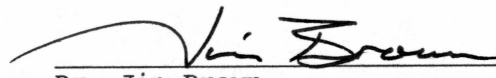THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF SELF IN FAN CULTURES: CREATING SELF

IDENTITY IN FAN COMMUNITIES

By

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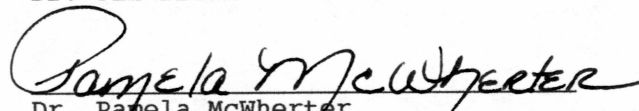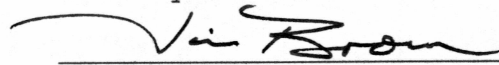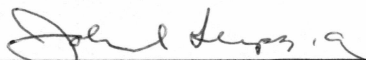
SELF IDENTITY IN FAN COMMUNITIES

A

THESIS

Presented to the Faculty

of the University of Alaska Fairbanks

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MASTER OF ARTS

BY

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Abstract

Star Trek fans have long been portrayed in the media as overweight women and geeky men. This study takes a closer look at Star Trek fans and their lived experience. Through conversational interviewing, the nature of the reality experienced in fandom is explored and implications for the relationship between the reality shared by participants in everyday life and the reality shared by fandom is sought. The analysis, which was carried out throughout the interview process, provided insights into the realities experienced by fans.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the members of my committee, Dr. Jin Brown and Sue Sheane for their assistance and support. I would especially like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Pamela McWherter, for her patience, understanding, and support. She has continually supported my somewhat nontraditional ideas about what constitutes interesting research. She has also given enthusiastic assistance when I decided that fans, and science fiction fans in particular would make a good thesis topic.

I would also like to acknowledge the steadfast support and help received from Leah Aronow-Brown. When I needed something done, she was always willing to assist or advise. She was also always willing to take a few moments out of her busy schedule to encourage, commiserate, or act as a sounding board for ideas.

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF SELF IN FAN CULTURES: CREATING SELF IDENTITY IN FAN COMMUNITIES

Introduction

The term "fan" derives from the word "fanatic" - a person obsessively devoted to a cause or idea. The term "fan" as it is used today generally refers to someone who follows a certain sports team, television show, or personality. Fans are on a continuum according to the level of interest they manifest in the object of their fandom. Many fans are only moderately interested. These fans follow a sports team, watch a television show on a regular basis, or buy books or records of their favorite artists. They attend local events surrounding their area of interest, such as a public appearance by a celebrity, a book signing by an author, or a concert by a musical group. Many fans are even more involved, to the extent of travelling some distance to out-of-town sporting events or conventions organized around stars and movies/television shows, joining fan/booster clubs, and collecting items related to their fan interests. A few fans develop an obsession that psychologists classify as pathologic, a phenomenon that has been the focus of several novels and movies about the fan as stalker, but is beyond the scope of this thesis. The main focus of this

study is on fans of television series who are committed enough to actively incorporate fandom into a considerable portion of their lives.

Fans who actively incorporate fandom into their lives manifest this in several ways. These fans watch the show, and then speculate about the show, its characters, plots of various episodes, and the future direction the series is taking. Two inventions have revolutionized television fandom in the last twenty years, namely, the VCR and the internet. With the advent of the VCR, television programs could be taped while fans were engaged in other activities and viewed later. The VCR enhances the enjoyment the fan gets out of a favorite program, by enabling the fan to view the program multiple times, or to re-view and analyze a scene that is of particular interest. Because the videotape constitutes a "hard copy" of a television program, the text of the program can be reviewed and analyzed in a way that promotes discussion among fans. In areas where there are enough fans in geographical proximity to each other, these discussions may take the form of a fan club that meets on a regular basis. However, such discussions are now increasingly taking place on the internet. A search on the internet for any particular television program will turn up a number of fan sites devoted to the show. Popular shows such as "The

X-Files," "Star Trek," or "Buffy, the Vampire Slayer" can have hundreds or even thousands of sites devoted to them.

There are a number of fan activities that take place on the internet, some or all of which may be found on any given fan site. A typical site offers pages that chronicle gossip and news events surrounding the series and/or one or more of the characters/stars, biographies of the characters and the stars who portray them, an episode guide, and links to other related sites. Some fans tape each episode and do a complete transcription, often adding comments about their interpretation of the events which unfold in the episode, and then post the transcript to one or more web sites. Other fans create their own stories about the characters, called fan fiction or fanfic, and post these stories on various web pages devoted to fan fiction.

Discussion groups and chat rooms devoted to a series, character, or personality also abound. Several listserves exist on which anyone can start a discussion group about any topic they wish. For any given popular series, hundreds of discussion groups exist. These discussion groups are devoted to such topics as spoilers (tidbits about upcoming episodes), fan fiction, characters, stars, role-playing games centered around the series, technical discussions of the "science" in science-fiction series, and inconsistencies in the timeline of the series, among others. Both official

and unofficial fan clubs and groups schedule regular chats, sometimes featuring a person involved with the series. These chats have traditionally been text-based, but recent software innovations have made it possible to plug a microphone/headphone set into the computer, so that the chats are conducted like a conference call.

If the internet has given fans a voice to discuss their interests with each other, it has also given them a venue in which to discuss a series with the people who are responsible for producing that program. Many series have employees whose job it is to monitor and report fan reaction to the series by reading the various reviews and discussions generated by fans and posted on the internet. Some producers have been known to leak possible future scenarios on the show to internet discussion groups in order to test how acceptable such future directions are to the fan community.

