

# MEDIA TEXT AND AUDIENCES: DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS OF FANDOM

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**ABSTRACT** *This paper presents the research findings obtained from a research project investigating media audiences and their reception of a cult-television (Cult TV) text, namely Da Ali G Show. The audience research comprises 18 semi-structured interviews conducted in London (the United Kingdom) and in Zagreb (Croatia) aimed at establishing how fandom is discursively constructed. The analysis of the interpretive community in two distinct socio-cultural contexts showed that there were more similarities than differences overall. The practices engaged in by the interviewees mostly involved making a conscious effort to regularly watch the primary text as well as to show an interest in the future work of the author. The research showed that interviewees typically engaged in a type of 'moderate' fandom, whilst strong emotional attachments were seen as negative, as was intrusiveness into people's privacy. This indicates a split between the signifier and the signified: the term 'fan' was readily adopted by interviewees in describing their relationship to the text; however, the meaning was negotiated and carefully constructed so as to disassociate oneself from the extreme, passionate, irrational connotation that the etymology of the term carries.*

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#### KEY WORDS:

FANS, FAN PRACTICES, DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION, MODERATE FANDOM, CULT TV

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## INTRODUCTION: APPROACHES TO FANDOM

Throughout the development of media theory, the audience has been conceptualized in a variety of ways: as mass audience, as socially differentiated audiences, as social groups or individual readers. The ways in which audiences are positioned are complex and several traditions in media studies have developed different typologies of audience: passive or active; consumers or citizens, according to class, lifestyle or taste cultures; formed through the medium, channel or content. All these constructs can be placed within broader narratives that Joshua Meyrowitz (2008) calls 'the power and resistance narrative', 'the purposes and pleasures narrative' and 'the structures and patterns narrative'. Within the power and resistance narrative, there has been a shift away from the traditional way of viewing audiences as passive targets of manipulation - instead, the new trend is to conceptualize audiences as resistive, creative and active.

One way of thinking about audiences in this powerful and creative way which has emerged in the context of the above mentioned changes and which has become of interest to scholars in the last two decades is the interest in researching fandom constructed in accordance with cultural consumption preferences.

The etymology of the term 'fan' is, according to the dictionary (Klaić, 1988), a shortened form of the word 'fanatic' – referring to a fierce worshipper (of sport, arts, artists), rapturous follower or passionate supporter. In the context of media consumption, in its simplest form "fans" are defined as audience members devoted to a particular media text (artifact or person). Lawrence Grossberg refers to fans in relation to cultural text in a very broad sense, as to "something that matters"... "These mattering maps are like investment portfolios: there are not only different and changing investments, but different forms, as well as different intensities or degrees of investment..." (Grossberg, 2006: 585-586).

Another definition of fandom is particularly linked to the market, as "a form of sustained, affective consumption" (Sandvoss, 2005 in Longhurst, 2007: 33) of popular culture text (music, television, sports, celebrities...). Grossberg argues that consumption is an important aspect of fandom because popular culture in a capitalist society is the "only space where the fan relationship can take shape," because it is the only space left for the active construction of our identities (Grossberg, 2006: 589). Grossberg's claim suggests that consumption is the only way to constitute the subject in contemporary societies where market economy, competition and individualism are regarded as highest values.

The political project that was predominant in the interest in researching popular culture within cultural studies was vivid in Hall's claim that "Popular culture is one of the sites where this struggle for and against a culture of the powerful is engaged...it is one of the places where socialism might be constituted. That is why 'popular culture' matters." (Hall, 2005). This has been abated in more recent considerations about its political potentiality. Grossberg links fan practices to political struggle in the domain of popular culture and claims that:

*"The fan's relation to culture in fact opens up a range of political possibilities and it is often on the field of affective relations that political struggles intersect with popular concerns. In fact, the affective is a crucial dimension of the organization of political struggle" ... "fandom is, at least potentially, the site of the optimism, invigoration and passion which are necessary conditions for any struggle to change the conditions of one's life." (Grossberg, 2006: 590)*

Thus, even though the attempt to push forward the well-known political agenda in cultural studies research is still visible, the focus has moved from ideology and politics to pleasure and consumption (clearly noticeable in the change of discourse: from 'socialism', 'class' and 'power' to optimism, passion and affectivity); from political possibilities emanating from subcultural resistance to political possibilities emanating from affective consumption practices.

