

All of us will be speaking about imagined communities in some form or another and I'd like to focus my comments on the question of who we, as TV scholars, imagine our *own* communities or audiences to be. Where and with whom do we share ideas and how does that shape different trajectories of knowledge production? Who are our people? The answers are different for each of us, I suspect, but I'd like to focus on two audiences I presume we *all* hope to reach – other scholars and the TV industry itself.

TV studies is an interdisciplinary endeavor, and with all the positives that come with that, there's also a danger of preaching to a small enthusiastic choir – instead of acting in a Venn-diagram kind of way, bringing disparate bodies of knowledge together while generating new knowledge at the intersections, we risk losing some connections that might be useful to us. Some of my recent collaborative work has been a meta-analysis of fan studies – we surveyed fan scholars around the world about their own understandings of where fan studies originated and where it is headed. We found curious disjunctures between scholars based on geographic locale, whether they study sport fans or fans of other cultural texts, and where they are located in the academy (Harrington & Bielby, 2007; Schimmel, Harrington & Bielby, 2007). In terms of this latter point, for example, sociology and psychology appear to have taken a vow of “never the twain shall meet,” with parallel research efforts rather than mutually informative ones. Indeed, Valerie Walkerdine (1996) points to the widespread rejection of psychology in media and cultural studies, particularly within audience research. Henry's six-month blog debates this past year brought fan scholars together for a meta-conversation initially focused on gender but expanding to a wide range of issues relevant to fans and fan studies. How might TV studies benefit from a similar conversation, both among ourselves but reaching

out (or back) to a wider imagined audience that includes colleagues in academic and geographic spaces different than our own?

A different set of challenges exist when we imagine the TV industry as an audience for our work. Consider the marginalization or perceived uselessness of academics and academic scholarship to industry members (any present company excepted, of course). For example, there is a veritable chasm between who the TV industry imagines its audience(s) to be and what the last 30 years of academic audience studies tells us about who, what and where audiences are (or are not), let alone what individual viewers might want from their television. Tim and I have both written about the global syndication industry and the particular business community constructed in that context. We've attended the same trade fairs and if his experience has been like mine, the color-coded entry badge that signifies us as academics might as well be a giant L-on-the-forehead for its ability to send the very people we're hoping to speak with scurrying the other way. Events like FoE are few and far between. A lot of culture industry research is necessarily speculative simply because we cannot get industry insiders to talk with us (Abolafia, 1998). I've been trying since last February to get 10 soap opera actors on the phone for a project I'm doing on acting and aging. This would have been tricky in the early 1990s but it seems ten times harder today, I think in part because what we as academics can offer to industry members is not particularly clear.

The root of this problem may well be the pace at which the industry is transforming vs. the pace at which academic research is conducted and distributed. Soap operas are probably the "turtle" of the TV landscape in terms of speed of innovation, but even here, academic research has to fight for a place at the table. Van Cagle just

published a fascinating chapter about his experiences directing the Center for the Study of Media & Society at GLAAD (Cagle, 2007). The Center was an exciting attempt to bridge the gap between academia and activism. Van was the founding director who in a few short years was out of a job because GLAAD executives could not see the value of academic research to their activist mission, even on projects they solicited and paid for. I did a study for the Center on a lesbian coming-out storyline on *All My Children* (Harrington, 2001) and one of the research outcomes was a very sound-bite-able list of findings that spoke to the storyline as it was currently unfolding. Van and I were completely unsuccessful at persuading GLAAD to publicize the study and used my university's public relations office instead, which angered GLAAD executives and contributed to the closing of the Center. Sam Ford's experiences with his master's thesis could add to this discussion of the challenges of constructing the industry as an imagined audience.

I'm over-generalizing to some extent, of course. The very technological changes that have transformed industry and audience practices are also used by scholars to reach their (our) imagined communities in new ways – we blog and YouTube with the best of them. But until we return to being general readers rather than niche readers, and until publish-or-perish either goes by the wayside or accepts a broader range of knowledge-production as “scholarly,” and until we can better articulate the value of academic research relative to market research, these communities might be a bit more imaginary than we'd like.....

References

- Abolafia, Mitchel Y. (1998). “Markets as Cultures: An Ethnographic Approach.” Pp. 69-85 in *The Sociological Review*, edited by Michael Callon. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Cagle, Van (2007). “Academic Meets LGBT Activism: The Challenges Incurred in Utilizing

- Multimethodological Research.” Pp. xx-xx in *Communication Activism: Communication for Social Change* (Volume 2), edited by Lawrence R. Frey and Kevin M. Carragee. Hampton Press.
- Harrington, C.Lee (2001). “Current Representations of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered People in Entertainment Television: The Case of *All My Children*,” Center for the Study of Media & Society, Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), New York.
- Harrington, C.Lee and Denise D. Bielby. (2007). “Global Fandom/Global Fan Studies.” Pp. 179-197 in *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, edited by Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington. New York: New York University Press.
- Schimmel, Kimberly.S., C. Lee Harrington, and Denise D. Bielby. (2007). “Keep Your Fans to Yourself: The Disjuncture between Sport Studies and Pop Culture Studies’ Perspectives on Fandom.” *Sport in Society* 10(4): 580-600.
- Walkerdine, Valerie (1996). “Subject to Change without Notice: Psychology, Postmodernity and the Popular,” pp. 96-118 in *Cultural Studies and Communications*, edited by James Curran, David Morley and Valerie Walkerdine. London: Arnold.