussed, and how they create hierarchies that give (or take) a form of power to selected fans. It can also be seen in the way fans interact with creators, often demanding that they adhere to a very specific vision of what the fandom should be. In some cases, this can also lead to forms of violence – physical or not – both towards other members within the fandom, but mostly towards outsiders. A notable example is, of course, the correlation of violence within sports and the community of sports fans (although they are not the only ones). This can be seen in the hefty competition between members of opposite teams and demonstrations during sport events, but it has also been observed between fans and their teams, especially when the team loses.

At this point of the dissertation, it is hopefully clear that not all characteristics apply to all individual fans. However, this chapter wishes to focus on aspects of fandom that create division, rather than union. What this means is that we have seen that fandom has a community of individuals. It brings people together, it unites them; and yet, there are few aspects that are discriminatory. We have already mentioned factors like age, race and social background potentially impacting individuals differently. In the following subchapters, our attention will be on factors that are repeated and constant (and hence relevant to mention and explore so as to understand all the facets of fan culture) but produce behaviors and discourses that are divisive.

### 3.1. Limits of Fan Culture: Who Is *Not* a Fan?

The term fan is used so colloquially and frequently that not only is it hard to determine a proper definition for it but looking at the limits of the term is as much of a hard task. To define what a fan is, one can also look at what a fan is not.

Groene and Hettinger explain that the “entering” and “exiting” of the identity is done freely:

[There] are typically no structural or enforced requirements/boundaries to constrain group size or membership of media fandoms. Rather, media fandoms are often ‘imagined’ or ‘perceived’ communities that do not necessarily involve frequent contact/interaction, and they are also typically not associated with societal status markers or extrinsic rewards. Thus, fan identity is unlike some social identity categories in the sense that it is typically unmonitored and freely chosen by the identifier for the intrinsic rewards and benefits it offers, rather than being societally assigned, expected, and/or policed. (2016, 26)

Despite the movement, the individual might not be entirely aware of it, namely because the decision-making does not always have to be entirely unbiased or totally make sense. This means is that there are components that are much more empirical that can play a role. The passing of time, evolution in the field technology, change of interests or changes in the private lives of individuals all can affect directly the way an individual self-identifies (or not) as a fan. This idea of movement through a spectrum of fan identity reflects again Bourdieu’s model of social space and social mobility (1989, 14-17). “Social space is that through which both class or social groups and individuals move through time” (Fiske 1992, 33).

Gray proposes to use the term “non-fan” when referring to an individual that *does* consume or partake in fan activities, “but not with any intense involvement” (2003, 74). The non-fan is sometimes also referred to as the “invisible fan” (Geraghty 2012). It is important to note that non-fans do differ from “people who are not fans” in the sense that there still is some activity. These non-fans do not have as much knowledge, and are more irregular (in their participation, watching, activities, etc.) but there is still *some*. Gray exemplifies non-fans with a relatable scenario from one of the participants of his research. That participant explains that they watch four episodes of *The Simpsons* every six months, and do take some pleasure in that (2003, 74-75). What this shows is that the involvement of these individuals is much lower, irregular in time and a lot laxer. However, the central key point is that they do still show interest and take pleasure in it (75).

Metaphorical spaces are interesting when we want to define boundaries or limits. Understanding who is and who is not a fan, and within the communities themselves, is part of what this dissertation proposes to do. Fans create these boundaries mostly via judgement of “good” fans and “bad” fans. Stanfill states that “[internalized] stereotypes about bad fans and the need to define oneself as appropriate leads to the production and maintenance of boundaries” (2013, 122). In that sense, stereotypes regarding certain behaviors and subgroups are used by the fans themselves to delimitate who is and who is not a fan.

Lastly, fan communities tend to create their hierarchies following a social stratification structure (Stern 2016, 27). What this means is that the hierarchy is based on social value. There are many categories that can be taken into account here, like gender and sexuality. These social factors are then responsible for the marginalization of some fans within their own fandoms, obligating them to create their own sub-communities. Stern conducted an entire study that concluded the following:

[members] are separated into in-groups and out-groups based on their social identities. In-groups and out-groups were defined by oppressive norms and social expectations that were then perpetuated within community boundaries. Community boundaries separated members into desirable and undesirable identities that mirrored the social stratification within broader society. (2016, 39)

### **3.1.1. The Anti-Fans**

After trying to explain and define where the boundaries lay between fans and “non-fans”, there is another concept that stands opposite to the one of fans: the “anti-fans”. In short, anti-fans are individuals that heavily dislikes a certain object (Fuschillo 2020, 20). Their behaviors are also organized, and the interest in approaching such a concept as anti-fans in a dissertation about fan culture is to understand the diversity of the field.

Generally speaking, in contemporary celebrity fandom, fans are united with shared interests, but differentiated with beliefs. Those who own different beliefs, or are from a genre without showing much interest in, are reminding researchers that fandom studies are far from monolithic and bring this study into deeper thoughts over the diversities of fandom that non-fans and anti-fans are as important as fans to fandom studies. Studies on this diversity explore the dark side of fandom which is closely related to the cyberviolence phenomenon happening in contemporary fandom. Gray (2003) defines anti-fandom as a realm of audiences who are not necessarily against fandom in itself, but strongly dislike a given object or a genre, and may consider it pointless, immoral and/or unaesthetic. Previous anti-fandom practice proves that they can be organized and commercialized as their fan counterparts, and can even be conducted as alternative

tactics of gaining attention because sometimes infamy is as important as fame (Gray, 2003; Widholm, 2014). Anti-fans have various personalized reception modes over a disliked object or a celebrity figure, while this reception mode seems unnecessary to non-fans. (Miao 2020, 15)

Anti-fans not only dislike a certain object, but they also act on this dislike. In virtue of that, anti-fans will commonly follow the same characteristics that fans do. They organize, consume, possess, perform and share in a similar way to fans (Fuschillo 2020, 24), except that their intent is different. While for fans it comes from a place of admiration, respect or love, for non-fans it comes from dislike, disrespect and even hate.

Examples of anti-fans are not hard to think of. First, when it comes to sport, it has been explained that rivalry plays a big role. Hence, so do anti-fans. Anti-fans will hold a lot of knowledge regarding the opposite teams, especially a rival one, participate in common fannish activities and follow regular events to keep track of results of their adversary. Some of them might even push it to further extent, organizing to perform their dislike of the other team, by chanting diminishing songs, damaging property, or even just booing and calling out degrading nicknames.<sup>20</sup>

The examples do not end there. In fact, dislike, or even hate, have a way of propagating fast. Rooted in the idea that popular culture is equated with the mainstream and the masses (term not employed here in a negative way), other examples of anti-fans come from heavily liked things, which eventually turn into heavily disliked things. In this case, the list of examples grows longer and longer: Taylor Swift, Reggaeton music, the *Twilight* saga, the *Friends* TV series, and so on. Again, these anti-fans will organize and openly share their dislike, finding gratification in expressing that these topics are “beneath them” or trivial (based on their judgment).<sup>21</sup>

The last example is slightly different: once fans turning into anti-fans. Fans cultivate a bond with the topic they like. If that bond is broken, it can lead to fans changing their behaviors.

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<sup>20</sup> When it comes to sports, the examples are many. Portuguese football has a longstanding rivalry between three clubs. Fans of these clubs have not only created nicknames for their adversaries – FC Porto fans are called “*tripeiros*”, SL Benfica fans are called “*lampiões*” and Sporting CP fans are called “*lagartos*” – but these terms are used as insults, oftentimes used in phrases that rhyme or accompanied with other words to make them even more vulgar.

<sup>21</sup> From 2013 to 2017, the now inactive Tumblr account [reasonswhyihatetaylorswift](#) (Reasons Why I Hate Taylor Swift) was actively promoting reasons to dislike Taylor Swift. The most popular post had over 300k interactions, with different accounts continuously adding reasons to the list.

If their favorite band's new album has a new sound or if the storyline of a TV show suddenly takes an unexpected route, fans can feel deceived. Thus, turning into anti-fans.<sup>22</sup>

To summarize, Gray explains that anti-fans do not necessarily position themselves as against fandom or fannish activities, but rather as haters of the specific topic of the fandom (2003, 70). Some of the reasons for this strong dislike are that they consider the object to lack in value, moral, aesthetics and more. Gray even goes to the extent of saying that anti-fans are “variously bothered, insulted or otherwise assaulted by [the] presence [of the object]” (70). In that sense, he explains that this strong dislike finds an origin in having some knowledge about the topic. This means that anti-fans hold and possess knowledge the same way that fans would do. The difference here is that this knowledge does not produce positive reactions (the way it would for fans), but rather will produce negative ones (70).

### **3.2. The Groupie and Fangirl Phenomena: The Roles of Gender and Sexism**

The Urban Dictionary is an American website in which its own community suggests the definition of a word, and votes for the most accurate one. Originally intended as a parody and a space for phrases and words of Internet slang and/or informal cultural lingo not found in classic dictionaries (Nguyen, McGillivray, and Yasseri 2018, 3), it is now an open-source for any word or phrase. Their slogan is “Urban Dictionary Is Written by You”. Launched in 1999, it has now become a source of interest for many internet users, as well as scholars that use it to monitor and study language innovation (2). What matters the most for this dissertation is the participatory aspect, as it is an interesting resource to study the general opinion regarding a certain term. There is, in fact, a definition for the word “fangirl” on the website. The most voted definition currently has 5,920 likes and reads as follows:

A rabid breed of human female who is [obsessed] with either a fictional character or an actor. Similar to the breed of fanboy. Fangirls congregate at anime conventions and livejournal. Have been known to glomp, grope, and tackle when encountering said obessions. (Urban Dictionary)<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> TV Show *Game of Thrones*, already mentioned a few times in this dissertation, suffered from this specific anti-fans phenomenon. Having amassed a considerable following of devoted fans throughout most of the run of the show, the final season did not convince many members of the fandom. In fact, while a good portion of the show is an adaptation from the book series *A Song of Ice and Fire*, the last season comes as an exception since the production of the TV show version surpassed the production of the last volumes of the book series. Fans were so critical to the point of turning their backs to the show.