Another major fan activity is the convention. Some conventions are devoted to a particular show, while others may be dedicated to several shows with a common theme, e.g., science fiction, fantasy, etc. Fan conventions are held in major cities around the world. Most conventions feature appearances by producers, writers, or the stars who play major or minor characters on the show. Other activities may include art shows/contests of fan-generated art, music

sessions (sometimes called filking) where fans perform songs they have written around the show, readings of fan fiction, charity auctions of personal items donated by the cast or series props, costume contests which feature fans dressed up as series characters, vendor booths selling series-related memorabilia, and a myriad of other activities designed to provide an exchange of information between fans and series producers. Many fans attend conventions not only for the opportunity to see series stars or enter the various contests, but also to meet with other fans they have met through the internet discussion groups, but have never met face-to-face. Prior to a convention, there are always numerous posts on the discussion lists about who's going, where they should meet, how will they recognize one another, etc.

This study examines how fans, through their communication with each other, both face-to-face and on the internet, construct a self-identity through storytelling or a narration of self both by telling stories to themselves and participating in the stories they hear about themselves from others (Gergen, 1994). A careful analysis of the interviews throughout the entire interview process will result in a better understanding of fans and how they become and remain fans. It will also provide insights into fan

communities and how fans view their place in such a community.

Chapter 1

Review of Literature

Fandom and its manifestations in public life, e.g., conventions, clubs, fan fiction, etc., have been largely ignored by the academic community. A few psychologists have studied extremes in fandom as pathology, but only a few researchers have studied how the average fan creates a reality which centers around a fictional character or characters and how they share this reality with other like-minded fans. Green, Jenkins, and Jenkins (1998) posit several possible problems that exist when academics attempt to study fandom. Although Green et al. (1998) refer specifically to homoerotic fan fiction, many of their observations are apt when applied to fandom in general. They state that academics tend to isolate a single aspect of fandom, such as studying a single genre of fan fiction. Instead, researchers should consider a genre within the entire spectrum of fandom and how the genres relate to each other and fandom as a whole.

Another consideration is that fandom is not static, especially in relation to television programs. Shows change over time as new characters are introduced and old characters leave. Series are canceled and fans find other shows to engage their interest. Green et al. (1998) argue that academics tend to search for a single, unequivocal

explanation, when fans have multiple, and sometimes even contradictory motivations for the realities they create through fandom. For example, there is a popular conception that people who become science fiction fans do so because their own lives are lacking in some way and they can fantasize participation in a better world through fandom. This may be partly true, but the same person may also watch Star Trek, for example, because they think the captain of the Enterprise, Jean-Luc Piccard is an interesting character, and, in addition, enjoy the revelations about certain aspects of alien cultures on the show.

A popular conception of television is that the communication is only one way. The television sends messages in the form of programming and we, the audience, are the "couch potatoes" who passively receive these messages. Harris (1998) argues that this is not entirely true. She states that "television is arguably our most pervasive representation of a shared cultural space within which the allocation of social value is negotiated" (p. 41). We are active within this "shared cultural space". We call this particular activity fandom. Harris argues for a reconceptualization of fandom as "a spectrum of practices engaged in to develop a sense of personal control or influence over the object of fandom" (p. 51). Harris goes on to emphasize the importance of television in our culture,

suggesting it plays an important role in circulating the meanings in which we engage daily, and influences the ways in which we gain knowledge and experience of the world around us (Harris, 1998, p.51). Further, Harris states that in our identification with characters and celebrities on television, we perceive television as a way in which we are represented in the world, i.e., we use television to create a social reality. Harris concludes that the more involved one is in fan practices, the more one comes to feel a sense of personal influence or control in this social reality.

Aden (1999) says that fans experience popular stories as "purposeful, imaginary-yet-real journeys" to a "promised land." He likens such journeys to pilgrimages, where we leave "home" to meet and communicate with other pilgrims, forming communities along the way. We engage in reflexive thought, both about home, and about the people we encounter on our journey. This reflexive thought corresponds with Gergen's (1994) concept of self-narration. We tell stories about ourselves and listen to stories others tell us about ourselves. Fans develop a sense of self-identity as fans and discover a sense of place for themselves as fans through this self-narrative. As this self-identity is reflected in conversations with ourselves and others, we change the people we meet along the way and return home changed ourselves by this journey. As we visit with other fans, we

discover that they are more "like me," although interests and interpretations vary.

One way in which this journey is conceptualized is in the self-identity that a fan constructs through communication with other fans. Such fans form collective agreements and use what Gergen (1996) describes as specific forms of language to articulate such agreements. Fans develop what Gergen (1996) refers to as "working" languages. Philipsen (1997) expands this idea in his theory of speech codes. Philipsen states that although speech codes "are not necessarily restricted or unique to the places in which they were found, each is an artifact that was constructed in and through a process of social interaction" and that interactions take place in a "particular, socially constructed discursive world" (p. 121).

Gergen (1994) proposes that one way in which people develop self-identity within a given culture is through self-narration. Through a process of storytelling about oneself and the reactions of others to these stories, a "narration of self" is developed which is characterized by the interdependence of self and others in relationships and social interchange through communication. The self-identity that evolves through self-narration is not static, but rather in a constant state of change.

Harre and Gillett (1994) state that the sense of self is developed in discourse and reframe the concept as the "discursive self." They focus on two factors in discursive research, i.e., the resources people have in the form of a repertoire of concepts, and how they use these resources. The repertoire of concepts refers to the availability of "usable sign systems" and how these sign systems and words are capable of being used or, in other words, how the "resources are put to work in the coordinated actions of the episodes of everyday life" (Harre & Gillett, 1994, p. 98). According to Harre and Gillett (1994), there is a discursive character to the world we live in. It is "a world of signs and symbols subject to normative constraints. It comes into being through intentional action" (p. 99). The discursive world is a world of symbols and in order to function effectively in that world, we need to know the correct use of those symbols according to norms and conventions attached to the symbols.

From Harre and Gillet's (1994) discursive point of view, we sort people by types and that these types "appear in our discussion of other people and reappear in our beliefs about ourselves" (p. 102). This applies both to the individual's own sense of uniqueness and to what type of person the individual believes him/herself to be. The discursive self is one who has a sense of having a place in

different systems of locations, as well as a social place, a "location in a manifold of persons" (p. 104). And who experiences self "not as an entity but as having a place from which I perceive, act, and am acted upon and where I am myself perceived"(Harre & Gillett, 1994, pp.103-104).