Affirmative approaches to fandom have developed parallel with the increased interest in popular culture as the focus of scholarly research which in turn has seen an increased interest in the investigation of fiction genres, popular pleasures, consumption practices, popular tastes and entertainment. In addition, the altered approach to this type of phenomenon has also been influenced by the emergence of the internet, which facilitates an easier involvement in various practices and social networking. As Joli Jensen (2002) claims, what was initially criticized as a problem, or even as a form of pathology, carrying negative attributes - as infantile, hysterical, and even deranged behavior, has now found a new, more affirmative ground, linked to engagement, resistance, subversion and creativity.

This positive aspect of fandom has come to the fore particularly in the context of Cultural Studies in the last two decades, where fans are mainly seen as a powerful element, with an active role in altering the text, challenging private property controlled by producers, engaging in resistive tactics of everyday life and moving away from being spectators to being participants. This co-creativity of fans has been stressed by Henri Jenkins (2005) who claims that fandom is specific in that the boundaries between consumption and production are fading, since fans alter the text, and make the producers modify their product to suit the vision of the fans.

In an attempt to locate cultural products that are likely to attract fans, Fiske claims that fandom is usually oriented towards cultural forms that occupy a low position in the hierarchy of taste (Fiske 2002). He sees fans as part of a culture that resists the mainstream meanings of their chosen media text, and act outside the domain of cultural industries. This margin of cultural products and fans is emphasized by Lisa Taylor and Andrew Willis (1999) who claim that fans are a minority that lack power. They view them as marginalized in the public sphere and with little access to media institutions or influence on representation of themselves. These communities use the chosen text to construct alternative visions of the world, and can be seen as communities that symbolically resist the dominant systems and power relations (Taylor and Willis, 1999: 193).

As visible from the above, the common denominator of fans and fan practices within cultural studies is the attempt to shed light on positive aspects of fandom, even though they are defined differently and linked to different domains of the social sphere. The questions of power relations, resistance, political activism and the creative potential of fans are the most prominent in contemporary debates about fandom, with a clear agenda - empowerment through consumption.

## FANDOM AS SOCIAL PRACTICE

As previously mentioned, fandom includes various forms of investments and intensities of these investments. In terms of concrete social practices, Brian Longhurst (2007) attempts to distinguish between different forms of fan practices, and suggests a variety of positions that audience members can adopt on a continuum representing the relationship of audiences and media texts: The first type is "the consumer" – this type of stance indicates a "generalized and unfocused" interaction with the media product. The second type is "the fan", -- it denotes someone who is attached to the object "within the context of relatively high media usage". The third is the 'cultist' – focused not only on the media object but also on the audiences with whom he/she attempts to interact; The 'enthusiast' – is "involved in the actual production of artifacts connected to their fan and cultic activities", and finally the 'petty producer', whose engagement turns into a full-time, professional activity (Longhurst, 2007: 42-44).

This continuum of fan practices includes a range of activities through which fandom is re-produced. In the field of media, this includes regularly watching a program, gathering information from secondary sources, active participation in formal fan communities (online or offline), visiting places of significance of a program (for example, visiting the public places which the four protagonists of *Sex and the City* used to occupy), buying spin-off products, producing text related to the object of fandom etc. Janet Staiger (2008) points out that, in general, fan studies (including her research) show that fan behaviors usually include 'textual investigation' in order to make sense of a text, attempts to 'memorize dialogue' that is later used in real-life conversation, re-watching a text in order to create fan-produced texts, scopophilia (simply the pleasure of watching), 'emotion-on-demand' and 'ritual collectivity' (Staiger, 2008: 62).