<sup>23</sup> Urban Dictionary. 2003. “fangirl”. <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=fangirl>

The number of words with a negative connotation in that definition is dreadful. In recent years, there has been a growing movement to challenge traditional gender norms. Scholars and activists alike have pushed forward that some narratives are not up to date anymore and should be challenged (Gerrard 2021; Salazar Rodríguez 2015). However, when it comes to fan identities and behaviors, some controversial stereotypes continue to persevere. For example, when it comes to sports, male fans are often seen as more passionate and knowledgeable about their favorite teams, while female fans are stereotyped as being more interested in the players themselves due to their attractiveness. Similarly, male fans are typically assumed to be more aggressive and vocal in their support, while female fans are often seen as being more restrained and calmer. The term “fanboy” exists, but funnily enough its lack of use has made for the “opposite” (or complementary meaning) of fangirl not being fanboy, but rather just *fan*. In a sense, we understand that the masculine fans are the “real fans” (Salazar Rodríguez 2015, 82).

Fangirl is not the only word used to describe fans who identify as women and that has a negative connotation. Another term that is very commonly used and has not yet been fully developed in this dissertation is the groupie. The term “groupie” first emerged during the 1960s (Gerrard 2021, 2). The music magazine *Rolling Stone* published an article titled “Groupies: The Girls of Rock” in February 1969 and is thought to be at the center of the widespread use of the term. At that time, it was used to describe young women who were devoted fans of male musicians, and who were allegedly more interested in having sexual relations with them than in their music (4). In some cases, groupies would follow bands on tour,<sup>24</sup> and they were often seen as a nuisance by the musicians themselves.

Over time, the term ‘groupie’ has become detached from its roots in music and sexuality, and it is now used to describe fans of other genres, including books, television shows, and even sports teams.<sup>25</sup> While the origin of the term may be controversial, there is no doubt that

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<sup>24</sup> *Almost Famous* (2000) is an American film that revolves around the experience of groupies. Kate Hudson’s character “Penny Lane” was loosely inspired by real-life groupie Pennie Lane (born Pennie Ann Trumbull). The latter is well-known to be a member of The Flying Garter Girls, a group that travelled alongside rock musicians. The former has an incredibly (almost) famous line that states: “*We are not Groupies. Groupies sleep with rockstars because they want to be near someone famous. We are here because of the music, we inspire the music. We are Band Aids.*”

<sup>25</sup> In sports specifically, we have seen an increase in the creation of terms that are even more derogatory and negatively charged than groupie. These terms are used towards women fans, on the basis that the only reason they show interest in the sport is due to their sexual attraction to the masculine players. Some examples of these terms are “lacrosstitute” (Lacross), “puck bunny” (Ice Hockey) or “jersey chaser”.

it has become an integral part of fan culture. What interests us here is the connotation that continues to be applied to the term despite its evolution and even the reappropriation of the term by the fans, reclaiming the term to empower themselves and stop the perpetuity of what once was a pejorative term.

Fandom and fan studies scholars have long noted the ways in which female fans are devalued within fan cultures (Jenkins 1992; Coppa 2006; Busse 2008). Pamela Wojcik, a professor of Film, Television, and Theatre, as well as Gender Studies and American Studies, says that:

The dismissal of fangirls is familiar to those of us who study pop culture as a stereotypical denigration of feminized mass culture in opposition to masculine “art.” It assumes that female fans are an add-on, derivative, and lesser than male fandom, which is assumed to be motivated by more serious interests. (2013)

Fans, fandoms and behaviors are devalued because they are seen as being related to non-‘quality’ feminine subjects (Gerrard 2021, 2). Feminine fandom is more commonly associated with everything that is commercial and/or mainstream (Salazar Rodríguez 2015, 77). By association, this means that it is made for a larger audience. In that sense, then, that same audience is thought of as a more passive, less rational and more easily manipulated public (80).

Early fan culture scholar Bacon-Smith (1992) already approached the assumption that fandom is globally seen as a primarily female activity and this leading to the devaluation of fandom as a whole. This is because femininity is often seen as inferior to masculinity, and thus anything that is associated with femininity is also seen as inferior. Feminine fan behaviors are often viewed as “lacking in substance” (Gerrard 2021, 5). Generally, this means that feminine interests connote a lower “value”. The overall persistence of these stereotypes suggests that they are deeply entrenched in our culture. This endurance is likely due in part to the fact that these stereotypes reinforce existing power structures and help to maintain the status quo. While it has been a subject put a bit to the side when it comes to academia, these outdated ideas about gender continue to shape our perceptions of fan behavior.

This can be seen in the way that many fan activities are dismissed as “futile” or “immature”, simply because they are associated with femininity. Another way of saying this is that it has been observed that, even when male fans and female fans participate in the same fan behaviors, the feminine behaviors are socially judged and rejected in a greater scale (Salazar

Rodríguez 2015, 82-86). Newson gives an explicit example: “[Football<sup>26</sup>] matches constitute secular rituals by transcending the normal to create a liminal space within which males hug, kiss, and can enact a range of moods and emotions that are otherwise seen as emotional or irrational” (2019, 2). This range of moods and emotions that Newson mentions are commonly agreed to be attached to femininity, and hence why they are seen as emotional or irrational. In the example of the football matches, she explains that men have a space where they can partake in those behaviors. The norm can be transgressed.

It is not only the behaviors of fans or their activities that create such a separation based on gender. Genres that are produced for a feminine audience usually have a connotation of being less valuable and of lesser quality (Salazar Rodríguez 2015, 80).

Similarly, fans themselves are often marginalized and ridiculed for their supposedly “obsessive” or “emotional” investment in their fandoms, as we have seen with the above-mentioned Urban Dictionary definition. There is a clear bias against anything deemed to be “feminine” within fan cultures, and this includes female fans themselves. “[These bias] circulate externally to fandoms via dominant cultural stereotypes, but they also circulate within fandoms as a way of maintaining boundaries and designating other fans as controversial: a process Stanfill (2013) calls ‘intra-fan stereotyping’” (Gerrard 2021, 2).

The way groupies have been perceived impacts the way individuals who fit into those characteristics choose to participate in fan activities. Gerrard (2021) explains that in her research, conducted with fans (regardless of their age or gender) of teen drama TV series. She came to the understanding that some participants carried out their fan activities in secret, mostly using social media. In her discussions with fans, she often observed that some participants used the term “groupie” when referencing to young fans, as a way to distance themselves from certain behaviors and in the hopes of being perceived differently (2021, 6). In fact, Gerrard even goes further by explaining that this distancing from fans of their own fandoms is done as a way to “normalize their own fandom” (6). In more simple terms, this relates to how “some fans” might have a certain behavior but “not all”. However, what it actually does is only singling out fans that perform groupie-like behaviors and perpetuates those negative connotations towards them.

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<sup>26</sup> Martha Newson is a scholar from the UK. Hence, she uses Football as a term to refer to Soccer.

The topic of age and fandoms is something that has been increasingly growing in the field of Fan Studies. Especially when it comes to content that is specifically made for a certain demographic and enjoyed by another. For more specifics on this, there is the research done on adult fans (especially men) of *My Little Pony*, a children's animated show, also called the "Brony" fandom<sup>27</sup> or research on adult fans (especially women) of *Twilight*, a teen drama saga.<sup>28</sup> While the way age plays a role in fandom is interesting, it is not the main focus of this dissertation. Here, I mention it mostly to parallel how fan activities that are gendered as feminine are similarly connoted as "inappropriate" or even "unacceptable", the same way that these disparities between demographic audience and demographic fans have been seen as inappropriate (Gerrard 2021, 2).

The fangirl is the contemporary groupie (Gerrard 2021, 6). They share the same characteristics: young (seen in the use of *girl* in *fangirl*, rather than *woman*), "uncontrolled", obsessive women that are attracted to male popular cultural icons. "[The fangirl] is one of the most dominant mediated images of fandom in contemporary culture, yet she does not symbolize an increased acceptance of fandom" (6). In fact, as it was done for groupies, fangirls are discredited and shamed. They are used as a means of comparison. In fact, "the fangirl is the Other against which fans of more acceptable (masculine) cultures are measured" (7).

Gerrard's abovementioned study is pertinent for this dissertation's reflection because it has permitted to show how some fans that do follow the same behaviors or activities as fangirls (for example, running a dedicated social media page, organizing and/or joining fan conventions, exchanging with other fans, extreme loyalty, etc.) choose to distance themselves from self-defining as fangirls, who they believe are deserving of the criticism they are subjected to. Moreover, as Stanfill also argues, "[m]embers of nonnormative groups will subdivide their group into (a) themselves and others like them, whom they classify as normal, and (b) a deviant subgroup they declare actually deserves the stigma or pathologization to which the entire group is subjected" (2013, 6). These members simply perpetuate the negative stereotypes by believing that they do not "fit" into that category

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<sup>27</sup> For more information, see Bethan Jones's (2015) work "My Little Pony, Tolerance is Magic: Gender Policing and Brony Anti-Fandom".

<sup>28</sup> For more information, see Christine Scodari's (2013) "Breaking Dusk: Fandom, Gender/Age Intersectionality, and the 'Twilight Moms'".

(because they are more mature, more acceptable, more professional, more intelligent, and so on). Once again, pushing a narrative that fangirls do not fully comprehend the true meaning of a certain cultural piece, only focusing on the attractiveness or obsession that they might have.

Gerrard indicates that her participants are “not being deliberately sexist but are invoking gender stereotypes to defend and legitimize their own subject positions” (2021, 8). However, I would be extremely cautious when making such a comment. It can be observed that the space that is given to fangirls (while still upholding these stereotypes) is given to white middle-class women. From that perspective, they represent a dominant class. The feeling of wanting to distance themselves from fangirls because that group is often seen in a negative eye does not make them a marginalized group. In fact, I want to reiterate that the key element to fan identification, is fan *self*-identification. The idea of choice here is central and, in that sense, even if perpetuated by women, these behaviors are sexist at their core.