In groups where self-identity is shared, where people are located in a "manifold of persons" (Harre & Gillett, 1994), such as in fan groups, shared context is important in the signaling of meaning. Hymes (1972) proposes that each such group will have distinctive words and language patterns, as well as unique ways in which communications are produced and interpreted. This corresponds with Harre and Gilett's (1994) idea of using symbols according to norms and conventions attached to those symbols.

Philipsen (1997) describes speech codes as "phenomena which can form the starting point of inquiries which reveal practical resources that are crucial to the lives of individuals and societies" (p. 125). According to Philipsen, speech codes consist of socially constructed symbols and meanings, premises, and rules within a cultural place or setting. Speech codes are constitutive of cultural communicative conduct. Fandom occupies a cultural space, and therefore has a distinctive speech code through which the fans can share meanings not readily apparent to non-fans.

According to Philipsen (1997), "interlocutors enact, articulate, and negotiate and test their personal identification with a code or speech community" (p. 144). Philipsen describes the three ways in which this is done as totemizing rituals, myths, and social drama. By learning and performing one or all of these three acts, a person can demonstrate a persona that is familiar with the speech codes of the culture.

The first act, the totemizing ritual is "a structured sequence of actions the correct performance of which pays explicit homage to a sacred object of a group or culture…it is routinized but it also is a particularly poignant (meaning-full) ritual" (Philipsen, 1997, p. 144). The second way in which self-identity is demonstrated is by a knowledge of the cultural myths. Philipsen (1997) describes these as "a story of some type of person who confronts some type of problem and responds effectively though the use of some type of action or resource" (p. 145) It is a story that, "in the telling, provides its hearers with resources for interpreting their own experiences and for telling their own stories in ways intelligible to them and their interlocutors" (p. 145). The final communicative act emphasizing salient cultural forms is that of the social drama. In the social drama, someone criticizes or challenges another's conduct. The person challenged must

then answer the accusation with a repair, denial, etc. The challenger then must either honor the reply and the challenged rejoins the group, or the reply is dishonored and a schism results (Philipsen, 1997).

Harre and Gillet (1994) give an example of how such meanings can differ between cultural groups. A group of tourists walking in the bush may (or may not) see a bent twig and crushed flower along a trail. If they did notice, it would have little meaning for them. However, for any aboriginal trackers passing by, these small signs would be immediately noticed and acted upon as a sign that an animal passed that way. Concepts, such as the meaning of bent twigs and crushed flowers, are the basis of thinking. Such concepts can be conveyed to others through words, which require a language. Through language and gestures, we communicate with others in many ways. Thus, according to Harre and Gillet (1994), "discourses constructed jointly by persons and within sociocultural groups become an important part of the framework of interpretation" (p. 22). People "inhabit many different discourses, each of which has its own cluster of significations"(Harre & Gillet, 1994, p. 25). These significations, when expressed in discourse, can be considered through Philipsen's (1997) idea of speech codes.

The manner in which fans create shared meanings through speech codes has been observed by Baym (1998), who describes

four practices engaged in by fans, i.e., informing, speculating, criticizing, and reworking. Baym also emphasizes that increasing the shared meanings increases the pleasure fans get out of the program. Additionally, Baym (1998) proposes that fans actively seek out an object, i.e., program, character, or star, onto which they can project something of their own life, and because of this feel that they have a commonality with other fans. Fandom is the pretext for discussion of other things, including emotion, relationships, and self. This identification of self within the wider medium of a program is a strong attraction for becoming and remaining a fan (Baym, 1998).

MacDonald (1998) looks at some of the differences in communication among fans when conducted online instead of face-to-face. According to Rheingold (1993), the anonymity afforded by online communication should have a leveling effect on the hierarchies found in face-to-face communication because physical appearance and gender would no longer matter. However, according to MacDonald (1998), these hierarchical formations are replicated on the internet, but the social relations are reorganized. MacDonald (1998) describes the hierarchies that exist in several dimensions of fandom, specifically, level of fandom, access to "inside" knowledge, leaders, and control of venue. A higher level would be obtained in these dimensions by

exhibiting a great deal of knowledge about the fictional universe, attending prestigious gatherings and/or conventions, having access to show personnel, leading a smaller group that is part of a larger fan group, and controlling an internet site or newsgroup about the show. Because each of these levels requires a familiarity with the speech code in that particular cultural setting, fans who have a highly-constructed self identity are more likely to have a good knowledge of the socially constructed symbols, meanings, premises, and rules within that setting.

There is a strong sense of community among fans. They congregate on internet newsgroups and at conventions and are very supportive of other members and their efforts. Some researchers, such as Jenkins (1992) and Aden (1999) contend that the combination of writers retelling and recreating familiar characters and the access to these stories on the internet may presage a return to the folk tradition of participatory storytelling.

According to Jenkins (1992), culture evolved as people built collections of myths, legends, folktales, and ballads. Folklore originates from everyday things that were part of the social reality of the people experiencing the events of their time. Soldiers returned from wars with tales of battle, farmers sang songs about work, and everyone invented

stories to describe human nature. After the Industrial
Revolution, culture became privatized intellectual property.

> Robin Hood, Pecos Bill, John Henry, Coyote, and
> Br'er Rabbit belong to the folk. Kirk and Spock,
> Scully and Mulder, Luke and Leia, or Xena and
> Gabrielle belong to corporations (Jenkins, 1998).

Jenkins (1992) also looks at the motivation for fans.
He says that not only must the fans be involved in the
program, but they experience a dialectic about their
feelings for the program. The fans' response is one of both
fascination and frustration, of adoration and antagonism,
and this response provides the catalyst for becoming
actively engaged in fan behaviors. Because of their
involvement, fans are too fascinated to simply walk away, so
they try to reconstruct the texts in a way that salvages
their interest, i.e., they become "active participants in
the construction and circulation of textual meanings" (p.
24).