Kari Whittenberger-Keith (1992) is less interested in the object of fandom, or the relationship between the text and the fans; instead, she stresses the importance of fans as community. In her analysis of the '*Beauty and the Beast*', (B+B) she focuses on fandom through the analysis of fan-generated literature (fanzines). The author defines fandom as "a collectivity of people who interact together on the basis of a specific media artifact. The distinguishing features of fandom include the intense involvement of the viewers/fans and the interaction of the fans, not just with the artifact but with one another" (Whittenberger-Keith, 1992: 131-132). She claims that fans and fandom are marginalized and have been ignored within media studies, since the focus is usually on the interaction between text and audience and not on the interaction between fans themselves within a collecti-

ty. The author analyses fanzines as the 'thing' that holds fandom together. She points out that there are three types of rhetoric in fan communities of B+B: aesthetic rhetoric (quality of the show); "fighting the good fight rhetoric"; and rhetoric of personal fulfillment from belonging to a community (p 136). She describes the show from the point of view of the fans as saving lives, changing lives, enabling them to connect to other people realizing that there are "others like them", (Whittenberger-Keith, 1992: 141). The author claims "fans go beyond simple appreciation of the program's values; they enact these values in their everyday lives" (Whittenberger-Keith, 1992: 142). The fans of B+B changed things - they were more involved in helping the homeless, doing charity work, giving donations etc. According to the author the artifact plays an important role only in the initial phase of fandom, at the point where people get involved, but later it is more about the people that are fans and their relations, thus, the interaction with the artifact is secondary to the interaction among fan members within the community.

As different from Whittenberger-Keith who focuses on the relations between the fans, an approach focusing on the artifact is taken by Matt Hills who is interested in television text that he calls 'cult TV'. In addition to the broadly accepted notion that fan texts are polysemic, i.e. that they are open texts, Hills points out the main characteristics of cult TV shows: they are anti-mainstream, not industry-led (as opposed to soap fans), emerging over time, ahead of their time, textually innovative or unusual and - in relation to their media institutional context - they usually first appear on cable or in "fringe timeslots" indicating that they never intended to reach a mass audience (Hills, 2004: 521).<sup>1</sup>

These examples of researching social practices linked to fandom show two main approaches: in the first one the focus is placed on the text-audience relationship, where modes of media usage are pushed forward; the second approach is about the interaction between the members of a fan community, where social networks are established via the object of fandom, which facilitates integration among the members of the fan community.

## THE TEXT-AUDIENCE RESEARCH: A CASE OF CULT TV

In this research the focus was placed on the text-audience relationship. The text I was interested in is the television comedy *Da Ali G Show*, a comedy that had elements of what Hills (2004) calls 'Cult TV': it was anti-mainstream, not-industry lead, ahead of its time, textually innovative with unusual elements, which made it a text that was likely to attract a fan audience. It was outside the domain of cultural industries; however, this holds true only in the first phase of its appearance (similar to other cultural texts) because as soon as it became recognized as a success by the industry this led to the loss of some of the features attributed to cult-TV (as defined by Hills).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Reeves, Rodgers and Epstein give the example of Beavis and Butthead (1996).

<sup>2</sup> Hills focuses on television text and attempts to make a distinction between cultural products (artefacts or people) that are industry-led and ones that are not. In addition, Fiske links fandom to the domain that lies outside the industry. This is adequate as a description of the initial phase in which the text is circulated; however, if a profitable niche is recognized the whole 'package' gets subsumed by the market and triggers profitable industry-led actions (spin-off products).

The text *Da Ali G Show* - created by Sasha Baron Cohen - is a television comedy that originated from the United Kingdom. The show developed out of *The 11 O'Clock Show* broadcast in 1999, where the character of Ali G appeared as a cast member. In the UK was first broadcast on Channel Four in 2000 and in Croatia it was first shown on Nova TV<sup>3</sup> in 2003 (and subsequently in 2004 and 2006). In *Da Ali G Show*, Cohen embodies three trickster characters that represent identities of the 'Other': the homosexual (Bruno) the lower-class (underclass), black, subculture (Ali G); and the Oriental (Borat). All three characters are fake journalists that either invite guests to the studio, or go out to report 'live' on specific stories. This cover enables Cohen to make people take part in the show, since their expectation is that they are interacting with 'real' journalists. The humorous situations develop from their unpreparedness to be confronted with the characters that Cohen embodies, and the set of unusual questions he asks.