I would conclude this part on gender and its impact on fan culture by saying that, while the narrative of negative connotation toward young female fans remains, there is still a shift at a micro level that can be observed. As these embedded sexist gender notions are being requisitioned, the figures of the groupie and of the fangirls are being questioned too. In fact, there is a growing trend of reappropriation of the term by the fans. It is used as an empowering tool, creating a subcommunity regardless of the shame that others might feel (or might make others feel). “The choice [of reappropriation of the term] is an effort to build community and demonstrate empathy with other community members, as demonstrated by regular use of first person plural pronouns: ‘we’ or ‘us’ or third person plural ‘fangirls’” (Birmingham 2013, 163). It also enhances the connection between them (i.e., the fans) and what they love.

### **3.3. Violence, Online and Offline**

After mentioning the “feminine side” of fandom and the way that interlinks with sexist violence, I would like to try and understand the more literal violence that exists within (certain) fandoms. There are many ways in which this violence takes shape. This idea started to germinate when I thought of celebrities that were injured, attacked or, for the less

fortunate, even killed by their own fans. It is, sadly, quite a recurring event to the point that it is worth mentioning. Without doing any sort of particular research, I can already name a few at the top of my head – John Lennon, killed by a fan that he refused to give an autograph to; Selena, killed by the founder of her own fan club; and more recently Christina Grimmie, killed at one of her meet-and-greets. The list, sadly, goes on.

There are many ways in which violence immerses itself in fan behavior. While some of the more brutal have been mentioned, there are many others. Think about the horde of fans that flocks to celebrities whenever they exit a place, opposite groups of football clubs rioting after the loss of their team, but the list does not have to only showcase physical violence. There is a rise in cyberviolence, or cyberbullying, amongst fandoms. Vile comments targeting fans from other communities, or even within the same fandom. The use of the Internet and social media, and the way this has made easy for people to hide behind a pseudonym, has created a haven for negative comments.

It seems to me that I could not talk about fan culture without mentioning violence. Through many personal experience and observations, I have witnessed many conflicts originating from groups of fans, some less literally violent than others. These could go from small disagreements on who arrived first to stand in line before a concert, to physical violence after a sports team has lost a game. The book *Fractured Fandoms: Contentious Communication in Fan Communities* (2018), in which “one hundred and one fans shared their stories, in their own words, about heated disagreements over what to like, how to behave, who to follow, and even what things mean” (Reinhard 2018, 2), is an excellent reference regarding fan-made conflicts. While violence will not be discussed in this dissertation as a fundamental characteristic to be considered a fan, the recurrence of the behavior makes it so that it is of relevance to analyze here.

### **3.3.1. The “Spreadability” of Cyberviolence**

In the fan lingo, there is a phenomenon commonly referred to as “ship wars”, as explained in an earlier chapter. While the activity might seem innocent enough, what sparked my interest is the use of such a violent vocabulary. The term of “war” sets the tone. As explained, these discussions between fans, often from the same fandom, are not always innocuous. I

use this example because I feel it represents a good starting point to talk about the way violence has included itself in discourses from fans on the Internet.

Cyberviolence materializes as a form of online abusive activities and discourses that can result in the physical, psychological, or emotional harm to an individual or group (Miao 2020, 4). It manifests as a vile form of online bullying, which mostly consists of spreading negative rumors, threats of physical (and sometimes sexual) violence, releasing personal information and more (5). A specific characteristic of cyberviolence that distinguishes it from physical offline violence (other than one being done online, and the other offline) is that it has a much higher “spreadability” index. This is a term made popular by Henry Jenkins, used to describe “the continuous process of repurposing and recirculation” (Jenkins et al. 2008, 27), creating a “deep engagement within a niche community” (22). In that sense, we might refer back to another of Henry Jenkins’s concepts and understand that this spreadability is only made possible due to the participatory culture effect of “shaping, sharing, reframing, and remixing media content” (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013, 2).

Miao suggests that it is “exactly because fans are included in the creation and dissemination of commercial cultural products, a feature of participatory culture defined by Jenkins (2008), that they have a venue to express all forms of opinions towards celebrity figures on the internet” (2020, 6). What this makes us realize is that the online digital space, also called the World Wide Web, is all interconnected. Platforms are currently more and more interlinked, each individual having a presence on more than only one. Due to the aforementioned spreadability of social networks and the emancipation of individuals creating and sharing discourses online, social networks have presented fan-users with “multiple operational possibilities to achieve the goal of conducting cyberviolence” (60) and events of cyberviolence have a way of propagating throughout.

Online networks have figuratively removed (some) of the physical barriers that used to maintain a distance between fans and their object of liking. The example of sport events is a very good one to illustrate the physical barriers that exist between fans and their object of liking.

The official barriers that separate fans from the field of play – police and security guards, fences, walls, and in extreme cases, moats and barbed wire – are evidences not only of the fans’ desire to participate (however disruptively) but also of the dominant culture’s

need to maintain the disciplinary distance the object of liking and the fans (Fiske 1992, 41)

In fact, in the digital sphere, while the fan's desire remains, the fences have become immaterial. Social networks removed those official barriers. The distance between the fans and their object of liking has never been shorter. Interactions through these platforms have replaced the "middle-men" that used to be present (like managers or security, that would limit the access). These social networks have permitted direct contact (or at least, the illusion of it). While, with policies and guidelines, they have tried to keep cyberviolence away from their platforms,<sup>29</sup> their core fundamentals have made it so that they are a prolific environment for it to happen.

### **3.3.2. Physical Violence, a (Sports) Fan Problem?**

American scholar Amanda Doherty makes an analogy between gladiatorial games in Ancient Rome to the modern sports in our contemporary society (2001, 1). In her thesis, she states how in both of those settings, "violence has been a key component to the success" (1). Today, fans' extreme involvement and investment in violent behaviors does not have to be kept under the rug and away from the public eye. In fact, there is a social phenomenon that takes up most of the space when it comes to violent activities from fans and that is sports. In this dissertation, we will focus exclusively on the effects of fans of football (or soccer, in US English) but there are many scholars exploring and studying the cases of sports fans, especially basketball, baseball and hockey (Hunt, Bristol, and Bashaw 1999; Murray 2019; Samra and Wos 2014).

Here, football is not chosen based on a personal interest of the author of this dissertation. I do not particularly identify myself as a fan of any football team, nor of the sport itself.

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<sup>29</sup> Social media networks like Twitter have tried to handle violent behaviors within their platforms by imposing their rules and policies on their users. Twitter's 2021 Transparency Report focuses on the way the platform proactively wants to ensure that abusive content is kept at bay. The platform explains that their use of technology and machine learning permits to better detect that content, hence then taking action and/or punishing. As of September 2020, Twitter is "enforcing [their] hateful conduct policy against content that incites fear and/or fearful stereotypes about protected categories [and their] hateful conduct policy [now includes] content that dehumanizes on the basis of race, ethnicity, or national origin." From July to December 2021, Twitter actively enforced their rules on 4.3M accounts (Twitter 2021). It is relevant enough to state that as of October 4, 2022, Elon Musk has bought the platform and has publicly shared his desire to revoke these policies in the name of free speech.

However, it is part of my social environment as an individual living in a country with a big adherence to football, Portugal. What I have been able to observe has led me to question how and why this narrative of violence has become so prominent among fans of this particular sport.

For context, I live in a country that has become famous due to the sport. This statement can be quite strong, especially from a young scholar pursuing Culture Studies and interested in the intricacies of culture. However, this is not to undermine other cultural forms of expression, the cuisine, the history, and so on, but more of a statement of facts – many people abroad know Portugal because of its national football team, more particularly because of one player: Cristiano Ronaldo. Once again, I use a small anecdote from my world trip. Anywhere I went, if I mentioned I was from Portugal, people automatically answered with a reference to football. It is so prominent that some speak of the “footballization of Portuguese society” (Coelho and Tiesler 2007, 579). Coelho and Tiesler explain that “people who live in Portugal, even if they don’t share an interest in or taste for the sport, have long been aware from personal experience of football’s social importance in the country” (578). The authors offer a very interesting insight regarding this specific example, going as far as observing how football-related slang has started to immerse itself into the day-to-day vocabulary of Portuguese people (579).<sup>30</sup>

It comes as no surprise when I say that football fans are well known for their loyalty and their dedication. They have already been used as examples a few times in this dissertation, mentioning the extent to which they might go to show their support to their favorite team. I have also similarly already mentioned the existent rivalry within the community. The recurrence of violence within this group is so persistent that we can pinpoint some common characteristics.

First, “football crowds are largely male; the masculinity of football matches, and related violence particularly, has been noted as key to how groups of fans construct themselves and interact” (Newson 2019, 3). Second, research has shown that the use of substances like

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<sup>30</sup> “*Nesta altura do campeonato*” (or “at this time of championship” in English, used in a context when an certain event has already started and insinuating that the time to change the course of things has passed) and “*chutar para a frente*” (or “to kick [the ball] forward” in English, meaning to continue despite the struggles) are two examples of expressions that find their source in Football vocabulary but have now found their way into the day-to-day usage of Portuguese people.

alcohol and drugs enhances “these ‘(hyper-)masculine’ identities among violent members” (Ayres and Treadwell 2012, cited by Newson 2019, 4). Third, the recurrent violence has become embedded in the self-identification of the fans. This means is that the reputation, the repetitive nature of the violence, as well as the cultural backdrop in which these take place, have all made it so that fan violence “[formed] a congruent part of pop-culture” (Newson 2019, 5). In a way, not only is violence expected in these groups, but it has almost become a requirement for entry into the groups.

There is a name for these (more radical) groups: Hooligans. Used in an extremely negative way, the term’s origins are not properly defined. The most common theory claims that the term derives from the last name of an Irish family, “Hoolihan”, known to be thieves and criminals in London (Gosselin English Communication 2016). Used in a colloquial way, and mostly in non-specialized texts, similarly to the use of the term “fan”, hooligans (or hooliganism) have not necessarily been exactly defined. Newson, quoting Spaaij, says that “[hooliganism is] the competitive violence of socially organized fan groups in football, principally directed against opposing fan groups” (Spaaij 2006, cited by Newson 2019, 6).