According to Jenkins (1992), shared meaning is a public
process. For these purposes, the internet has had profound
implications for fandom. Fans use the internet to form
online communities, and the conventions and expectations of
these communities also transform the meanings that each fan
derives from the texts and the form in which these meanings
are expressed. In addition, these communities form a

subculture which borrows the characters and symbols of a popular program and transform them into something meaningful to the members of that community. In a sense, it is not the stories in and of themselves that are important, but the focus they provide for the fans to communicate the issues that are important in their lives to other members of that community.

Chapter 2

Methodology

According to Kvale (1996), the ideal in interview studies is for 15 plus or minus 10 subjects (p. 105). He also argues that this number may actually be too high, because the goal is to "make penetrating interpretations of the interviews"(p. 102). The goal of the qualitative interview is to focus on single cases, thus making it possible to "investigate in detail the relationship of a specific behavior to its context, to work out the logic of the relationship between the individual and the situation" (p. 103). To this end, the researcher solicited narratives about the activities in which fans engage on a daily basis, how these activities are communicated, and how fans construct a cultural place in both a physical and an online environment through the use of speech codes.

Kvale (1996) likens the researcher to a traveler. The traveler wanders through a particular landscape, collecting stories to be told upon returning. These stories are interpreted and transformed by the traveler into new narratives. Not only do the narratives change, but the co-researchers involved (the researcher and the interviewees) may also be changed by the narratives, coming to a new level of self-understanding or gaining new insight on customs and values previously taken for granted. From this viewpoint,

the researcher actually becomes the research tool.
Interviews require craftsmanship on the part of the
interviewer. The researcher validates conversational
interviews throughout the entire research process through
continual analysis and questioning, and also by interpreting
the findings not after the fact, but through the progress of
the research from beginning to end (Kvale, 1996).

Such practices reflect the theoretical concept of the
social construction of reality. Crotty (1998) states that
constructionism is the "view that all knowledge, and
therefore all meaningful reality, as such, is contingent
upon human practices, being constructed in and out of
interaction between human beings and their world, and
developed and transmitted within an essentially social
context" (p. 42). Social constructionism takes the view that
meaning and subsequent human realities are not inherent in
objects, waiting to be discovered, but rather are
constituted in communicative interaction as people engage
each other in the world around them and try to make sense of
it together (Polkinghorne, 1983).

Kvale (1996) describes the research interview as "an
interview whose purpose is to obtain descriptions of the
life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting
the meaning of the described phenomena" (p. 6). By eliciting
a rich description of the fan's activities within the fan

community, we then have the means to interpret what being a fan means to the person involved. Narrative interviews are conducted on a conversational level. When we treat knowledge as belief that has been justified by common acceptance rather than as scientific truth, conversation becomes the key to understanding other peoples views of reality (Polkinghorne, 1983). Accordingly, shared human reality can be defined as persons in conversation. Polkinghorne (1983) supports the use of interviews in data gathering, stating that it is the most appropriate method for "holding the meaning of the human realm" (p. 268). He goes on to state that:

> The nature of linguistic data is meaning, and thus
> they are most adequate for dealing with the realm
> of meaning. Linguistic data, like the human
> realm, are held in vehicles of expression. The
> data are not the container - the marks on the
> piece of paper or the sounds on the tape. The
> data are the meanings themselves. Linguistic data
> are fragile, and they are affected by the
> transformation of the mode of their expression.
> Thus the researcher needs to take care and
> understand when linguistic data are transferred
> from the oral mode to the written mode. (p. 268)

According to Kvale (1996), the topic of the interview is "the lived world of the subjects and their relation to it. The purpose is to describe and understand the central themes the subjects experience and live toward" (p. 29), and to describe and understand the meanings of these central themes through specific experiential situations and action sequences. Kvale (1996) goes on to state that the "research interview is an interpersonal situation, a conversation between two partners about a theme of mutual interest" (p. 125). The research interview is analyzed in conjunction with the life world described arising from this shared mutual interest. The research interview is analyzed throughout the entire interview process, by the researcher as research tool. The analysis is "interspersed between the initial story told by the interviewee to the researcher and the final story told by the researcher to an audience" (p. 184).

There are several suggested steps in the analysis of the research interview (Kvale, 1996). Step one takes place during the interview when interviewees describe their lived world. Step two occurs when the participants in the interview discover new things about themselves during the interview process. They see new relationships and meanings in this lived experience. In step three the interviewer condenses and interprets what the interviewee is describing and checks these interpretations with the interviewee. Step

four takes place after the interview, when the interviewer transcribes the conversation and interprets it. Step five is an option that takes place when the interviewer presents the interpretation to the interviewee for confirmation of the interpretations. Step six is the option of taking action on the new insights gained through the interview process.

Tulloch and Jenkins (1995) have done extensive research on fan communities. They state that there are potential problems when researchers are too involved as fans in the communities they are studying. Tulloch and Jenkins (1995) believe the key to doing good research within the fan community is:

> characterized by a fluid movement between critical
> distance from and mutual knowledge with the
> reception committee: distance facilitates
> understandings that may not be fully recognizable
> by participants within a culture, while proximity
> or mutual knowledge allows for a recognition of
> pleasures and meanings central to the
> participant's cultural experience. Each vantage
> point - proximate or distant, participant or
> observer, brings certain insights to bear upon the
> community, yet also brings with it certain blind
> spots. (p. 19-20)

Since the purpose of this study is to gain access to and interpret the lived experience of a fan, the research interview is the most suitable methodology to attain this goal. As Jenkins stipulates above, as researcher, I am not too committed a fan that I cannot be an observer, yet I am enough of a fan that I can be a participant. I am the research tool through which a narrative is co-constructed that sheds light upon the shared meanings through which fans experience the lived world of fandom. Through careful craftsmanship, this study seeks to produce new, systematic knowledge about the lived experience of being a fan that will add to the body of knowledge about fans and fandom in general and how fans create meanings around the series that interest them.

