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Global Fandom/Global Fan Studies

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When we were asked to submit a chapter on global fandom, we said "sure."[1] We put the idea aside for several months, came back to it, and began to wonder what we had gotten ourselves into. What, we asked ourselves, does the term "global fandom" even mean? Does it mean studying the meaning of "fan" in different parts of the world? Does it mean studying how fans in different countries all respond to the same "global" text? Does it mean studying import/export trade patterns and how fans in one cultural context respond to texts from another cultural context? Given our own uncertainties, we decided to pose these questions to scholars who conduct fan research in different parts of the world. This chapter is thus about the *status* and *possibilities* for global fandom and global fan studies, and is based on email interviews with sixty-five scholars.

Our exploratory study is framed by four overlapping debates. Most obviously, it is framed by debates over cultural globalization, since media consumption[2] is "perhaps the most immediate, consistent and pervasive way in which 'globality' is experienced" (Murphy & Kraidy 2003: 7). Until recently, there has been a clear distinction between global media studies taking a macro political economic approach and the more micro (text-based) media reception research more commonly associated with cultural studies. In the latter approach, scholars have spent the last two decades exploring the effects of border crossing by both texts and persons; that is, the reception of imported media by local audiences (e.g. a Chilean in Chile watching *Desperate Housewives*) and the reception of "home" media by dislocated audiences (e.g. someone from the United States traveling in Chile watching *Desperate Housewives*) (see Ang 1985; Harrington & Bielby 2005a; Juluri 2003a, 2003b; Liebes & Katz 1990; Milikowski 2000; Naficy

1999). The focus of this approach is typically the effects of imported texts on national and cultural identities.

Given rapid advances in technological distribution and evolving formal trade agreements, fan studies scholars have recently turned from the study of imported media to the notion of "global" media texts and internationally dispersed audiences. For example, the International *Lord of the Rings* Audience Research Project directed by Martin Barker (http://www.lordoftheringsresearch.net) includes globally dispersed viewers (over twenty-five thousand to date) as well as globally dispersed research teams, and facilitates a variety of audience and fan studies analyses (both qualitative and quantitative). The project allows for within-country and cross-cultural comparisons of audience response to the film. Furthermore, the open (online) discussion of the research process, unfortunately still rare in academia, encourages collective reflection about the difficulties and limitations of such a project. Other global media texts ripe for scholarly investigation include the Eurovision Song Contest, which launched in 1956 and currently has thirty-nine countries participating, and the recent Live 8 concerts in Canada, France, Italy, Japan, South Africa, Russia, England, and the United States, which allow for a unique opportunity to study cultural (music) globalization explicitly framed by larger political and economic events (the G-8 meetings in Scotland, July 2005).

Crane argues that media reception theory

> requires modification to be useful in today's complex global environment. Understanding the public's responses to global culture in different countries and in different settings in those countries necessitates a broader reconceptualization of reception theory, one that goes beyond focusing entirely on the audience itself and instead examines the relationships between the imported culture and the national culture, as well as the roles of cultural entrepreneurs. (2002: 18–19)

Indeed, global media reception studies are slowly moving (back) to central questions of culture, power, and ideology more typically associated with a political economic approach.[3] In the context of fan studies, for example, Sandvoss (2003) engages explicitly with debates over cultural, political, and economic globalization in his empirical study of football fandom. He examines how television "provides the cultural and social basis of the globalization of football fandom" by both reflecting global structures and acting as an agent of globalization (2003: 82, 86). In another approach,

Juluri (2003a, 2003b) studies the reception of music television in India in the context of globalization as an everyday experience. Posing the central question, "What does it mean to be a global audience?" he writes, "The reception of music television in India is [. . .] not so much about a 'global' text and a 'local' audience [. . .] but instead about the construction of a new sense of the 'global'" (2003b: 119–20). Our own project here is geared, in part, toward an understanding of scholars' conceptualization of fandom in the context of globalization.

The second debate framing our study surrounds the question of who, what, and where is the media audience (see Mosco & Kaye 2000). Originally an industrial (marketing) term linked with the rise of commercial radio broadcasting, the concept of the audience quickly became one of the central ideas in mass communications research. The concept began to destabilize in the late 1980s, however, as scholars recognized the extent to which media are embedded in everyday life and the extent to which we are all living in a mediated culture, both researchers and research participants. As Bird asks, "if we cannot define an audience, is it effectively impossible to study it?" (2003: 4). This notion of "elusive audiences" has been critiqued, however, by global media scholars. For example, Juluri argues that "the study of globalization and media needs to turn its attention to the media audience, not merely as a commercially constructed aggregate of viewers, or partially disembodied subjects of global modernity, but as the point at which media are made meaningful and effectivized" (2003a: 9). He questions, "what does it mean for us as scholars to bow to postmodern recognition of the impossibility of total knowledge [of the audience] precisely at that moment when millions of people across the non-Western world have only begun to become global [. . .] audiences?" (2003b: 218).