Hooligans are an extreme case of extremist fan groups. However, there is no need to only go to the extremes to observe these behaviors. In fact, groups composed of whom I will now refer to as “highly dedicated fans” are known for being involved in cases of abusive behavior and criminality too.<sup>31</sup> Could it be that violence is the common denominator?: “[What] actually distinguishes this subset of ‘hard-core fans’ is not just involvement in an organised, violent group, but greater dedication to their team and fellow fans, including more match attendance and a potentiality for low-level violence” (Dunning et al. 1986, cited by Newson 2019, 6).

To explain this violence, one must turn to the literature on identity construction and fan identification. These have already been mentioned in this dissertation in chapter 2.2.1 and will be the base for creating a new understanding on the formation of violence. In fact, a way to explain it is that football fans’ identities have become very intrinsically linked with their

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<sup>31</sup> Examples of this violence can be the eruption of riots between fans after a game loss (like the infamous 2011 Vancouver Stanley Cup riot, after the loss of the local team Vancouver Canucks, leading to over 140 people injured and 101 arrested), destruction of public property in opposing cities (like graffiti spread around by fans in visiting cities) and or even violence from the fans against their own team (like the “Alcochete War”, an attack on players and coaching staff of Sporting Clube de Portugal by a group of 50 fans who forced their way into the locker rooms). These are only three of the many violent events that can be linked to fans.

own self-identities. That is, their social (fan) identities and their personal (self) identity have essentially blended together. These consist of individuals that are highly fused with their object of liking.

Sport team identification is also important as it displays the fans overall self-concept after games and how the result in said game will indicate how the fan behave. A fan will perceive themselves as being personally less competent after a loss by their favorite team than after a win (Hirt, Zillmann, Erickson & Kennedy, 1992). Also fans with higher levels of team sport identification are likelier to have higher group-based self-esteem more so than those fans whose identification levels are generally lower (Wann & Branscombe, 1993). (Murray 2019, 7)

What research has shown regarding these highly fused individuals is that they “are more likely to engage in combat on behalf of or in the name of the group” (Newson 2019, 10). This means that individuals see themselves as both the self and the group. Their own identity is intimately linked with the one of the group’s. Hence, when feeling threatened or defeated, “the individual perceives this as an attack on both group and self, and is likely to engage in a hostile stance” (13)

It is important to note that it is not only fan identification that leads to violence from the fans. There are many related characteristics here that are not necessarily as explored, because they might not directly relate to fan identification, but rather specifically belong to the field of studying violence and sports. In that sense, the effects of cultural backgrounds, police presence and/or desire to question authority, women engagement and so many other points could be further researched.

#### **4. What If We Quantified Fan Identity?**

The fan experience is, in itself, subjective. In that sense, divergences are as numerous as similarities, which makes it an incredibly complicated subject to quantify. And yet, some research has in fact tried to find viable ways to do just that. In this dissertation, I will use the works of scholars Mina Tsay-Vogel and Meghan S. Sanders; Cynthia Vinney, Karen E. Dill-Shackleford, Courtney N. Plante and Anne Bartsch; and Javier Lozano Delmar, Juan F. Plaza and Milagrosa Sánchez Martín. They have turned their qualitative data sets into a quantitative one. This means that the data has been organized and coded into a set of quantifiable items, mostly via Likert-scale surveys converted into cohesive data.

I have decided to use a secondary data analysis as a reference to add to my qualitative research. My investigation on the topic has led me to conclude that already existing studies present a much higher quality of data than any study I could potentially create myself. Allow me to, briefly, explain the criteria used for the selection of the three studies under analysis in this section. First, the studies are all recent (2017, 2019 and 2020). Second, the studies were all conducted by scholars with extensive experience in the academic field. This is not to undermine my own capacity for research, but to point out the necessity for scientific rigor. Third, and arguably the most important, they are all studies similar to what I would have liked to conduct myself, which would potentially result in an unnecessary overlap in terms of methods and data. In this dissertation, I analyze the data gathered from these three studies, compare the different studies and results, and establish a bridge with the reflection initiated in our literature review.

The first study was led by scholars Mina Tsay-Vogel and Meghan S. Sanders and resulted in an article published in 2017 called “Fandom and the Search for Meaning: Examining Communal Involvement with Popular Media Beyond Pleasure”. From that study, the Fandom and Meaning Scale was generated.

The second study was led by scholars Cynthia Vinney, Karen E. Dill-Shackleford, Courtney N. Plante and Anne Bartsch and resulted in an article published in 2019 called “Development and Validation of a Measure of Popular Media Fan Identity and its Relationship to Well-being”. From that study, the Fan Identity Scale was created.

The third and final study was led by scholars Javier Lozano Delmar, Juan F. Plaza and Milagrosa Sánchez Martín and resulted in an article published in 2020 called “An Approach to Defining the Identity of a Media Fan”. From that study, the Fan Identity Questionnaire was made.

#### **4.1. The Fandom and Meaning Scale**

Mina Tsay-Vogel and Meghan S. Sanders are two scholars whose work is fundamental (and foundational) when it comes to quantitatively looking at the involvement of fans and its implications when it comes to fan identification. Their work “Fandom and the Search for Meaning: Examining Communal Involvement with Popular Media Beyond Pleasure” was

based on the following characteristics: “(a) fandom, (b) narrative exposure, (c) entertainment motivations, (d) reflectiveness, (e) personal growth, (f) enjoyment, appreciation, and physiological responses to the series, (g) knowledge acquisition, (h) behavioral intention, and (i) general demographic information” (Tsay-Vogel and Sanders 2017, 6).

Their research followed a 21 items questionnaire that fans answered on a Likert-scale from 1 to 7, ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. Their sample was constituted of 235 fans, in this case specifically of the *Harry Potter* saga. It is important to note that they ran their questionnaire during the time that the last movie of the saga was in the cinema, in the summer of 2011, which might have led to a greater level of involvement from the fans.

Another important aspect is that, while the other two studies referred to in this dissertation focus generally on “media fans”, with participants simply indicating which object they are a fan of and with the only requirement to self-identify as a fan, in this case Tsay-Vogel and Sanders specifically targeted fans of an extremely successful and popular book and movie saga. It gives for an interesting result as that group of fans is well-known to be extremely participatory and creative.

The characteristics that were used by Tsay-Vogel and Sanders were described by the scholars as follows: Fandom is seen as the “shared values and emotional connections” (2017, 6) that the fans have with the *Harry Potter* series. These values and connections are described and defined by the fans themselves. That is, they are the ones grading that quotient. Narrative exposure is subject to how many books of the saga the participants have read. This characteristic has not been massively explored in this dissertation due to it being fundamentally linked with Psychology. While this dissertation does take many important key elements from that field, it chooses to keep the cultural dimension as its primary focus. Hence, while it is of great interest, this factor is not as relevant for this particular research.

Continuing, Tsay-Vogel and Sanders divided the characteristic of Entertainment Motivations. The category was split into two parts: six were relating to hedonic motivations, and six were regarding eudaimonic motivations. As explained previously, both are relevant, while being slightly different in their origins. Hedonic motivations originate in the need for pleasure and enjoyment, while eudaimonic motivations steam from a need for a greater purpose or understanding.

Then, Reflectiveness was used as a base to understand a participant's habit of self-reflection. Rather than being directly connected to fandom and fan identification, it is about self-identification. This component is significant because it does not directly include elements of fan-related characteristics. Instead, it questions if participants have a predisposition to question *themselves*. This component is noteworthy as all fans *self-identified* as fans.

Similarly, the next characteristic is about Personal Growth. It also questions self-development. The next components all come back to having direct correlations with fandom and in this case *Harry Potter*. The Enjoyment, Appreciation, and Physiological responses to the saga all relate to the overall responses from the fan. Again, it bases itself in Psychology and measures the “affective, cognitive, and physiological reactions” (Tsay-Vogel and Sanders 2017, 8) of the fans. These are all relevant since they relate to the well-being, enjoyment, and pleasure that fans get. While this research touches upon physiological reactions – i.e., feelings of “warm in the chest, lump in the throat, increased heart rate, chills, and light/bouncy” (8) – this is once again a topic that we will not be approaching too closely on this dissertation, as it falls outside the scope of this work. Simply, it shows and validates the impact that fan identification – or being a fan – has on the individuals.

Finally, the last two components are Knowledge Acquisition and Behavioral Intention. The former highlights the specific knowledge of the fans related to the saga, and the latter focuses on the intent of fans to participate in fan behaviors.

Tsay-Vogel and Sanders questioned 235 fans of *Harry Potter* via an online form that targeted American university students and participants of *Harry Potter*-focused online platforms. As mentioned earlier, all the participants were self-defined *Harry Potter* fans. The conduction of this study resulted in “[revealing] that membership in a fan community enhances enjoyment, appreciation, physiological responses, knowledge acquisition, and intention to seek fan-related materials, implying that being a fan entails high degrees of affective, cognitive, and behavioral involvement aside from simply being a passive media consumer” (Tsay-Vogel and Sanders 2017, 10). From the original characteristics they focused on, their results showed that 1) narrative exposure, 2) entertainment motivations, 3) physiological responses, 4) Knowledge acquisition, 5) facilitates fandom and 6) behavioral intentions all facilitate fandom (2017, 8-10). All other characteristics either did not facilitate fandom, or only did so partially.

## 4.2. The Fan Identity Scale

The article “Development and Validation of a Measure of Popular Media Fan Identity and its Relationship to Well-being” is a very valuable tool in not only understanding but confirming all the characteristics we have explored thus far, and their importance in the fan identification process. The article proposes to use two different studies to create the Fan Identity Scale (Vinney et al. 2019).

Vinney and her colleagues worked on two different studies, both focusing on fans of mainstream films or television shows. While this was particularly focused on media fans, they do believe that their results offer a strong enough base to generalize it to other types of audiences. In fact, they mention how their research itself was based on other scholarly texts on sports fans and science fiction fans (Vinney et al. 2019, 10).