For this study, face-to-face interviews were conducted with five persons, two males and three females who identify themselves as fans. Four of the interviewees are members of the local Star Trek fan club and were contacted through the fan club internet page. The fifth interviewee is an avid science fiction fan. The interviews were taped and then transcribed for further analysis. All the participants had been active in fandom for at least three years. The youngest participant, at eighteen, had been active the least amount of time. The three older participants had become fans when the original series aired in 1968, although they had pursued

other fan interests in the interim between the original series and Star Trek: The Next Generation that came out in the 1980's. Each of the five described themselves as avid fans of science fiction and/or Star Trek. Two of the five, Trianna and T'rena, asked that they be identified by those names, which are the names of their Star Trek personae. The three other interviewees were given pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality.

Chapter 3

Description of Interviews

According to Polkinghorne (1983), various systems of inquiry provide "internal coherence and meaning to a research project" and they "take their validity and reliability from their participation in a particular form of inquiry" (p. 5). However, even thought the form of inquiry is the same, the results of each individual interview can be quite different. The following interviews are each from science fiction fans, but, in interviewing the participants in this project, I found that each of the five, although they would all fall under the umbrella of Star Trek/science fiction fans, had very different stories to tell. Each of the interviewees was involved in Star Trek fandom to varying degrees, but each also focused on a specific aspect of being a fan, while at the same time embracing the concept of Star Trek as a whole. Perhaps that is one of the attractions of the Star Trek "universe" that has made it so enduring. Once fans learn the conventions and rules that govern this universe, there is a tremendous variety of activities in which they can engage to reinforce and expand their self-identity as fans.

Interview with Mark

Mark is eighteen and attends vocational classes while he works on his GED (General Education Diploma). He was the only interviewee who requested that I interview him at his home. He lives in the basement of his parents' home. The space was cluttered with clothing and other articles scattered around. There was a computer in the corner with a computer game running - one of the "first person shooter" games that are popular with young males.

Also scattered across the floor are thousands of cards from the Star Trek card game. Mark later informed me that he owns about 5000 cards. This game is similar to the Magic, the Gathering card game. Collectible card games are similar to role-playing games such as Dungeons and Dragons, but are less flexible. In role-playing games, players make up their own characters and assign them such abilities as strength, intelligence, fighting skills, psychic powers, etc. In a card game, such as Magic, Star Trek, Star Wars, or Lord of the Rings, players draw cards of characters which list these abilities, and the players must strategize to use the cards they draw in the most effective manner in order to win the game. Cards come in packs of ten or so, with packs costing an average of $3.00. There is also a market for individual cards that are especially rare and/or powerful, with a single card of this type costing up to hundreds of dollars.

Individual cards can be found for sale at local stores that specialize in comics and gaming, but there are also many sites on the internet, such as eBay, where cards can be bought, sold, or traded.

Mark started out as a Star Trek fan "when Next Generation came out, probably since I was four. My brother and I got fascinated with it and we found out about the Star Trek Club, we joined up." He told me his activities with the local Star Trek club include attending the meetings, saying that "During the meetings, we've got basically stuff that's going on in the Star Trek world around the world. And after the meetings, we do some role-playing or watch episodes of Star Trek. A lot of different stuff, actually." He also claims to be active in a group within the club that makes their own Star Trek movies. He explained the concept behind the movies as

> we basically cross over Star Trek with some other
> dimension or something. Our first one was Star
> Trek versus Star Wars. We called it 'The Wrath of
> Vader.' The one we're working on now is Star Trek
> and Dr. Who. We're calling it 'Regenerations.' So
> we cross over some sort of genre and we get a
> funky name from one of the movies or something
> weird. We have our own newsletter we call 'A
> Fistful of Credits.'

Mark also talked about the current film project the club is working on. He said "basically I play the only person, I am a character in that, a marine, but I'm the only one who gets to fight back before I'm killed." When I made a reference to him being a "red shirt" he did not know what I was talking about. I had to explain the phenomena in the original series that anyone wearing a red shirt (denoting security division) was a sure bet to be killed off during the episode. Mark told me he had watched almost none of the original episodes and was somewhat defensive about the distinction between being a red shirt and being a marine. He stated that:

> we actually use a little 8mm camera, and then we
> have a bunch of editing equipment. We put in some
> special effects and then we cut scenes from some
> of the movies and put them in. We've got one
> scene in there where we're fighting a star
> destroyer - yes, we cut scenes from Star Wars too.
> We're fighting the star destroyer and one of the
> scenes is from Star Trek II, the Enterprise firing
> its phasers against the Reliant.

Mark "gets together with a bunch of guys on Tuesdays" and says "we do role playing games and such, not specifically Star Trek." According to Mark, there isn't much opportunity to play the Star Trek customizable card game

(CCG) very often, because, he says, "we don't really have a regular group per se that gets together and plays the card game."

The premise of the current, ongoing role-playing game is:

A time-travelling ship that was built just a few months ago, but there was a…some sort of accident or something and it is caught in some sort of temporal anomaly and the ship itself in that anomaly has aged somewhere around the point of 650 years and that amount of time has gone by. So the Sol has to destroy the ship because there's shock waves or something that are destroying the space-time continuum.

When he began discussing the Star Trek customizable card game (CCG), Mark's enthusiasm became evident. He sat up straighter and his face became more animated. He knew every single series of the CCG that has come out and when each was introduced, saying that he had started collecting the cards "right after they first came out. I had a deck set up that could wipe anybody's - today even. But it got stolen. I've actually got some good cards. Every once in a while the Comic Shop will come up with a good one and I'll buy it up."