I conceptualized the audience as an interpretive community, defined by Fish (1980) as communities whose interpretative practices are guided by shared cultural codes - Fish points out that the process of meaning-making is primarily a social act, in which interpretation is constantly negotiated and in which the reader 'authors' the text. Thus, interpretation will depend on strategies that circulate within the interpretive community of the reader - a community whose members can have different structural positions.

Similar to Janice Radway (1984) in her research on romance readers, I used the expression of commitment to *Da Ali G Show* to identify my interpretive community. In other words, the research included viewers who claimed they used to watch this television comedy, and who expressed a positive attitude towards the show and the type of humor it pushed forward. This was important due to the fact that the text in question raised controversies and generated polarized positions regarding the acceptability of this type of provocative, 'politically incorrect' humor (as shown in the analysis of the text and the extra-textual environment including newspaper articles and academic articles, which also formed part of this research).

## RESEARCH METHOD

Due to the fact that I analyzed the audiences as discourses, I chose interviewing as a method to gather data. The interviews were conducted individually because I wanted the participants to discuss the topic in their own terms and with their own linguistic blocks unhampered by others as is often the case in focus group interviews. The interviews were semi-structured and included more general questions about the context of watching the show, followed by more specific questions about the show and its characters and jokes, touching upon the way the participants discursively constructed the audience (as a projection technique), and related to issues of fandom. The general interview guide also included broader concerns in relation to the controversy the text raised, the political correctness debate and the limits of humor. In a general sense, it included three fields of interest linked to television comedy: the discursive construction of the meaning of the

<sup>3</sup> A commercial television channel with national reach.

concrete text *Da Ali G Show*, viewing practices and the discursive construction of fandom; and cultural consumption and taste hierarchies with respect to comedy as genre and the limits of humor. I conducted 18 semi-structured interviews (2009-2010), with the interviewees selected using the snow-ball method. The interviews took approximately 30 minutes and were audiotaped. Nine were conducted in London in the United Kingdom, and nine in Zagreb, Croatia.

The research was conducted in these two separate settings with a view to assessing the shared cultural codes of the interpretive community and delimiting the socio-cultural context. My research was conducted from a comparative perspective, aimed at illustrating the similarities and differences in the meaning-making process in a setting in which the text originated (UK) and a setting into which the text had been imported (Croatia). Even though these two countries are quite diverse in terms of history, social and political organization, relative economic strength, and structural position in the world order: the UK being part of 'the West' and Croatia being part of 'the East', it was interesting to compare because one of the motifs in the show dealt with power relations between the 'uncivilized East' and the 'civilized West', which could be linked back to different modes of reception in the respective settings.

Some of the methodological problems that arose from situating the research in these two settings are linked to the differences in my own ability to master the nuances that emerged during the interviews in London, in a 'foreign' cultural context where I occupied the position of an outsider - compared to Zagreb, Croatia which, as my country of origin, enabled me to have an 'insider's' perspective. This had repercussions in the way the interviews were conducted, particularly in my ability to lead the semi-structured interviews in which topics are supposed to arise naturally, with digressions likely to be of use (Bertrand and Hughes, 2005). In addition, the focus on discursive strategies in my research makes language extremely important and the implications of the expressed are crucial in later interpretations. I consider this to be the weakest part of the research.

## DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS OF FANDOM

In this article only one segment of the research is outlined: the part that touches upon fandom and the way the interpretive community in question discursively negotiates the concept of fandom<sup>4</sup>. The focus was placed on the way fandom was constructed as a practice and how it potentially altered people's everyday life. The comparison between the interviews conducted in the two socio-cultural contexts did not yield any distinct differences attributable to either context.

The research showed that the majority of the London based interviewees<sup>5</sup> claimed they were fans of Cohen and *Da Ali G Show*. However, when they were asked to describe what fandom meant for them, they qualified it to a certain extent, and talked about it in a

<sup>4</sup> The term 'fan' was also used in the Croatian interviews even though it can be translated as 'obožavatelj' in Croatian.