The first study they conducted followed 210 American participants who self-identified as fans. The method they used was having these participants fill out a questionnaire. To get to the final items, the scholars started with 54 items under 7 categories: enthusiasm, enjoyment, appreciation, personal, self-definition, social interaction and participatory. Each of these 54 items had to be answered on a Likert scale in terms of “how much [the fans] enjoy doing each of [the items]”, “how much [they] agree with [the items], or “how often [they] do each of [the items]”, with values going from 1 (Not at all) to 9 (Very Much). However, to get to a correct value they scaled it down to only nine. They resulted in the following questions:

- *How much do you love your favorite television show or movie?*
- *How passionate are you about your favorite television show or movie? (adapted from Thorne & Bruner, 2006)*
- *How big a fan of your favorite television show or movie would you say you are?*
- *How much [do] you agree that your favorite television show or movie is relevant to [your] life?*
- *How much [do] you agree that your favorite television show or movie has helped [you] grow as a person.*
- *How much [do] you agree that your favorite television show or movie helps [you] think about the things I value.*

- “I often talk about my favorite television show or movie with a friend. (adapted from Thorne & Bruner, 2006)” How much do you agree with that statement?
  - “I often email/text/private message with another fan about my favorite television show or movie. (adapted from Thorne & Bruner, 2006)” How much do you agree with that statement?
  - “I have friends who are also fans of my favorite television show or movie. (adapted from Thorne & Bruner, 2006)” How much do you agree with that statement?
- (Vinney et al. 2019, Table 1)

Results of the first study showed that Enjoyment and Enthusiasm were the two categories that scored higher. On the opposite, Self-Definition is the one that scored the lowest.

The second study was used to confirm the accuracy of the Fan Identity Scale and followed 201 British participants. This time, the participants answered the Fan Identity Scale’s 9 items, but the items were presented in a random order.

Then, Vinney and her colleagues compared their results with other already existing research to get a valid measure. The three scales they compared their scores with were the Fandom Scale by Tsay-Vogel and Sander (2017), Oliver and Raney’s (2011) research “Entertainment as Pleasurable and Meaningful” using eudaimonic and hedonic motivations scale, and lastly the BBC Well-being Scale by Schwannauer, Kinderman, Pontin and Tai (2010). These scales were used to verify and validate the data from the Fan Identity Scale. The data did show a positive correlation, thus proving the validity of the results and conclusive measure of the Fan Identity Scale to be employed in further research.

The research that Vinney and her colleagues conducted led to interesting conclusions. First, by funneling their questionnaire with a structural equation model, they were able to highlight three factors. The factors they finished with are (1) Enthusiasm, (2) Appreciation and (3) Social Interaction. Remembering the initial nine, this means that the following were left out: Enjoyment, Personal, Self-Definition and Participatory. As Vinney says, the results do not wish to imply that these factors are not a part of the fan identification experience. Rather, they demonstrate that the remaining three have consistently shown correlation to fan identity. Not only that, but they went further as to show a *positive* correlation, using here positive in its most literal sense.

As can be seen in the following Figure 4, as well as in the conclusion of the research, the data “[provided] evidence that being a fan of a popular culture narrative is positively related to well-being” (Vinney et al. 2019, 16).

This investigation demonstrated that social interactions between fans are associated with increased relational and physical well-being, suggesting that [...] fans may benefit from the opportunities for socialization and in-group membership offered by their involvement with their favorite entertainment. (Vinney et al. 2019, 17)

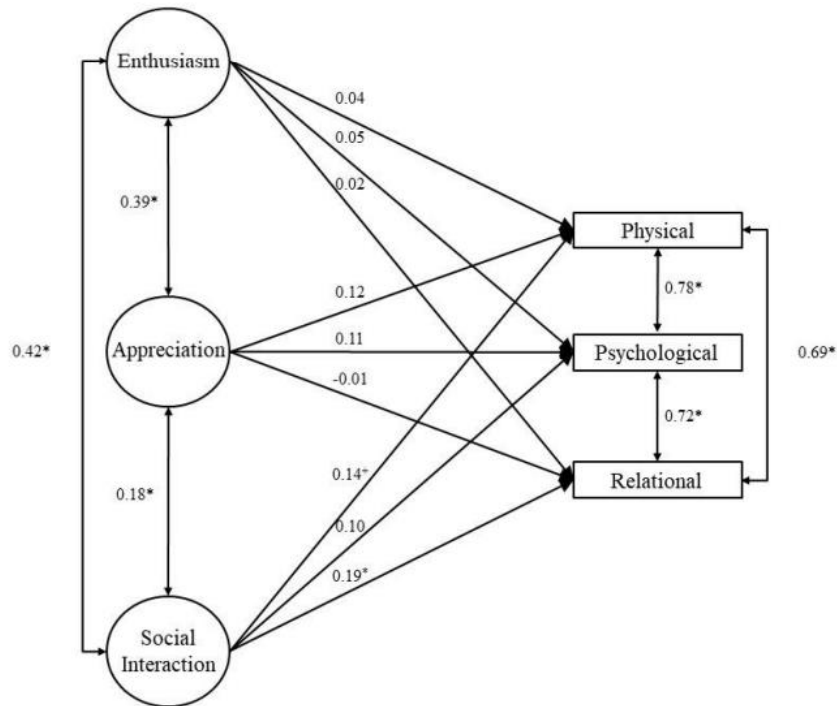


Figure 4 - Structural equation model allowing Fan Experiences subscales to predict well-being. (Vinney et al. 2019)

It is important to note that the Fan Identity Scale did not take into consideration the wider participatory aspects, in the way that it has been discussed in this dissertation for example. More accurately, it was included in the original questionnaire, but it eventually was taken out. This decision from Vinney et al. was made based on other research that proved that these fan activities were not, if quantified in terms of volume, done enough by fans (2019, 18-19). In other words, participation was not a characteristic that was relevant enough to use to define Fan Identity.

### 4.3. The Fan Identity Questionnaire

In the year following the publication and elaboration of the Fan Identity Scale, three Spanish scholars also developed the Fan Identity Questionnaire. Lozano, Plaza and Sánchez’s goal was to “determine which characteristics and behaviors are shared by users [...] who define themselves as fans in such a way [...] that could help define their identity [...] and [...] to analyze the socio-demographic characteristics that define the fan and to correlate those characteristics with self-perception as a [...] fan” (2020, 9).

The method of this research followed a similar one to the Fan Identity Scale, using a Likert-scale (from 1 to 7 this time). The items that were researched were chosen based on a qualitative study, as well as another previous study on fans of the *Game of Thrones* TV show. This resulted in the following elements put together that constitute fan identity, as can be seen in Figure 5 below:

KEYWORD	Fan identity items in the questionnaire
PLEASURE	I consider myself a fan of movies or TV series that are well made and developed with interesting characters and stories that are worthwhile.
EXPERIENCE	I consider myself a fan when I get involved in the experience of the movie or television series, look for additional information on the Internet, participate and generate content on social networks.
VIEWING	I consider myself a fan when the consumption of a movie or television series is repetitive and constant, nearly addictive.
COLLECTING	I consider myself a fan when I collect material related to a movie or television series.
KNOWLEDGE	I consider myself a fan when I like to investigate and know about all the products related to the story (e.g., sequels, books, and comics)

*Figure 5 - Table showing characteristics and items of fan identification (Lozano, Plaza, and Sánchez 2020, 11-12)*

Similarly to Vinney et al.’s research, Lozano, Plaza and Sánchez also further funneled theirs after coming to the conclusion that one of the characteristics (Pleasure) had a low factorial loading.

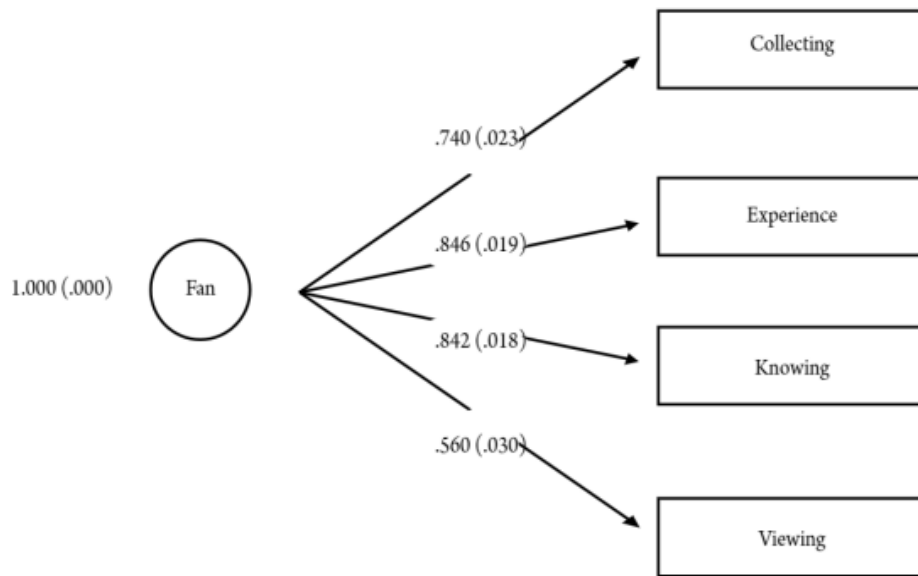


Figure 6 - Structural equation model allowing to determine the items that contribute most to fan identification (Lozano, Plaza, and Sánchez 2020, 16)

Figure 6 shows us, statistically speaking, that “the items that contribute most to defining who a fan is are experience (item 2,  $\lambda = .846$ ), knowledge (item 3,  $\lambda = .842$ ), collecting (item 1,  $\lambda = .740$ ), and viewing (item 4,  $\lambda = .560$ )” (Lozano, Plaza, and Sánchez 2020, 16). In short, they quantified fan identity and determined a direct and viable correlation between all these items and an individual identifying as a fan.

An added value of this research is that Lozano, Plaza and Sánchez analyzed their data according to other social characteristics that are of interest to us here. Namely when related to gender, age, occupation and education level (14).

When it comes to gender, they divided it between men and women.