We discussed the concept of how to staff a Federation starship:

A normal ship will need personnel with gold stars, which is command and silver stars, which is officers. You know, you won't see anything that's got more than one gold star, but you could have a gold star and two silvers or a gold star and one silver. I'm not sure if I've seen any with just two silvers, but I've seen some with just one silver - something like a runabout and a shuttle craft can use anything, even a civilian…There's actually missions and mission requirements. You need personnel with certain attributes to be able to complete the mission.

Mark has "a bunch" of the technical manuals and shares Star Trek magazines with his girlfriend in order to learn more about the technology of Star Trek. His position within the club is that of a communications officer, but he takes on the role of chief engineer in the club RPG, since the club's chief engineer is gamemaster.

One of the things Mark said he enjoys about Star Trek is the complexity of the Star Trek universe and the idea that "small things can have large consequences." We talked a little bit more about club activities and then his cat came in. Mark disengaged himself from the interview and went to the other side of the room to play with the cat. He talked a little bit more about general things, but we never

got back into Star Trek. The interview ended shortly

thereafter.

Interview with Peter

I met with Peter in the university student center. He

was reading a book by Isaac Asimov; the leather bookcover on

it read "reality is just a crutch for people who can't

handle science fiction." Peter is a college student in his

twenties and is a physics major, a field he said he was

attracted to because of his fan activities. He informed me

that his interest in science fiction started with Star Wars

when he was in elementary school, saying "Star Wars came

first. We went to the theater… and we got the times wrong,

and Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back was playing in the

next theater…it scared the hell out of me." By the time the

next movie, Return of the Jedi, came out, he had become a

Star Wars trivia expert. Peter explains that he got his

mother to

> buy me a copy of the novelization of Return of the
>
> Jedi when it came out, and she read the whole
>
> novel to me bit by bit every night before I went
>
> to sleep. And then I was like 'god of Star Wars'
>
> because I knew like the whole novel, so I knew way
>
> more about it than all of my friends did.

Peter became interested in the British series Doctor

Who about this time. "My uncle got me into Dr. Who because

he used to watch it with his kids and I was over at his house a few times, watched it, and got really interested in it, and I actually learned how to tell time just so I could tell when it was time to watch Dr. Who." As for Star Trek, according to Peter, his cousins had all the episodes on tape and when he went over,

> we would watch two or three episodes and then I'd
> pretend to be Spock, and my cousin would pretend
> to be Kirk and my other cousin would pretend to be
> McCoy. Eventually over the years, they lost
> interest in it, but I never did. And then my
> cousin's mom discovered the Star Trek Club and
> sent us to it a few times. I fit right in there
> although I was the youngest person there at the
> time.

Peter has concentrated on these three interests, although he has done some reading, mentioning Asimov, and has watched Babylon 5 a few times, but "never really gotten into it." He said, "I like universes that I know…I can go in there and get the whole universe mapped out in my head - every story that's a part of that universe builds onto that." The serialized Star Trek novels, however, are "crap - repetitive and boring." He reads all the Star Wars novels, although half of them are "crap," but reads all the Doctor Who novels. Peter likes science fiction because he:

likes technology, space ships, I like rayguns,
things that you just look at and go, 'Wow, how
does that work?' That's why I became a physicist.
I wanted to know how it worked or why it didn't
work… I'm very good at being geeky. As a matter
of fact, I'm so good at it, I've sort of made it
my life's work.

He socializes, he says, with two groups of people, "I have
my friends and I have 'the Club.' My friends are so-so into
Star Trek, but they don't get upset if they miss an
episode." Then there's the Star Trek club where:

some of them aren't so excited about me
personally, but the thing is they're all as
excited about Star Trek as I am, so we can sit
around and yammer on about Star Trek for three
hours and nobody gets bored, whereas my friends
will get fed up at me and start to throw things at
me if I yammer on for more than about twenty
minutes. Of course if we're in a role-playing
game, we can go on for about five hours, but
that's not the same thing as if we're just
prattling on about Commander Riker's trombone-
playing career.

Peter doesn't spend much time on the internet with Star
Trek fandom.

In my opinion, the Star Trek internet community
seems to be incredibly fragmented and
dysfunctional. I haven't managed to find one good
web site.

However, he spends a great deal of time online on the Doctor
Who fan sites. When I asked him if he had much contact with
local Doctor Who fans, he laughed and said that he, his
girlfriend and another member of the Star Trek fan club are
the only three "true blue" Doctor Who fans in the community.
"If you want to find anyone to talk to, you have to go
online. So I spend a lot of time messing around with Dr.
Who on the internet."

Peter "eats up" role-playing games in a face-to-face
situation. He stays away from CCG card games, saying that
they are "crack for gamers;" that once you "buy one, you
can't stop." The attraction in RPG's for Peter is what he
describes as the focus on the story. Since the characters
must behave within the rules of the Star Trek universe, the
ending of the game is already known, and the challenge is to
be creative within the parameters of the story line. "You
can just get on with telling a really interesting story and
not worry about the competition side of things, because it's
not so much you versus them as both of you together trying
to make a good story and play some good characters." He

says he doesn't like to play the Dungeons and Dragons type
RPG's. When playing such a game, Peter says:

> I'm too busy trying to write the story of the
> character who's wringing my neck or running my
> starship or whatever and what their real
> motivations are within their group and who's the
> cowardly one. Which means I always end up getting
> slaughtered because everyone else is out to win.

When I asked Peter what he talks about to people who
aren't Star Trek fans, he told me that the three things he
likes to talk about are science fiction, his girlfriend, or
his personal life, and that the latter is very closely
connected to the first two. Speaking of himself in the
third person, he says, "and that's about all Peter is
capable of talking about for a long period of time. So,
generally, if the group I'm in is such that you can't talk
about any of those three, I tend to be very, very quiet...I
don't have anything to say. I never read the newspaper. I
don't watch TV, only about one or two hours a week." He says
"I don't keep up with current events. Real life bores me...I
want something that's really different. I don't want
something I can see outside my own window." When talking to
non-Star Trek fans, he says:

> I spend probably a disturbing amount of time
> figuring out just how much Trek they can take,

because see, I can only talk about these three
things, so if you find somebody who wants to
listen to those three things, you know, and
actually boost your ego by making you feel like
what you have to say is important, you don't want
to overload them so they stop listening and don't
want to talk to you anymore. So you feed it to
them so they like it and they get just what bait
they're interested in, so they keep listening to
you.