Most scholars approach the embeddedness of the media in everyday life as a hurdle rather than a barrier to empirical research, which brings us to the third debate framing our project: methodology. Traditional social science methods such as interviews, surveys, and focus groups are criticized for their inability to fully capture the experience of mediated lives (see Alasuutari 1999a), and in the context of fan studies are seen by some as unable to fully tap into the inarticulacy of fan pleasures (Hills 2002). Ethnography is argued to be the ideal way to study contemporary media audiences, though research claiming to be ethnographic is often anything *but*. The classic anthropological model of long-term on-site fieldwork represents a major challenge to media and fan studies, and has undergone scrutiny throughout the academy for its us/them, researcher/Other

dichotomization (among other reasons). In addition, as Kraidy and Murphy (2003) note, ethnography's commitment to *depth* seems to clash with the *breadth* needed to fully comprehend processes of cultural globalization. Indeed, it is somewhat ironic (and confusing) that media studies turned to ethnography precisely when the "ethnographic crisis" was unfolding in anthropology. The sometimes paralyzing debates over the role of ethnography in the study of global media (see Algan 2003) are revealed in overlapping and often contradictory discussions of passing ethnography (Couldry 2003), auto-ethnography (Hills 2002), virtual or cyberspace ethnography (Bird & Barber 2002), multisited ethnography (Marcus 1998), mediation ethnography (Tufte 2000), and translocal ethnography (Kraidy & Murphy 2003), among others. In reference to the latter, Kraidy and Murphy write,

> ethnography's importance lies more in its capacity to comprehend the articulation of the global with the local, than in its supposed ability to understand the local in isolation of larger-scale structures and processes. A translocal ethnography builds on that to focus on connections between several local social spaces, exploring hitherto neglected *local-to-local articulations* [. . .] the idea of a *translocal* ethnography is born out of the paradox that in times of globalization, a rigorous ethnography *must be local and at the same time cannot only be local.* (2003: 304; original emphasis)

Kraidy and Murphy's recent book *Global Media Studies* (2003) represents a major effort to reconceptualize the role of media ethnography in understanding globalization.

Finally, and relatedly, our project is framed by the ongoing debate about researchers' presence or self-reflexivity in data collection and/or published findings. As Jenkins (2001: n.p.) points out, "the value of ethnography is not ultimately that it allows you to talk to 'the real' but that it introduces notions of dialogue and accountability." While academia in general privileges the critical distance of the academic "expert" vis-à-vis his or her "object" of study, there are obviously different and evolving traditions throughout the academy. Generally speaking, cultural studies expects self-reflexivity, and as it is the widely assumed home of fan studies (though this is debatable), scholars—perhaps *especially* those adopting ethnographic techniques—are expected to make their fannish presence, identities, and pleasures known. This is not unproblematic, of course, as Hills's (2002) and others' discussions of scholar-fans, fan-scholars, and

"legitimate" knowledge(s) attest. When we wrote our book on soap opera fandom in the early 1990s (Harrington & Bielby 1995), it frankly did not occur to us to declare our own fandom in print, in part due to our training in mainstream sociology, in part due to where fan studies was at that time, and in part due to the way we construct our own personal fan identities.

As we discuss below, the question of self-reflexivity remains a concern for fan scholars in research and publication. It is also a concern of scholars evaluating the possibilities of a truly "global" fan studies. In her critique of U.S. fan studies, for example, Meehan (2000) suggests that when scholars "share the taboos" of the groups they study, it "may prevent them from placing US fandoms in the context of US culture and from exploring the degree to which fandom's values and fan experience are shaped by dominant ideology" (2000: 74). Fan scholars' "insider" status and own identities thus make it difficult, Meehan suggests, for them (us) to perceive and analyze the relevant cultural contexts shaping fan activities and identities.

These four related debates—centered on cultural globalization, defining the media audience, methodology, and self-reflexivity—thus serve as the conceptual framework for our exploratory study of global fandom and global fan studies. We describe our data and methodological approach below, followed by a discussion of key research findings.