	Men (n = 263)		Women (n = 252)		Z	P	d <sub>Cohen</sub>
	M	SD	M	SD			
Average fan	5.38	0.81	5.50	0.89	-1.33	0.182	0.117
1. Collecting	5.06	1.56	5.07	1.66	-0.24	0.812	0.021
2. Experience	5.35	1.34	5.45	1.33	-0.81	0.419	0.069
3. Knowledge	5.59	1.10	5.69	1.23	-1.51	0.131	0.128
4. Viewing	5.51	1.34	5.77	1.36	-2.67	0.008	0.228

Figure 7 - Differences in fan characteristics according to gender (Lozano, Plaza, and Sánchez 2020, 18)

The results in Figure 7 show that little to no distinction can be made between men and women on nearly all the categories. Viewing has the most significant difference, in which women score slightly higher.

When it comes to age, their results are the same: there is no observation of variations or differences between the subjects belonging to different age gaps.

They divided occupation into three categories: students, workers and unemployed. Once again, the statistics highlight no differences between those categories regarding the four categories of fan identity.

Finally, results continued to show no viable difference regarding the distinct fan identity characteristics, despite different education levels. These were divided into compulsory education, vocational education, and higher education. No relevance could be observed.

To summarize, Lozano, Plaza and Sánchez used their quantitative research to successfully expose that 1) collecting, 2) experience, 3) knowledge and 4) viewing “define the identity of a media fan. That is, the identity of a media fan can be explained based on these four different behavioral characteristics. Fan identity in media consumption is a complex construct that includes the four mentioned behavioral characteristics, which operate together” (2020, 20)

Lozano, Plaza and Sánchez’s findings regarding the non-significance of gender, age, occupation and education level when it comes to fan identification is arguably the most important and valuable statistical outcome of this research. This research statistically shows

that there is in fact no difference in regard to those specific characteristics. In other terms, it highlights how fan identification is not contained and can “affect” anyone, regardless of their gender, age, occupation and education level.

However, it is important to remember that those are only four characteristics and that the research is merely a reflection of that. In fact, it does not invalidate that other behaviors are as much part of fan identity as these four are. Rather, it proves that these four must be a part of it.

Lastly, while this dissertation has actually joined the characteristics of knowledge and collecting, Lozano and his colleagues have decided to keep them as two separated characteristics. They understand collecting as the belonging of material good, when I have decided to see it as the gathering of material goods and non-material goods. In fact, I do believe this to be arguably one of the biggest flaws of this research because it seems to be the less reliable one. In fact, in my opinion, collecting should have been included under knowledge and I would even go to the point of saying that it is not a fundamental necessity for fan identification.

#### **4.4. Comparison of the Studies**

The three studies used in this dissertation all employed quantitative metrics to define fan identification. While their scope was relatively similar, it can be observed in Figure 8 below that their conclusions were not all the same.

Tsay-Vogel and Sanders (2017) concluded that Self-Identification, Possession (but solely non-material), Consumption (but solely intentional), Entertainment, Pleasure and Enthusiasm all support fan identification. Appreciation and Enjoyment only partially support it. Lastly, they concluded that Personal Growth is not a requisite for fan identification.

Vinney et al. (2019) concluded that Enthusiasm, Appreciation and Social Interaction are fundamental characteristics for fan identification. On the other hand, they concluded that Self-Identification, Participation, Production, Enjoyment and Personal Growth are not all fundamental characteristics.

Lastly, Lozano, Plaza, and Sánchez (2020) concluded that only Participation and Possession are fundamental to fan identification. They excluded Production and Pleasure.

	<b>The Fandom and Meaning Scale (Tsay-Vogel and Sanders 2017)</b>	<b>The Fan Identity Scale (Vinney et al. 2019)</b>	<b>The Fan Identity Questionnaire (Lozano, Plaza, and Sánchez 2020)</b>
<b>Self-Identification</b>	Included	Excluded	N/A
<b>Participation / Experience</b>	N/A	Excluded	Included
<b>Performance</b>	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>The Affective Process</b>	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Possession</b>	Included, but solely non-material (knowledge)	N/A	Included, but differentiate between material (collecting) and non-material (knowledge)
<b>Consumption</b>	Included, but solely as intentional	N/A	N/A
<b>Productivity / Production</b>	N/A	Excluded	Excluded
<b>Entertainment</b>	Included	N/A	N/A

<b>Pleasure</b>	Included	N/A	Excluded
<b>Enthusiasm</b>	Included	Included	N/A
<b>Appreciation</b>	Included, partially	Included	N/A
<b>Enjoyment</b>	Included, partially	Excluded	N/A
<b>Social Interaction</b>	N/A	Included	N/A
<b>Personal (Growth)</b>	Excluded	Excluded	N/A

*Figure 8 - Cross-analysis of the three studies and their data (Own elaboration)*

These studies allow us to further help define not only which characteristics are fundamental to the experience of being a fan, but also the ones that are not. Starting with the latter, as our cross-analysis identifies, Production and Personal Growth are the two characteristics that were understood the most as not relevant. The former is a bit harder to define clearly, as the rest of this dissertation shows, namely because it involves many different formats and types of relationships. Possession and Enthusiasm, on the other hand, are two of the characteristics presented as fundamental by the most studies. However, the definition given for those slightly differs between the studies, making it more difficult to grasp and contextualize.

This analysis maintains its relevance in the way that it has given data that is supported by a quantitative set of results. However, it remains that the foundations for these observations were originally made from a qualitative approach (despite their quantitative results) and some parts lacked a more precise definition of the characteristics. As such, some of the data here needs to be analyzed with these aspects in mind and the qualitative set of this dissertation, hopefully, helps with that. It is the dual set of results that will allow us to reach a clearer conclusion as to which are the fundamental characteristics of a fan.

As a conclusion, fan identity still remains an intangible subject that is extremely hard to define, and this includes both qualitatively and quantitatively. In this case, different statistical methods were used to approach fan identification. Rather than reporting yes or no answers to verify a theory, they provide data to identify and confirm the patterns and trends that were discussed in the first part of this dissertation. This data allows us to understand tendencies and make estimates to confirm our research propositions and reach a conclusion on the fundamental characteristics of being a fan.

## **5. Findings and Discussion**

When I decided to focus on the topic of Fan Culture, I knew that I was about to tackle a big challenge. I knew that I was interested in the phenomenon as such, not so much in the behaviors or actions since I knew them already as a fan myself. I was mostly focused on trying to understand and explain the shift from one fan to *Fan Culture*. I was interested in how Fan Culture materialized and came to life. In short, I was interested in unveiling how Fan Culture worked.

To start to understand the way Fan Culture worked, I had to approach it first with a qualitative eye. This meant to highlight some of the common jargon, as well as the existing fan terminology. Then, based on the literature and previous knowledge, I initially retrieved six elements that I believed to impact the definition of a fan and were fundamental in composing fan identity.

The six characteristics that were developed in the first reflection are the following:

### **1) Fan Identification and Identity Construction.**

Considered as the key characteristic, fans can only be seen as fans if the individuals self-identify as such. The scale of intensity can vary, as well as to which degree the individuals partake in all the other elements, but to understand fan identification there needs to be a self-identification by the individual done prior.

### **2) Participation and Repetition.**

Participation in some sort of fannish experience does not need to be confined to specific levels of devotion. Participation can be understood as an action or as a behavior. There is a

common denominator (i.e., what fans are fans of) that links the community to partake in these activities, giving them a sense of belonging. The theory of participatory culture here is used to enhance the way in which participation becomes a central and fundamental characteristic to fan identification.

### **3) The Affective Process.**

The theory of affect structures the way fans connect through meanings that are originally built on various social norms. More than looking at emotions, the theory of affect reflects on the fact that fans live an embodied experience. It is a process of anticipation that provides meaning to the fan experience and can be a source of motivation for fans.

### **4) Possession and Consumption.**

The possession (and hence the consumption) of fan capital (including knowledge and/or material goods) has been defined as an easy way to differentiate between individuals who are fans and those who are not. In short, those who have it are fans, and those who do not are not.

### **5) Productivity and Production.**

Production can be understood as the creation of some sort of content. The specific list of all the activities is long and differ in level of investment. They also differ in their format, which can go from writing fanfiction to attending a fan convention. These productions are then exchange between fans, creating an economy of legitimization that partakes in giving different statuses (higher or lower ones) to different fans within the fandoms.

### **6) Entertainment and Pleasure.**

Motivations for fans are plural. However, entertainment and pleasure (sometimes also referred to as well-being) occupy a strong place in the top motivations. Hence, enjoyment is commonly referred to as a characteristic defining of fan identity.

## **5.1. Fundamental characteristics to be a Fan**

After that first reflection based on the available literature, I used three studies to gather quantitative data that would help me provide a more elaborated answer to my research

question. Having this dual amount of data permitted me to properly lay down the characteristics of Fan Culture and fan identification, using the quantitative sets to solidify my qualitative data. I did a cross-comparison of my characteristics with the conclusions of the three studies to pinpoint the elements that were of fundamental to the fan experience.

These dual sets give me a wider view of what composes Fan Culture and which characteristics are fundamental to the experience. With this comparison, I developed my reflection to make a second set of characteristics that are now more heavily supported with all the data from my research.

The four characteristics in the second reflection are the following:

### **1) Self-identification**

All in all, the central idea that has been observed to be commonly agreed upon is that self-identification remains the key aspect of fan identification. While this is not a topic I will digress into too much for lack of time and resources, there is an aspect to self-identification that intersects with Queer theories. In fact, it has been agreed (with the help of many activists and queer individuals) that there is no need for a person to speak up about their identity (commonly referred to as “coming out”) for their (self-)identity to be valid. This is an interesting point when applied to Fan Studies as it permits to understand the inclusion of groups such as Non-Fans or Invisible Fans under the one umbrella term of “fans”. These consist of people who do not self-identify as fans, and yet do partake in (some) fannish activities and behaviors. While self-identification seems to still be at the core of the experience, the lines still might remain slightly blurred.