When it comes to being a Star Trek fan and meeting
other fans:

Part of what you're doing when you're a fan is
looking for your own place, trying to find
something you're good at, something that validates
your existence. Everyone I've ever known that
gets into Star Trek does it because there's
something about life they can't fit into or can't
cope with. They turn to Star Trek because they
get some level of acceptance they can't get
elsewhere.

He talks about being a Trekkie, saying:

As long as you're a Trekkie in general, you can
meet another Trekkie and you can have oodles of
conversation and not even know the guy's name.

You can instantly have this huge, once you know
who they are and whether they like Kirk better
then Sisco, you can instantly lock into this map
of connections, and you instantly know all about
them, well, in general, know all about them. So,
you don't - it doesn't matter, the details of your
life so much, because when you meet another Star
Trek fan, the details of your life aren't
important. What's important is how much you know
about Star Trek and what your opinion is of all
it's little nuances. You can separate yourself
from whatever your problem might be and you can
still have a social structure to interact with and
validate your existence and make you feel
important, wanted, needed and all that other stuff
humans need.

Peter continues with this theme, saying that:

When I was a kid I wasn't very good at things like
hitting a baseball or riding a bike, and here was
this whole universe where people never rode bikes,
but had hovercraft or transporters. I wanted to
live in that universe.

At this point, Peter began a comparison of the merits
of the various Star Trek series. We talked a little about
the positive and negative aspects of each, and some of our

various favorite episodes. Peter had to leave shortly afterward, so we concluded the interview after he invited me to come watch the filming of the next installment of the local club's Star Trek movie.

Interview with Trianna

Trianna is a professional woman in her early fifties. She became a fan of the original series when she was in college. "It was intellectual science fiction… we were right smack in the middle of the cold war in 1967 and real xenophobic and then seeing this creature with ears that looked something like Satan, but he was a first officer on a star fleet ship. I was hungry about what might be out there and stuff." When Star Trek: The Next Generation came on, "we were in Fairbanks, you know - like being on Mars, no communication with the outside world. All I see is what's on TV. I looked at the library to see if they had anything and that's how I found the USS Sol (local club)." At about the same time, she got her first home computer, and says,

> I was the first one on the internet, so I was the
> communications officer for a long time, and we'd
> bring in all kinds of stuff from the internet into
> the club newsletter.

Trianna likes Star Trek because it is a way for her to use her creativity, saying,

> I have a degree in biology, in education, and I
> wasn't ever able to find a niche to use it. Star
> Trek was a place for me to use my science
> background, a place to use my computer skills I
> was learning from work.

This carries over into her activities with the club. She is
now the "commanding officer" of the club.

> My command style is kind of like a one-room
> schoolhouse. I try to find everybody's creative
> thing and try to find a way for then to use it in
> Star Trek.

She welcomes anyone into the meetings, saying, "we put
everybody to work, but Star Trek is really the only thing we
have in common." Star Trek, she says, has

> been a way for me to be creative, to give back to
> young people. You know, most of the Trekkers are
> kind of fifth wheels where most of us don't fit in
> other places. But we can come to the meeting, be
> accepted for who we are, and I foster open
> discussion, in a G-rated environment. People who
> come in know they have to be sober, they have to
> be clean.

Another attraction of Star Trek for Trianna is that it
fosters acceptance of everyone, regardless of physical or
other limitations, saying that,

in Star Trek, we as humans are reaching out and
other people are accepting us and we are learning
to get along with our galactic neighbors and this
comes right back home. It says that I accept you
even though you can't speak two words without
stuttering, even though you're blind. I accept
you just because, and there's no other reason.

Trianna organizes local activities for the Star Trek
club, such as answering phones for the KUAC fund raisers,
marching in the Ester 4th of July parade and Golden Days
parade, and running a booth at Golden Days, the Midnight Sun
festival, and other community events. She is very active
over the internet with the parent organization, where she
teaches classes at the online Star Trek Academy. She spends
a great deal of time online, mostly teaching classes and
administrating. She says that

I enjoy being known by somebody besides my four
cats and my sons. It's been a vehicle for me to
express myself and I've really enjoyed that over
the years.

Trianna talks about being a Trekker at work, saying
that she doesn't hide the fact that she's a Trekker.

When I first came out of the closet, so to speak,
as a Trekker, my boss thought that I had gone
completely off the end of the world, I mean, he

didn't even want to talk about it. You know he
didn't even want me to discuss Trek. Then all of
a sudden these people that were Trekkers started
coming to me and asking me questions…and he'd give
me these weird looks. Well, people got used to
that. So now you hear buzzwords there everywhere.
People putting stickers up on the wall and Star
Trek screensavers on their computer. So it's
spread there, and I think it's because of me,
because I wasn't afraid to stand up and say that
I'm a Trekker.

When it comes to the people around her who know she's a
Trekker and attempt to communicate with her on that level,
Trianna says, "I just smile at them, you know, because
they're getting it all wrong, but I don't have the heart to
tell them."

As Trianna gets "older and older, more of my life is
spent on Star Trek activities and communicating with other
Trekkers." She spends a lot of time online.

Most of the classes I teach now and the programs I
administer are online. I teach biological
survival classes - what's it going to take to
survive on the moon, on a multi-generational
spaceship. Another class is mapping, 3D mapping
where you have to learn the coordinates they use

on Star Trek. Another course is emergency
survival, what are you going to do if you're
stranded on a planet.