Project Design

Our research is based on email interviews with scholars who study and/or write about fans. All participants received email invitations to participate in the study. If they responded affirmatively, the survey (available in English and Spanish) was emailed to them for completion. Our methodology involved modified snowball sampling; we initiated some invitations to participate in the study, and participants were asked to recommend others. The invitation was also forwarded to several listservs with our permission. We followed through on all of the recommendations (we did not screen anyone out), so the pool represents people who *we* think do fan studies and people who our *participants* think do fan studies. Our goal was not to include everyone in the world who conducts fan research (an impossible goal) but to attract the most globally diverse pool possible given our language restrictions.

TABLE 13.1
Selected Traits of Fan Studies Scholars (n=65)

	PERCENT
SAMPLE	
Male	46%
Female	54%
1–4 publications on media consumers/fans	34%
5–100+ publications on media consumers/fans	42%
Other	7%
Humanities scholars	20%
Social science scholars	45%
Interdisciplinary studies scholars	26%
Business (sport) management scholars	6%
Other (e.g. education, movement science)	3%
SCHOLARS WHO	
Define fandom primarily as [investment]	38%
Define fandom primarily as [engagement]	20%
Emphasize no single dimension of fandom	32%
Emphasize affective dimension of fandom	18%
Primarily emphasize affective/behavioral dimensions	17%
Emphasize research question or goal as definitive	11%
Emphasize ideological dimension of fandom	3%
SCHOLARS WHO	
Are fans of what they study	63%
Humanities scholars	78%
Social science scholars	67%
Interdisciplinary scholars	46%
Business (sport) management	25%
Acknowledge their fandom in data collection	44%
Humanities scholars	62%
Social science scholars	44%
Interdisciplinary scholars	85%
Business (sport) management	0%
Acknowledge their fandom in publications	42%
Humanities scholars	71%
Social science scholars	44%
Interdisciplinary scholars	71%
Business (sport) management	0%

We emailed 104 surveys to potential participants and received sixty-five completed responses for a 63 percent return rate (very respectable within sociology). The survey consists of twenty-seven questions focusing on participants' involvement with fan studies research and their perspectives on a range of fan-related issues. We attempted to word the questions such that they could be easily understood by non-native English speakers, but we did not always succeed. We note that this study of scholars was in fact a study of scholarly produced *texts*, as we worked wholly with the written (emailed) surveys. Following a grounded theory approach, this study is

directed toward developing an understanding of participants' perceptions of the status and possibilities of global fandom and global fan studies, as revealed through the written surveys. The methodology was designed to capture both variation and depth in participants' responses.

Our sample includes thirty males and thirty-five females. Most are faculty and graduate students who conduct academic research, though several fan fiction writers also participated. Our participants conduct research and writing projects in twenty different countries, though North America is overrepresented, constituting 49 percent of the sample (n=32).[4] English is the primary language of publication, though Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Korean, German, Finnish, and Dutch are also represented. Participants' level of experience, discipline of training, and methodological approach vary. For example, 85 percent of the sample reports at least two years' experience conducting research on media consumers and/or fans, with 29 percent reporting eleven or more years. Eighty-three percent of the sample has published in the area of media audiences/consumers/fans, with 42 percent having five or more publications (one participant has over one hundred publications). A total of thirty-six different disciplines of training were reported, representing the social sciences (e.g. mass communications, sociology, clinical psychology, anthropology), humanities (e.g. English literature, philosophy, folklore), business (e.g. sport management), and interdisciplinary fields such as cultural studies, African studies, and Japanese studies. This variety in educational background is reflected in the wide range of methodological approaches participants bring to their scholarship, including textual/literary analyses, psychoanalysis, experimental and quasi experimental design, surveys, interviews, focus groups, participant observation, virtual ethnography, archival research, discourse analysis, performative/narrative analysis, polling methods, and historical research, among others.

Please note that, given space constraints, we opt to focus in this chapter on summary (descriptive) findings, with plans to examine several issues in greater depth elsewhere (e.g. Bielby, Moloney, & Harrington n.d.; Schimmel, Harrington, & Bielby n.d.). Our discussion below focuses on three key findings. First, we discuss participants' understanding of fans vs. consumers, dimensions of fandom, and the fan studies "canon." Second, we discuss self-reflexivity in media fan research. Finally, we explore the possibilities for global fandom and global fan studies. Given confidentiality agreements, no names are used; we identify participants by code number only.