<sup>5</sup> The names have been changed in order to ensure anonymity of the participants in this research.

dichotomous way, describing what their fandom amounted to and simultaneously emphasizing what they would *never* do:

**Sophia:** *I watched it on TV... but I wouldn't go to the cinema...*

**George:** *I look for his professional output... but I am not interested in his private life...*

**James:** *I watched it on TV and I usually go to the cinema to watch the movies...but I wouldn't go to his website, I probably wouldn't even go and see him do stand up...*

In a sense they wanted to make it clear that their fandom was moderate in terms of their allegiance with popular culture texts and that they were certainly not engaging in 'extreme' fandom which they saw as having negative connotations indicating over-the-top worshipping practices.

Fandom was related to *watching* the text - to be more precise, watching it on television as the primary medium where the text could be accessed when broadcast; however, the frequency of watching it was important in this respect – since there is a difference between watching something occasionally, and watching something by default and looking forward to it as well.

Further replications of the text on other mediums were seen as a step forward in fandom practices, ranging from renting a DVD (which is cheaper and does not imply a public engagement), or going to the cinema, which was seen as a practice that indicated engagement, since it meant one had to be up-to-date with a new product, and it also implied more expense than to simply just wait for it to be released on DVD. Watching it on YouTube was also seen as a fandom practice that indicated a need to repeatedly watch something.

Apart from consumption practices of the primary text in various mediated forms, fandom was linked to buying products related to it – DVDs, books, posters etc. This mode of fan practice was not so much embraced by the interpretive community, except by Albert to a certain extent:

**Albert:** *To be a fan means that I would go to YouTube and type in 'Ali G' and watch certain things. I own the Borat DVD, so there you go, that would be me as a fan. Yeah, that's it. I wouldn't go to for an autograph or go and see him (laughter)...*

The interpretive community was more inclined to use the text in everyday socializing interactions, i.e. talking and debating with friends about it, using catch phrases and jokes, and mimicking it. It also meant having high expectations with regard to the author's subsequent texts and being aware of his further professional steps. However, following someone's private life or being involved in a form of celebrity culture was deemed as inappropriate by several interviewees.

**James:** *You know - now aside from just watching and listening and consuming the actual product that an author creates - I am not the kind of person who kind of worships anything or anyone in terms of fandom celebrity or anything...*



Fandom was also seen as a concept that had changed status with the emergence of the internet, but which was nevertheless still associated with the original meaning of the word, the etymological root, in the sense of 'fanatic' – which was perceived as something with bad connotations:

**Henrietta:** *Fandom has changed meaning (...) The internet has changed fandom a bit... All the fan communities, all the fan fiction, all the YouTube where people re-edit their favorite shows... I don't think I am a fan like that, I pretty much find it...aaa... I occasionally read a little bit of fan fiction...but, I am a fan in the sense that I talk to people about it...I find it funny, I like it...aaa...and 'fan' has bad associations, doesn't it? All the, kind of, freaky fan movies and thing... I think fandom is associated with going online and blogging about it or pulp-kind- of- fictioning<sup>6</sup> it...and I don't want to subscribe to that (haha)...but I think I am a fan.*

Only one interviewee was engaged in 'extreme' fandom practices; however, she was the only one who claimed not to be a fan of Cohen or his show but of another text:

**Anne:** *Fandom is (...) kind of being immersed and kind of loving something... It is being slightly obsessed by something and loving it so much that you want to get really involved in it and it takes up, you know, a part of your life ...I mean, I am a Tolkien fan ...And I got this (showing a tattoo)... it shows on my hand. So that... I am obsessed with that. I can call myself a Tolkien fan. It is when you just love it very much you go to extremes, to have it in you life...*

The Zagreb based interviewees also emphasized that their fandom was moderate. They described themselves as fans (if not of Cohen's text then certainly of other media texts). However, they were careful to disassociate themselves from some practices which they viewed as extreme. Fandom as a phenomenon was viewed in different ways: there were elements of understanding fandom in the old sense of the word, seen almost as a mental disorder - being obsessed with one particular text, mad about something, having a fanatical attachment to something. The interviewees all sought to make clear that they did not subscribe to any radical fanaticism themselves but that they practiced their fandom moderately:

**Ignjat:** *Well, I am a fan, but to be a fan, I don't know...maybe it is different for different persons, some people are totally mad about something, and others simply love it, but it is not like they will go to any extremes, so maybe I am a fan, but only in the sense that I like it and enjoy watching it but it is not like I will cut my veins or anything like that...*

Fan practices were linked to the primary text, where, again, watching texts and perhaps discussing the text with others was the main practice of appreciation. As opposed to doing that, interviewees had no interest in the private life of the author or any personal information and did not consider it relevant to them.

<sup>6</sup> Pulp fiction stems from pulp magazines, printed on rough pulpy paper. It was cheap due to the poor quality of the paper. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/pulp+fiction> (15.08.2010).

**Tereza:** *Would I say that I am a fan? Well, yes, I would call myself a fan, not in the sense that I follow everything he does and all the projects he is engaged with [which being a fan also means] but that I will download the episodes I didn't watch on television, from the internet... I think I watched most of them in the end, but the things that are not a part of his work - the show or the movies - that aspect I wouldn't be so interested in. For instance interviews, where he appeared, what awards he got, that would not be relevant to me unless I came across it by accident, but I will not search for details about his life, his love life or what he is doing, whether he gives to charity - that is something I wouldn't be aware of.*

Some of the interviewees did subscribe to a broader fandom practice and they made no attempts to distance themselves from more 'hands-on' fandom practices. These interviewees were committed not only to watching the program but also to buying products associated with it and sharing the jokes with other people:

**Katarina:** *Yes, I am a fan. I have to watch it - because it is more important than to watch some things that I perhaps haven't seen. When talking to other people, of course I will touch upon something that made me laugh or that I was fascinated by (...) Other things that I am a fan of, like South Park, I used to buy the small figures, pendants, notebooks that were available. This was while I was at school, while now, I would engage with some e-mail sharing of the jokes...*

### APPROPRIATE SOCIAL PRACTICES: MODERATE VERSUS THE EXTREME

The comparison of interpretive communities in Zagreb, Croatia and London, the United Kingdom showed more similarities than differences. The question of whether the interviewees were fans and how they understood fandom showed that they engaged in a type of 'moderate' fandom. The way they talked about fandom was more oriented towards the product than towards the fan community, even though, it was often discussed with friends in every day conversations, and it was also mimicked - a practice that represents a shift from being a spectator to being a participant (Jenkins, 2005). However, most of the members of the interpretive community were not engaged in anything other than appreciating the program, even though they called themselves fans. Thus, in this interpretive community Longhurst's (2007) 'fan type' seems to best describe the relationship between the members of the interpretive community and the artifact - since this category represents readers primarily attached to the object. This suggests that fandom is different for different fan communities and cannot be viewed outside of the relationship with the text that is the object of fandom. To be a fan does not necessarily imply that fans go beyond simple appreciation of the program or embrace the associated values by applying them to their everyday lives, as in the case of B+B exemplified by Whittenberger-Keith (1992).

The practices embraced by almost everyone involved making efforts to regularly watch the primary text and to show an interest in the future work of the author. The majority tried to distance themselves from the type of fandom they thought of as extreme and therefore inappropriate. This need to disassociate oneself varied in terms of what was ou-

tlined in the context but despite this variety in range, the discursive process of distancing oneself did appear to be something most of the interviewees would subscribe to.