### **2) Participation**

Participation englobes a lot of fannish activities and behaviors. The limits of those experiences are not confined, and their levels of intensity diverge (within fandoms, and between them). However, the results I got from the current literature and from the quantitative results done by other scholars led me to conclude that it is a fundamental part of the fan experience.

### **3) Production**

Lozano, Plaza and Sánchez argue in their conclusion that their findings demonstrate that fan identity does not relate to production. They explain that by basing their statement on most of the recent literature and by referring some of the authors quoted in this dissertation, e.g., Zubernis and Larsen (2012), Taylor (2015), as well as Tsay-Vogel and Sanders (2017). Lozano, Plaza and Sánchez continue to state that “being a fan does not necessarily involve producing content” (2020, 21) and, after this entire dissertation – as well as personal research and experience – I would regard this statement as reductive. In fact, as it has been further explained, the idea and concept of fan production is quite broad, and I would argue that mere fan talk is already the production of *some* content.

As referred to earlier in this dissertation, production is something that needs to be regarded in a very critical form. In fact, the access to some of its forms can be restricted – due to age, revenue, or geographical constraints (amongst others). Therefore, I chose to understand production as sometimes being non-material and hence the inclusion of fan talk under this characteristic.

### **4) Pleasure**

Tsay-Vogel and Sanders (2017) conclude that entertainment motivations are positively related to fandom. Similarly, Vinney et al. (2019) refer to enthusiasm being a fundamental characteristic to fan identification. Basing my decision on those results, I kept pleasure as an umbrella term that would put together anything that was related to the well-being provided to the fans from their experience.

I would argue that these four characteristics are at the foundation of Fan Culture. Each of the elements interact with one or the other, and by doing so, support the experience of being a fan.

However, there was a need for more precise data and, in that sense, I believed that the results I had would need to be funneled down too.

	<b>This Research</b>	<b>The Fandom and Meaning Scale (Tsay-Vogel and Sanders 2017)</b>	<b>The Fan Identity Scale (Vinney et al. 2019)</b>	<b>The Fan Identity Questionnaire (Lozano, Plaza, and Sánchez 2020)</b>
<b>Self-Identification</b>	Included	Included	Excluded	N/A
<b>Participation / Experience</b>	Included	N/A	Excluded	Included
<b>Productivity / Production</b>	Included	N/A	Excluded	Excluded
<b>Pleasure</b>	Included	Included	N/A	Excluded

*Figure 9 - Cross-analysis of main fan characteristics, from the qualitative and quantitative sets (Own elaboration)*

If one refers to Figure 9 and the cross-analysis of our data from the three studies and the one with our own research, it is fairly easy to observe that production and pleasure are both only partially supported by the quantitative results I have available. Pleasure is supported by Tsay-Vogel and Sanders (2017) and is a characteristic that does end up as considered relevant. However, it is not mentioned at all by Vinney et al. (2019), and even ends up as irrelevant in Lozano, Plaza and Sánchez (2020). With that being the most recent study, combined with the non-mention from Vinney et al., I concluded that it would only partially be relevant.

Production seems even simpler. In fact, it is only mentioned in Vinney et al. (2019) and Lozano, Plaza, and Sánchez (2020) and both studies conclude that it is not of enough relevance to be a fundamental characteristic. With that in mind, I decided that production would only be partially relevant too.

This then leaves only self-identification and participation as the two characteristics left as fully fundamental to fan identification. However, both of those characteristics are extremely broad, as explained. In fact, their level of involvement can translate to different levels of

devotion (or not). With that in mind, there was a need to understand those two characteristics as a spectrum. To exemplify that, I elaborated a cartesian plan in Figure 10 below, which goes from “mostly self-identifies as ‘Fan’” to “mostly does not self-identify as ‘Fan’” on the vertical axis, and from “mostly participates in fannish activities and behaviors” to “mostly does not participate in fannish activities and behaviors” on the horizontal axis.

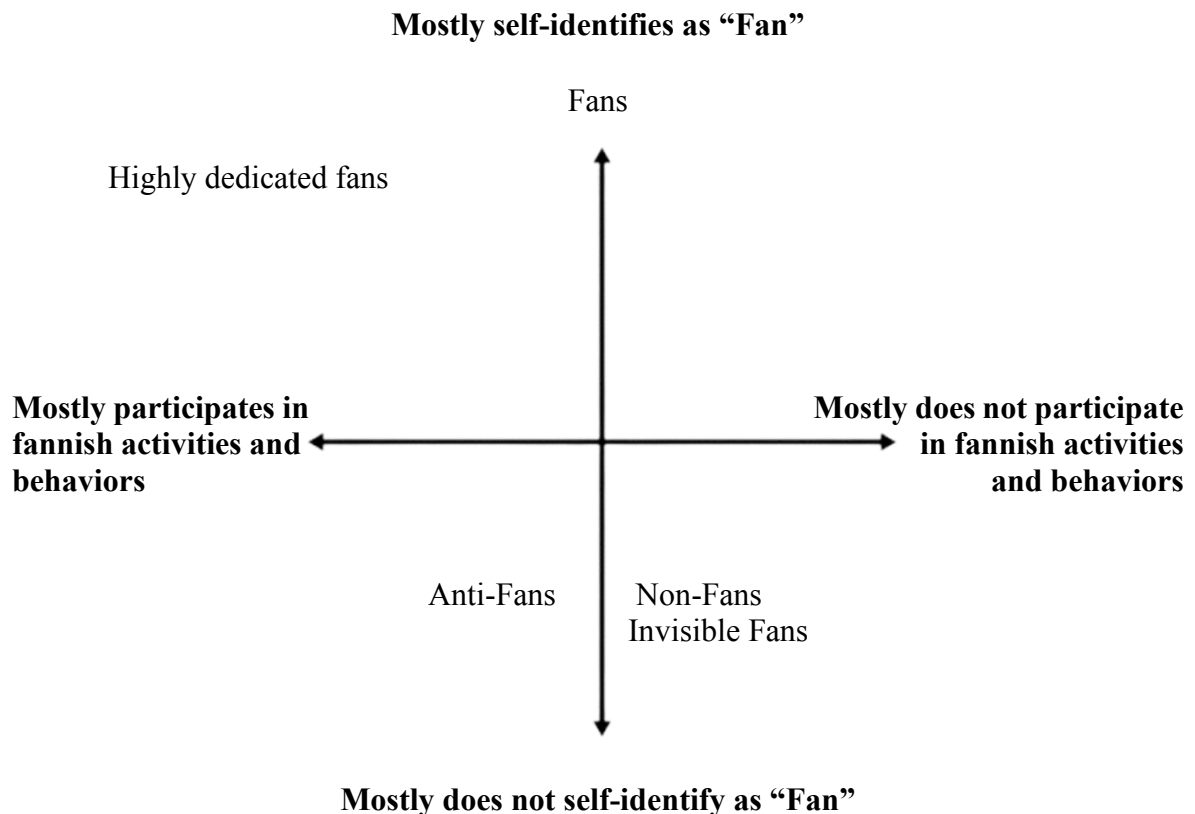


Figure 10 - Fan Identity Cartesian Plan (Own elaboration)

In this plan, I placed different fan groups according to our findings. Anyone who does self-identify as a fan can seemingly fit under the term. This includes the moderately dedicated fans, and the low dedicated fans, as long as they do identify as *fans*. Hence, any position above the horizontal line fits that category.

Highly dedicated fans are a special subgroup that include some of the groups we mentioned in this dissertation, like hooligans and groupies. The way those groups behave is special, as they combine both characteristics (i.e., they self-identify as fans and participate to a high

degree in fannish activities), pushed to their maximum level. Hence, that group was placed in the top left corner, as individuals in those groups are highly participative and their identity is intimately linked with the one of fan. Lastly, Anti-fans, non-fans and invisible fans were all placed according to the definitions made in this dissertation.

As it has been explained throughout this dissertation, all of these groups can have various levels of intensity in participation and identification. Hence, their placement in this cartesian plan is mostly illustrative. Individuals in those groups can place themselves in a different position and, within the same group, individuals might choose different positions too.

Similarly, I then elaborated a Fan Identification Matrix that provides an easy way to place different individuals (or groups) within certain traits. Figure 11 below shows a table that contains only two main characteristics of fan identification that we concluded to be of enough relevance. Those are self-identification and participation. This matrix is meant to be used to place individuals, in regard to their behaviors, in relation to those two characteristics. Horizontally, self-identification has two options, which are: “individual who does self-identify as a fan” and “individual who does not self-identify as a fan”. Vertically, participation has two options, which are: “individual who participates in fannish activities and behaviors” and “individual who does not participate in fannish activities and behaviors”.

I positioned each category of individual within their respective place according to the results found in my research. It is important to note these are not mutually exclusive. In fact, some are positioned in multiple places. For example, it has been concluded that any individual who identifies with the term “fan” is then considered to be a fan. Hence, it is found in both categories, regardless of whether that fan participates or not in fannish activities and behaviors. Then, the highly dedicated fan was placed in the cell that crosses between “Individual who does self-identify as a fan” and “Individual who participates in fannish activities and behaviors”. On the opposite side of the spectrum, there is of course the individual who simply is not a fan. This comes to no surprise. In fact, individuals that do not self-identify as fans and who do not partake in any fannish activities are, simply, not fans. Anti-fans require a particular attention, as this group does not identify as a fan nor does it necessarily partake in fannish activities, but because they do hold some knowledge, they are not the same as individuals who are not fans. Finally, non-fans and invisible fans are individuals that do partake in some fannish activities but do not self-identify as fans.

	<b>Individual who does self-identify as a fan</b>	<b>Individual who does not self-identify as a fan</b>
<b>Individual who participates in fannish activities and behaviors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fan</li> <li>• Highly dedicated fan, or any fan part of a subgroup with a higher intensity of involvement (i.e., hooligan, fangirl, groupie, etc.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-Fan</li> <li>• Invisible Fan</li> </ul>
<b>Individual who does not participate in fannish activities and behaviors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual who is not a fan</li> <li>• Anti-fan (to a certain extent)</li> </ul>

*Figure 11 - Fan Identification Matrix (Own elaboration)*

The Fan Identity Cartesian Plan and the Fan Identification Matrix allow a simple visualization of fan identity and where different fan identities place within those graphs. This research has tried to explain that this topic is an ever-shifting one and it is necessary to understand that fan identity is a concept in movement. Providing those graphs permits to visualize and organize fan identities, with its due fundamental characteristics.