Understanding Fans

We asked participants to distinguish between consumers and fans. Their responses confirmed dominant conceptualizations in the (Western) fan studies literature.[5] Many view fans and consumers as existing on the same continuum (e.g. Abercrombie & Longhurst 1998), with fans distinguished primarily by their degree of emotional, psychological, and/or behavioral *investment* in media texts (38 percent of participants emphasized this aspect of fandom) and/or their "active" *engagement* with media texts (20 percent emphasized this aspect; see table 13.1). Participants also referred to issues of community, sociality, self-identification, and regularity of consumption in distinguishing fans from consumers. Consider the following responses:

> One could say that in the "first world" nations everyone is a media consumer. We all constantly consume media artifacts [. . .] to obtain information, for pleasure and relaxation, or simply to channel our frustrations and anger[. . . .] A media fan is obviously a media consumer but one who develops a personal attachment to a particular media artifact or "star" and actively engages in a multiplicity of levels of creation that transcends or could even transform the "original" text, character, or star persona. (Participant #7)

> I see no real distinction though I am fully aware that orthodox representations work—often quite insidiously—to figure the two as very different indeed[. . . .] [M]uch of the critical interest and value of fandoms stem not from their status as a distinctive thing apart [. . .] but from their very ordinariness [. . . .] [F]ans are simply consumers that take their practices or media consumptions seriously and mobilize them in ways that are perhaps a little more spectacular and overt than other consumers but whose uses of media aren't qualitatively different. Thus any distinctions are, to my mind at least, of degree rather than kind. (Participant #47)

We also asked participants to identify which of the following dimensions is most significant for understanding fans: intellectual, affective, behavioral, or ideological. Nearly one-third (32 percent) feel that no single dimension is more important than others (i.e. all are relevant), almost one-fifth (18 percent) identify the affective dimension as most important, about another fifth (17 percent) believe that a mixture of (though not all) dimensions take precedence (most emphasize affective and behavioral dimensions), and slightly more than one-tenth (11 percent) believe the answer depends wholly on the research question and/or goal. We note that only 3 percent believe the ideological dimension is most important, which raises interesting questions in terms of Meehan's (2000) critique of ethnography, ideology, and cultural awareness in U.S. fan studies (see below). A number of participants identified additional dimensions they feel are crucial to an understanding of fandom but were omitted from our forced-choice question, including cognitive, aesthetic, psychological, and socio-cultural dimensions.

General consensus over the meaning(s) of fandom is echoed by consensus over the dominant stereotype of fandom—the all-too-familiar (to Western scholars at least) loser/lunatic image (Jensen 1992). Participants point to modifications of this stereotype, however, based on historical era, cultural location, and object of fandom:

> Complete geeks. Fortunately, we now have self-proclaimed Geek Peter Jackson on our side and he's got a trunkload of Oscars. I think in the US the last decade has given the notion of Geekhood some residual coolness. Gen X are children of the 70s, and we understand camp like no other generation[. . . .] [Y]ou've seen what we watched on TV, what we wore to grade school, the lunchboxes we had! [. . .] [P]art of the generational requirement of Gen X is to have your own pet corner of fandom that you can hold close to your heart and call your own. (Participant #30)

> [I]n Finland we do not have such prejudices concerning fans as "freaks" as in the US. This may partly boil down to language: in Finnish the term "fani" (fan) does not associate with "fanatic" nearly as closely as in English and perhaps other Indo-European languages[. . . .] [T]here is less need for fandom studies to defend fans. (Participant #21)

> Like much of the modern, Western world, the stereotypical image of the media fan in Australia remains a fairly negative one[. . . .] Such an image is of course inflected variably by social differences such as gender, age, race, sexuality, and so on[. . . .] [T]he straight male sports fan, far from being a pilloried figure, is rendered all-but-normative, whereas the "housewife" lover of TV soap, the adolescent girl fan of a teen idol, or the queer devotee of a Hollywood star is regularly coded as socially pathological or deficient. (Participant #47)

In general, then, our participants' understandings of fandom and its stereotypes confirms the extant literature.