Implicitly it could be inferred that negative aspects of fandom were foremost linked to worship of something or someone, being immersed, being obsessed; and being part of a celebrity culture, following the private life of the object of worship. Thus, the majority of the members of the interpretive community openly claimed that they were fans, however their fandom did not involve anything more than an interest and appreciation of the primary text. Fandom was accepted as a part of contemporary popular culture, and the interviewees did not seem to mind to include themselves into this category. However, they were cautious about expressing a high level of investment in their appreciation. In this respect they showed clearly that they most certainly would not engage in practices of overwhelmed emotional attachment. While fandom was mainly linked to the material aspects of fandom, especially to the primary product, the interviewees made very definite attempts to distance themselves from author worshipping practices, exemplified in seeking an autograph or taking steps to meet him/her in person as such practices were seen as silly. This indicates that the affectivity and passion, viewed by Grossberg (2006) as constitutive to fandom, and crucial for its broader social implications, were rejected by people who declared themselves as fans. Finally, it could be argued that there is a split between the signifier and the signified: the term 'fan' is readily adopted by interviewees in describing their relationship to the text. The meaning, however, is negotiated and carefully defined in terms of excluding and disassociating oneself from the extreme, passionate, irrational connotation that the etymology of the term carries.

## CONCLUSION

The approach to fandom has changed in scholarly research. The move from thinking about fandom as a form of pathology to celebrating fandom as a mode of empowerment has occurred within a relatively short period of approximately two decades. The interest in researching fans and fan practices has been boosted by the active audience tradition, claiming that audiences are creative, engage with the text, author it, change it and appropriate meaning that is relevant for them. The way a text 'matters' (as Grossberg formulates it) can be quite diverse, and includes not only different types of involvement with the product, but also involvement with other like-minded actors including various practices that connect them.

In contemporary society it seems that to be a 'fan' of something, is a part of everyday life, perhaps boosted by the rise of celebrity culture, camp, and a consumer society, a trend in which emotional attachments towards different products or persons-as-products is acceptable, legit and even desirable as an identity mark. However, this research confirms that approaches to fandom and social practices encompassing this phenomenon, are diverse and need to be viewed within the audience-text reading relationships. Despite the attempt to find resistance and subversion in the sphere of cultural consumption, fandom does not necessarily imply anything more than merely appreciating a text and share

that appreciation with a reference group. This research exemplifies that the engagement in this particular popular culture artifact was mainly connected to the pleasure of watching it. In addition, since strong emotional attachments were viewed as negative, and the intrusiveness into the private lives of others viewed as trivial – it could be argued that, in a broad sense, the battle – between the binary categories of public and private, the rational and the emotional – comes out in favor of the public and the rational in the analysis of this interpretive community. While this holds true in this instance, it is important to note that a different interpretive community who favours a different type of text would most certainly also have a very different way of looking at fandom itself and as a result fandom cannot be viewed outside the complexity of the text-audience reading relationship, nor can it be generalized as a potential site of resistance to dominant power relations in society.

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## MEDIJSKI TEKST I PUBLIKE: DISKURZIVNE KONSTRUKCIJE OBOŽAVATELJSKIH PRAKSI (FANDOM)

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Helena Popović

**SAŽETAK** U članku se prikazuju rezultati istraživanja medijske publike i kulnog televizijskog teksta (Cult TV) Da Ali G Show. Istraživanje se temelji na 18 polustrukturiranih intervjua, koji su provedeni u Londonu (Velika Britanija) i Zagrebu (Hrvatska), čiji je cilj bio utvrditi diskurzivne konstrukcije u odnosu prema fenomenu obožavanja (fandom). Usporedba interpretativne zajednice u dva sociokulturna konteksta pokazala je da postoji više sličnosti nego razlika između njih. Obožavateljske prakse (fan practices) uključuju redovito praćenje primarnog teksta te iskazivanje interesa za budući rad autora/autorice. Pokazalo se da je 'umjereno obožavanje' (moderate fandom) preferirano, dok su kao negativne ocijenjene snažne emocije te indiskrecija vezana uz privatnost drugih. To ukazuje na svojevrsni rascjep između označitelja i označenog: dok se sam izraz 'obožavatelj' ('fan') s lakoćom koristi u deskripciji odnosa prema tekstu, samo značenje pažljivo se konstruira kako bi se izbjegla ekstremna, iracionalna konotacija koja se nameće u etimologiji samog termina.

### KLJUČNE RIJEČI

OBOŽAVATELJI (FANOVI), OBOŽAVATELJSKE PRAKSE, DISKURZIVNE KONSTRUKCIJE, UMJERENO OBOŽAVANJE, KULTNA TELEVIZIJA (CULT TV)

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