## Conclusion

I have been a fan and active participant in several fan communities for at least a good decade. Deciding to explore this field with an academic lens was not necessarily an obvious one. I was afraid that my position as a fan would constitute a detriment to my position as a young researcher. However, I decided to go through with it because I saw the field of Fan Studies as a space of opportunity. It is an area composed of extraordinary scholars that, more and more, question and further deny all the negative connotations that have stood for so long in the way of fannish individuals. It is clear today that fans are at the forefront of society.

In capitalist societies popular culture is necessarily produced from the products of capitalism, for that is all the people have to work with. The relationship of popular culture to the culture industries is therefore complex and fascinating, sometimes conflictive, sometimes complicitous or co-operative, but the people are never at the mercy of the industries – they choose to make some of their commodities into popular culture, but reject many more than they adopt. Fans are among the most discriminating and selective of all formations of the people and the cultural capital they produce is the most highly developed and visible of all. (Fiske 1992, 47-48)

In conclusion, this dissertation wanted to discuss the concepts that compose Fan Culture. Departing from the concepts of self-identification, participatory culture, performance and the affective process, possession and consumption, productivity and production, entertainment and pleasure, I then reduced those to only four. Self-identification, participation, production and pleasure were discussed as the fundamental characteristics of the experience of a fan. After a second consideration, and supported by the entire data collected, self-identification and participation were concluded to be the only two fundamental concepts needed to define a fan.

This dissertation aimed to answer the following research question: how does Fan Culture work? Its complementary sub-question was to define which characteristics can be perceived as fundamental to enact the role of fan. The result of the research led to define two research propositions. RP #1: Self-identification is an essential part of Fan Culture. RP #2: Fan participation is an essential part of Fan Culture. The findings from our qualitative and quantitative research led me to conclude that they supported both RP #1 and RP #2.

With that in mind, I can then conclude that this research managed to successfully answer its research question. However, the reiteration of the fact that this discussion is only the tip of the iceberg and that there is a lot more to uncover when it comes to Fan Culture is not

obsolete here. Indeed, there is a quote in Hannell's work that resonated a lot with me and echoes that there is a lot of work and research left to be done: "I am mindful that it would be near impossible for me to do this work alone" (2020, 12).

I was also faced with some limitations. First, there are some strengths and weaknesses to the mixed method approach, but the most important issue is when the qualitative data and the quantitative data do not match. However, if that happens, it still might produce an answer and give an interesting insight to continue the research. That is the reason why this method was chosen for this research. Second, the difficulty in simply defining the term "fan" and the plurality of interpretations, which made the process of narrowing things down more challenging, even if simultaneously contributing to a much richer and diverse research. Third, while the dissertation touches on the fact that fans have expanded beyond the delimitations of their physical location due to their use of the digital space, this dissertation is still limited to an extremely specific point of view, which is mostly Americanized (or Westernized) and English-speaking. Fourth and last, the three studies used all focus on Media Fans. Despite tackling some global phenomena with extremely wide fandoms (i.e., *Harry Potter*, *Game of Thrones*, etc.), this still potentially limits the wider generalization to *all* fans.

As those limitations show, the field of Fan Studies has still a lot left to be explored. It is vast and wide, always adapting to cultural changes and to the individuals that take part in making it. This dissertation positioned itself as not only an informative piece, but it wished to question some canonized texts used in many Fan Studies contemporary works. In fact, due to it being a niche field, there is not an extensive list of fundamental texts compared to other "older", more established academic fields. In that sense, I do believe there is still much left to be explored.

Amongst some of the topics that I do believe are deserving of attention, the one of disputing some of the more established works is one that I feel a lot of interest for and that could lead to a lot of exciting discussions and results. To be clear, I am not debating the impact and/or the importance that these works have. Rather, questioning the way some things have been explained in those pieces, how the field has changed since and more specifically question if the position of these early scholars is maintained today. From the many studies that I have read, I would again note Hannell's contribution on this subject and on questioning the way

Fan Studies interlink with Feminist Cultural Studies as a great starting point. Hannell states that she “[is] concerned that the canonization of *Textual Poachers* has a number of implications for the stories we tell about the origins of fan studies and the impact these stories have on the ways that we theorize (or, rather, do not theorize) key methodological approaches within fan studies” (2020, 4).

I have been able to notice during my research how much of the early work of Fan Studies has relied on observing women’s behaviors in fandoms of “conventionally” more masculine-centered subjects (most commonly science fiction was the one being used).

The emergence of fan studies therefore aligned with feminist efforts to take seriously the study of cultural forms, their pleasures, and their audiences, especially those which were routinely denigrated, devalued, and pathologized in terms of hegemonic values which govern the production of knowledge. [...] And yet, despite this, the legacy of feminist cultural studies, its theories, and its methodological frameworks in the origins of fan studies is markedly absent in many of the stories we tell about how fan studies (and, by extension, our methodologies) came to be. (Hannell 2020, 5)

The subject of research being so engaged and involved always makes for a fascinating research exploration. However, I do believe in the need for more self-reflexivity when it comes to the position of the researcher. This field has a very intricate relationship when it comes to the observer/participant dynamic. By embracing this relationship with a more personal approach, I really believe that there is an opportunity for more and more researchers to bypass the distance between them and their subject, hence creating a distinguished point of view and offering a (potentially) more accurate representation of fandoms and fans. “When we produce research, what we’re really doing is the work of representation, which means researchers are responsible for the way others are represented (Ellis and Flaherty 1992; Lather 2007; Pillow 2003)” (Evans and Stasi 2014, 12).

Of course, this does not mean to question academic writing, performance or objectivity. Hannell mentions Hills when trying to explain this lack of personal involvement from researchers due to the lack of respect or recognition that might be given to “those who deviate from the academic norms of so-called rational and objective academic writing and performance” (2020, 11-12). She also goes so far as noting that scholars who identify as women and scholars, and who are just beginning their career, are even more prone to not developing the “intellectual use of the personal” (8). As a young woman in academia, I am constantly questioning my position and tried to bring that to this dissertation.

This leads me to the next topic, which is about exploring Fan Studies on a more inclusive and intersectional way. This connection mostly lies in the feminist beliefs that “[have [...] long rejected the polarity between emotion and reason [...] and [...] that normative academic frameworks tend to obscure the vital role of emotion and affect in the production of knowledge” (Hannell 2020, 9). This is related to the lack of further explorations on the connection with specific cultural indicators such as race, socio-economical background, ability, and more. I did not approach the topic of race-based violence but it is something I believe can be expanded a lot in the field. In fact, while doing my research, I came across an incredibly small portion of non-white researchers. The only ones I did read and learned a lot from were Asian or of Asian descent. By extension, I found and read no research that mentioned race as a characteristic of interest. I position myself as a white cis-gendered woman living, working and doing my academic research in a Western country. In that sense, I understand that I might have neglected to further research some realities that are not my own. Hannell says that “within both fan studies and fandom itself, whiteness often operates as an unmarked and unnamed norm “ (2020, 10). I can only hope and wish for that to change in the future.

There are many topics that I would have loved to explore more in-depth. I would say that the constraints for that were mostly linked to the scope of this dissertation. My interest lied in understanding Fan Culture as *a whole*. Existent research has mostly focused on a specific case study, observing fans of a specific fandom. While bringing an incredible insight and valuable data, those are limited by their scope too. I wished to provide a greater understanding of the multiple layers that can be found within Fan Culture.

Personally, I was not interested in reaching a conclusion that will not budge with the passing of time. The research and understanding of Fan Culture is to be continued, to be explored, to be developed. Rather, this dissertation intends to be a starting point to a much greater conversation. Departing from a simple three-letter word, it is the path that interests me, the twists, and turns one might take to get to the destination. Fan culture is an evolving culture. Not only that, but it finds itself participating within a fast-changing society. It is important to note that, sooner or later, the terminology used in this dissertation might become outdated. That is because fans themselves re-invent and re-define themselves constantly. That is why this dissertation is mostly focused on understanding paradigms, common jargons, points of unity and points of friction.

I have always seen fandom as a sort of a puzzle. Various individuals acting as the different pieces joining together to create a cohesive whole. And yet, each piece has its own intricacies, boundaries and levels of complexity. Experiencing fandom as a fan is the sole reason that I am now here experiencing it as a researcher. Raymond Williams famously said that “culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language” (1983, 87). I would argue that “fan”, as a component of culture, partakes in that complexity as well.

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## Appendix

### Annex A – Cross-comparison of the data – Full set

	<b>This Dissertation</b>	<b>The Fandom and Meaning Scale (Tsay-Vogel and Sanders 2017)</b>	<b>The Fan Identity Scale (Vinney et al. 2019)</b>	<b>The Fan Identity Questionnaire (Lozano, Plaza, and Sánchez 2020)</b>
<b>Self-Identification</b>	Included	Included	Excluded	N/A
<b>Participation / Experience</b>	Included	N/A	Excluded	Included
<b>Performance</b>	Included	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>The Affective Process</b>	Included	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Possession</b>	Included, but does not differentiate between material and non-material	Included, but solely non-material (knowledge)	N/A	Included, but differentiates between material (collecting) and non-material (knowledge)
<b>Consumption</b>	Included	Included, but solely as intentional	N/A	N/A
<b>Productivity / Production</b>	Included	N/A	Excluded	Excluded
<b>Entertainment</b>	Included	Included	N/A	N/A

<b>Pleasure</b>	Included	Included	N/A	Excluded
<b>Enthusiasm</b>	N/A	Included	Included	N/A
<b>Appreciation</b>	N/A	Included, partially	Included	N/A
<b>Enjoyment</b>	N/A	Included, partially	Excluded	N/A
<b>Social Interaction</b>	N/A	N/A	Included	N/A
<b>Personal (Growth)</b>	N/A	Excluded	Excluded	N/A