Finally, we explored the idea of an emergent fan studies canon by asking participants to identify the most important publications on media consumers and/or fans, the most influential scholars, and the publication outlets perceived to be most receptive to fan studies research. The five most important publications (in descending order of significance) are identified as follows: Henry Jenkins's *Textual Poachers* (1992), Lisa A. Lewis's *Adoring Audience* (1992) and (tied for second) Matt Hills's *Fan Cultures* (2002), Camille Bacon-Smith's *Enterprising Women* (1992), and Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance* (1984). In terms of the most influential scholars, three tiers emerged (clearly, this is awkward terminology). The first tier (most influential) is occupied solely by Henry Jenkins. The second tier of influence is occupied (in alphabetical order) by Camille Bacon-Smith, John Fiske, Matt Hills, Janice Radway, and Dan Wann. The third most influential group of scholars identified by participants includes (in alphabetical order) Nicholas Abercrombie/Brian Longhurst, Ien Ang, Will Brooker, Lawrence Grossberg, C. Lee Harrington/Denise D. Bielby, Constance Penley, and Jackie Stacey. Finally, participants identified the following publication outlets as most receptive to manuscripts on fans (in alphabetical order): *Journal of Sport Behavior*, Routledge, Sage, and *Television & New Media*.[6]

To briefly summarize this section, scholars agree that a range of dimensions should be taken into account in studying fandom, with the affective dimension singled out as particularly important. Participants also point to an emergent fan studies canon, as noted above. In the following section we discuss scholars' perceptions of the need (or lack thereof) for self-reflexivity in the research and publication process.

Self-reflexivity

As discussed in the introductory chapter to this volume, Henry Jenkins (2001) identifies three generations of Western fan scholars and encourages recognition of the historical context that shaped their authorial or fannish presence in their research. The question of self-reflexivity is an issue in media studies defined broadly, of course (as well as many other areas of the academy), and is central to scholars' efforts to develop the appropriate methodology for global media studies (see

Murphy & Kraidy 2003). We asked participants whether they themselves are fans of what they study (Hills's scholar-fans, 2002), and if so, whether they acknowledge that in data collection and publication.[7] Almost two-thirds (63 percent) of participants are indeed fans of what they study, though less than half (44 percent) self-identify as fans in data collection and only 42 percent in published articles. Their explanations for acknowledgment (or lack thereof) focus on methodology, discipline of training, institutional status, and cultural location, among other reasons:

> I expect it from a scientist to acknowledge his/her own position towards the research object (which for me is the fan as well as the media) and I would expect it from myself. Besides, I think it's very easy to find out if a researcher is a fan himself by reading his work—whether he mentions it or not. It makes a big difference. (Participant #22)

> Certainly anyone who looks at my bio would know I am a consumer and producer of, for example, science fiction. I make no apologies for that in any of my writings. But I don't waste valuable scholarly time on personal confessions, either[. . . .] It's no surprise US citizens often write US history, either, or French citizens French history, or Catholics Church history. The work should speak for itself. (Participant #48)

> I do not acknowledge that I am a sport fan in published articles. Of course, much of our publishing occurs in journals dedicated to examining aspects of sport and exercise. Most of the people who do research in these areas are also fans of the sport they research. It is almost as if you had to acknowledge that you breathe. (Participant # 3)

> [Mass Communication] in Korea tends to expect a positivist, objective research. The inter-subjective, interpretive researches of qualitative studies or cultural studies have often faced severe criticism in terms of objectivity and verification. (Participant # 46)

We mapped responses on self-reflexivity to both disciplinary heritage and cultural (geographic) location. In terms of the question "Are you yourself a fan of what you study?" over three-quarters (78 percent) of those trained in the humanities responded "yes," along with two-thirds (67 percent) of social scientists, nearly half (46 percent) of those trained in

interdisciplinary fields, and one-quarter (25 percent) of those trained in business (sport) management. In response to the question "do you acknowledge that in data collection?" nearly two-thirds (62 percent) of humanities scholars who are fans of what they study responded "yes" along with almost half (44 percent) of social scientists. The vast majority (85 percent) of those educated in interdisciplinary fields responded affirmatively to this question, although none of those trained in business (sport) management did. Finally, in response to the question "do you acknowledge that in published articles?" the vast majority of humanities scholars and those trained in interdisciplinary fields who are fans of what they study responded affirmatively (71 percent of each group), while less than half (44 percent) the social scientists did, and none of those trained in business (sport) management. (We found sport fan scholars differing from other participants on a range of issues; see Sandvoss 2003; Schimmel, Harrington, & Bielby n.d.).

To examine self-reflexivity and cultural (geographic) location, we began by separating participants into two groups. While not wanting to reify presumed distinctions between the "West" and the "Rest," we were at the same time precisely interested in how our own socio-cultural location (as U.S.-born-and-trained scholars who read only English-language publications) has shaped our understandings about fandom and fan studies in ways that may—or may not—be shared by colleagues in other parts of the world. Prior work has suggested that central foci of Western fan studies—in notions such as pleasure, autonomy, individuality, freedom, leisure, etc.—must be understood in terms of the larger cultural context rather than taken for granted as inevitable features of fan experiences. For example, Meehan (2000) argues that the emic (insider) status typical of U.S. fan ethnographies contributes to scholars' underengagement with issues of ideology:

> For fans, leisure time is spent in fandom, work time in the "mundane world" of nonfans. An emic approach accepts this division as authentic, lived experience and thereby as a unique feature of fandom. Thus, emic ethnographers overlook the constructedness of "leisure time" and the role that dominant ideology plays in that construction. (Meehan 2000: 75; see, however, Sandvoss 2003)

Indeed, we reiterate the finding noted above that only 3 percent of our participants perceive the ideological dimension of fandom as most significant. While self-reflexivity represents just one way in which cultural location might impact scholars' analyses, it offers important insight into how trajectories of research might develop differently in diverse global contexts.

As the term "Western world" has no single international or academic definition, we elected to follow a common (albeit problematic) practice by separating participants into two groups, one including scholars and fan fiction writers from North America, European Union member states, Australia, and New Zealand (Group 1), with our participants from Brazil, Chile, India, Israel, South Korea, Malaysia, Puerto Rico, Russia, South Africa, Taiwan, and Turkey comprising the second group (Group 2). Similar percentages of scholars from these groups (77 percent and 73 percent, respectively) report being personal fans of what they study, but fewer (74 percent) Group 1 scholars acknowledge that fact when collecting data as compared to Group 2 scholars (88 percent). In response to the question "do you acknowledge that in published articles?" 60 percent of Group 1 scholars who are fans of what they study respond "yes" compared to 100 percent of Group 2 scholars. In short, Group 1 scholars are only *slightly more likely* to be fans of what they study—but, if they *are* fans, they are *considerably less likely* to acknowledge that in data collection and/or published articles (particularly the latter) than scholars working in other parts of the world. What factors related to cultural context might lead to this finding? How does this help create different fan studies around the globe, particularly given Meehan's (2000) hesitations noted above?

In sum, most of our participants are fans of what they study though whether they reveal this in data collection and publication varies, depending in part on disciplinary heritage, cultural (geographic) location, and power/status dynamics. In the following section we examine the status and possibilities of global fandom/global fan studies.

Global Fandom/Global Fan Studies

Earlier we listed the various methodologies used by participants in their own research. We also asked, "What would be the ideal methodological design for a study of 'global fandom'"? We received a number of responses along the lines of, "Good God. I'm not even going to try to answer this" (Participant #1) and "Yikes! Start with Tylenol on hand" (Participant # 24). To ask about appropriate methodological design implies, of course, that a thing called "global fandom" even exists.[8] As our participants note, this assumption is debatable:

I do not know if "fandom" is a globally representative category to generalize—would fans of *Sex and the City* or *Star Trek* in suburban USA fall into the same category of fandom as a working class peasant fan of [the actor] Chiranjeevi in rural India? I doubt it. (Participant #2)

Filling in this questionnaire, I'm starting to find the empirical category "fandom" quite useless [. . .] so if you want to globalize it you'd end up in many complicated debates about what constitutes a "fan" in, say, Sydney, and in Tehran, and in Helsinki. [J]ust study "global" consumption patterns. (Participant # 4)

I think [global fandom] is too broad a category; there are specific movements that can [be] discussed intelligently and smaller stories that can be constructed[. . . .] Right now, we're in a place where all kinds of fandoms are now communicating and merging—tv fandoms are talking to anime vidders are in contact with role play gamers, but those are all separate genealogies[. . . .] I worry that they'll be swept together and important history erased. (Participant # 34)

The study of consumer culture or fandom should be studied in terms of every specific cultural, social, historical and political context. To carve out a "global methodological design" may not help, but on the contrary may suppress the cultural and social differences around the globe, which is the exact opposite of what cultural studies and its interdisciplinary ideals strive to achieve—to demonstrate the different social and cultural varieties and compositions in people's lives. (Participant #35)

Indeed, in a brief summary of sport fan research, Lee suggests that cultural context is a key factor distinguishing sport fan communities from one another:

In the world of soccer, the hooligans, particularly the "English model," have embodied the idea of the pathological and dangerous fanatics[. . . .] Different types of societies have produced other types of fans [. . .] such as the Danish roligans, the Italian ultra, and Scotland's Tartan Army. These fan groups take on characteristics specific to the social and political conditions within which they arise. (2005: 197)

Most of our participants *do* believe in the concept and possibility of global fandom (and global fan studies), though many share the cautions noted in the quotations above. They propose a variety of methodologies to empirically access global fandom; some approaches, mostly in sport fan studies, are heavily quantitative:

A longitudinal quasi-experimental design that measures participants' identification with at least three different teams across different sports as the independent variable and has multiple measures of psychological health. Have at least six different measurements of both the independent variable and the dependent variables. (Participant #3)

Others are largely Internet based:

Virtual ethnography would be the most efficient way to compare and contrast modes and methods of fandom around the globe. A combination of observation (e.g. of fan-created Web sites, fan fiction, fan art) and participant observation (in chats and bulletin board discussions) could be used. Obviously this would entail a multilingual and computer literate research team. (Participant # 17)

Most participants indicate the necessity of a multisited, collaborative research project that is methodologically diverse. They emphasize a social-scientific focus with particular emphasis on ethnographic methods, though several made impassioned pleas for the continued relevance of literary/textual analyses. As one can imagine, this sets the stage for an extremely complicated research design:

[O]ne way that might be efficient without having one national or regional perspective dominate would be to have researchers from different areas of the world design projects; then everyone looks at the designs so that all researchers know what the others are doing. Then, as the projects are completed individually, a joint publication could emerge in which the collaborators work to thread together the projects based on their original goals. (Participant #24)

It's a very interesting goal [. . .] but I think it would inevitably neglect many methodological angles and leave major occlusions, and perhaps necessarily falsify the subject in some ways because of the difficulty of finding researchers who are adequately embedded in all the various local formations and languages[. . . .] Overall, I think it would require a collaboration

> between multiple researchers with a shared sense of purpose and divergent regional specializations as well as divergent specializations within the study of fandom[. . . .] [I]t would have to be social science oriented, and I think the most interesting results would be descriptive, followed by analysis along political economy and globalization lines. (Participant # 26)

One of the scholars participating in the International *Lord of the Rings* Project shares the following insights:

> I would have to say that on paper, the design for [the LOTR] study looked almost perfect: combination of marketing strategies and merchandising, large survey (both online and offline), and interviews. From participating with this project, I have learned that a survey of this size should be designed and pre-tested very carefully, and that a project such as this would require a firm and consistent theoretical background[. . . .] [T]he design would be such that the researchers would be strongly encouraged to cooperate in transnational groups, otherwise the project runs a severe risk (as did [. . .] the LOTR project) of reifying the nation state. (Participant #57)[9]

These responses speak to the notion of translocal or multisited media ethnography discussed earlier, as well as to the research agendas proposed by Kraidy and Murphy: "First, global media scholarship must make *a commitment to empirical research* to complement its theoretical arguments[. . . .] Second, we advocate that global media studies *embraces real interdisciplinarity,* because the complexity of globalization and its multifaceted process require diverse expertise" (2003: 306; original emphasis). Fan studies' emergent global focus suggests that the above agendas are shared by both fan studies and global media studies, thus potentially bringing these literatures together in a new way.

Conclusion

As an initial effort, our exploratory study met with some challenges. For example, we underestimated the amount of time it would take to complete the survey, which seemed to irritate some participants (never a good research outcome!). In addition, our attempt to find the most accessible terminology possible, combined with the lack of followup opportunity,

meant that miscommunications occurred (e.g. participants did not always understand our questions). Relatedly, disciplinary divisions within fan studies revealed themselves in that the terminology we as sociologists use to describe empirical research on fans and fandom (e.g. research "participants," media "consumers," etc.) was considered problematic by some of those who completed the survey. An unexpected phenomenon occurred wherein several participants did not directly answer our questions but instead replied, "Read my book," or "Look at my webpage." In part, this probably reflects the unexpected length of the questionnaire and/or the desire by published authors to not repeat themselves in gruesome depth, but as researchers who have interviewed other groups of professionals before, this was a first for us. Finally, a significant limitation of our project is that the survey was available in only two languages (English and Spanish), which certainly limits any research findings purporting to be "global" in nature.

Despite these limitations, our study points to fruitful areas for continued research. Findings suggest general consensus on some aspects of fan studies (e.g. the meaning of the term "fan"), indicate continued lack of consensus in others (e.g. expectations of self-reflexivity), and raise interesting questions for fan studies scholars: how have etymological differences shaped the public image of fans and fandom in different parts of the world? Where and with whom are fan scholars exchanging ideas (see Murphy & Kraidy 2003: 11), and how has that shaped different trajectories of fan studies? Why do scholars seem to place so little emphasis on the ideological dimension of fandom? How can we more fully explore the relationship among disciplinary training, cultural location, and self-reflexivity in fan scholarship? How should key assumptions in Western fan studies—about the importance of pleasure, say—be understood in other cultural contexts (see Meehan 2000)?

It is difficult to address the importance of these questions because we have no way of knowing the extent to which our sample is representative of the field, which raises epistemological questions. For example, in our discussion of self-reflexivity we separated participants into two groups, with Group 1 comprised of "Western" scholars and Group 2 comprised of scholars in other parts of the world. Fully 80 percent of our participants are located in Group 1. Consider too that the emergent fan studies canon we identified included *only* Western scholars, publications, and publication outlets. Finally, consider the 63 percent return rate on our email sur-

vey. While this is a perfectly satisfactory rate for sociological research, we were enthusiastically awaiting completed surveys from scholars who would have helped extend the global reach of our project (including scholars from Uganda, Kenya, Ecuador, China, Zimbabwe, Zanzibar, Bolivia, Mexico, and Nepal). Did these potential participants not understand the survey questions? Did the questions not capture fan studies as they know it? Did our questions focus, as Meehan's (2000) critique might predict, too much on individualistic fan experiences and too little on the political economy of fandom that might be more recognizable to other groups of scholars? The answers to these questions might tell us something significant about the global location of the history and development of fan studies . . . or it might tell us something about the methodological limitations of our project. At this point, we honestly do not know which.

Ultimately, the most important finding of our study is scholars' concerns about what might be gained or lost by assuming that "global fandom" even exists. We asked participants "how would you *study* global fandom?" with the hope of revealing their assumptions about what it actually *is* (see opening paragraph). The diversity of their responses, however, speaks to a notable lack of clarity regarding the existence and/or nature of global fandom, and thus, about the possibilities for global fan studies. We hope this study is the beginning of a fruitful conversation to that end.

Notes

1. We thank Andrea Parks for her assistance with data entry and preparation of transcripts; Kimberly Schimmel for her assistance in identifying potential participants and for feedback on prior versions of the manuscript; and our participants for their time and effort in completing the surveys.

2. We define the term "media" broadly here to include television, sport, music, movies, literature, and so on. Some of our participants study mediated fandom (e.g. fans of televised music or sport) while others study nonmediated fandom (e.g. fans of live music or sporting events). We acknowledge that this broad definition might be controversial within some areas of the academy.

3. A full examination of the history of reception studies is beyond the scope of this manuscript; for recent discussions, see Alasuutari (1999a), Bird (2003), and Meehan (2000).

4. Countries represented in the sample include Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, England, Finland, Germany, India, Israel, Italy, South Korea, Malaysia, the Netherlands, Puerto Rico, Russia, South Africa, Taiwan, Turkey, and the United States.

5. See Hills (2002) and Sandvoss (2005a) for a review of the major sociological and psychological approaches to fans and fandom.

6. These survey items were open-ended questions. We have included here the most frequently identified publications, persons, and publication outlets.

7. As one participant points out, however, the general expectation of self-reflexivity in fan studies does not extend to scholars who are *non*-fans or *anti*-fans of what they study. Why are scholars expected to "confess" their (our) pleasures but not displeasures? (Participant #59)

8. It further implies, in reference to our prior discussion, that a global media *audience* exists. Juluri asks, "[W]hat would cultural studies have to say about something called the global audience? The marketing-oriented definition of the global [TV] audience as a billion people all over the world watching the Olympics or *Baywatch* is clearly not the answer[. . . .] [B]ecoming a global audience may be seen not only as the outcome of cultural production on a worldwide scale by giant media conglomerates, but as a moment of situated struggle over what constitutes the world for the audience" (2003b: 120).

9. A number of participants cited the LOTR project as one of the most ambitious efforts to date, though some argue that the type of data being collected does not adequately distinguish between fans and other audiences, and does not allow for the richness of fan experiences to be explored. However, in a series of presentations about the project at the 2005 International Communication Association meetings, it seemed to us that findings made contributions to both fan studies and audience studies (broadly defined).