Star Trek is not Trianna's only interest in science
fiction. She says she's "mostly into Star Trek, but I'll
read all the hard science fiction I can get my hands on."
She also watches several television programs, including
"Babylon 5, Stargate, and Earth: Final Conflict," but
doesn't participate in fan communities for these programs
because Star Trek is her main area of interest. "I have a
lot of titles behind my name for Star Fleet International,"
she told me, "and that takes up most of my time."

Trianna wants to start "simming" on the internet, but
is currently involved in doing research on all the rules and
regulations for Bravo group, so she can join in. Sims are
online simulations, similar to role-playing games, but
conducted online. RPG's (role-playing games)and simming are
attractive to her, because "I can immerse myself in my
character." Her persona (Trianna)is half Vulcan and half
Betazoid. This is a rather contradictory blending of Star
Trek species, but she says, "I enjoy the logic, but I also
enjoy the passion. She was raised in a diplomatic family,
went into telepathy and became a healer." She loves the
sims. When describing them she laughs and states that

It's addicting, oh, is it addicting, to play your
character against someone else. You can really be
your character. You don't have to be a short, fat
53-year-old anymore. You can be a dynamic person,
just be out there and interact with everybody -
it's so cool!

Trianna thinks most of the people simming online are
young, but, she states,

I don't pretend to be younger than me. I enjoy my
fifties. I always tell them I'm 53. That way
nobody gets carried away and thinks that I'm a
young thing they want to be in love with. I want
to be looked upon with respect, as a mature
person. Pretty much who I imagine my character to
be is a lot of what I am inside. It's a big
emotional investment.

Trianna also enjoys writing Star Trek related poetry and is
currently working on the life history of her Star Trek
persona, saying "she's really grown in different directions
than I expected." She sums up, "you've really got to find a
creative outlet. It doesn't matter what religion you are,
you have to find a way to nourish your soul."

Interview with T'rena

T'rena is an attractive and very active 72-year-old woman. When I asked her how she became interested in Star Trek, she told me some of her background, saying,

> My father was a socialist, so I was brought up as a socialist kid, went to socialist camp and everything else. Well, that doesn't exactly make you popular with a lot of people, so I had a lot of trouble over it. When I got into college, I joined the Young Socialist group and everything, but I couldn't find anything that actually portrayed the principles that I had as a person. Then I started watching Star Trek and I wanted to live in the 24th Century. I wanted to live in the Star Trek world. I fell in love with the concept of IDIC, infinite diversity in infinite combinations. It's the answer to prejudice. It's an acceptance of everything. I'm also involved in pagan. As a matter of fact that's my religion, Wiccan.

T'rena got out of Star Trek for a while and joined a church in town. She says,

> I had gotten off the track. By the time DS9 (Deep Space 9) came around I was with a significant other and he didn't care for it so I stopped watching it and then he got me mixed up with a

religious group and then took off and went to
California. Well, I put up with this for seven
years, and then I was at the point where I was
ready to drop out of it because they were trying
to mold me into what they wanted me to be, not
what I wanted to be. They were not willing to
accept me as me; they wanted to change me. If it
had been a constructive change for me, I would
have gone for it. But it wasn't. It was to
change me into nothing but an absolutely
dependent, mewling, humble - and this was not me.
I am not that way, and it was killing me to try to
force myself into this, but I did it for the
simple reason that they were people to be with; it
was like a family.

T'rena discovered the Star Trek group a couple of years ago
and signed up immediately, saying "I knew I'd found what I
was looking for…I'll never leave it, because it portrays
everything, it contains everything that I need and want as
far as being accepted as you are." She is very happy within
the club, adding,

I have a new family, an international family and
everyone of them is the same way, they understand.
We get along, and everybody helps everybody else.
That to me is the most important thing.

T'rena's main activity is simming over the internet. Her favorite sim takes place on a ship and each character is assigned a position on the ship and plays out their role via an email listserve. She says the game is "an email that's sent to a list of what we're feeling and what we're doing. And it becomes your life. It's fantastic. It's like living in the 24th Century, which is what I wanted to do anyway." She got into the sim via an email, saying,

> They had a ship and they were looking for
>
> officers, and I thought, well, I can do email. So
>
> I joined, started out as a cadet, went to the
>
> academy, and had a ball. I got on the ship.

She also talks back and forth with other Trekkers via "ICQ, Instant Messenger, Yahoo, and MSN." She joined an online group called Federation Intelligence, where the participants have a virtual life on board a ship. She started as a cadet, but has worked her way up to ensign.

T'rena is also very active within the local group. She holds four positions, including that of a communications officer. Her participation encompasses attending meetings regularly and helping out at all the local events, e.g., answering phones at the PBS station fundraiser, running the club booth at the Midnight Sun Festival, etc. She also works for the parent organization, Star Trek International,

where she is Chief of Communications in the diplomatic
department.

One aspect she enjoys about being online so much with
Star Trek is that it gives her the opportunity to write. She
says,

> I have always been a writer but I've never been
> able to express it. I've been a writer within
> myself. But I couldn't put it on paper. I didn't
> know how to write description and I didn't know
> how to write dialogue, but being in these sims,
> it's easy.

T'rena has four characters she has developed. She will
develop a character and a biography for that character and
then the sim is written around that character. She spends a
lot of time on the internet, saying,

> I don't have anything else to do. I'm retired,
> I'm on social security. I'm on longevity, so I
> get enough money. What else am I going to do? I
> can't stand television. Except for Star Trek, of
> course.

Star Trek, she told me, has "given me a whole new life,
at a time when I didn't expect it. At 72 you don't expect
to have a whole new life handed to you." She likes the
internet,

because there is no face-to-face. A lot of
judgements are made because of face-to-face. In
other words, some of these younger people would
see me as an older person, as an elder, as a
grandmother, but would not talk to me the way they
do now, when they don't know how old I am. All I
tell them is that I'm over 21. I have some very,
very close friends.

T'rena says that the "language that we share is Star
Trek. If we talked to someone who isn't in Star Trek,
I don't know how we'd sound, because all of our talk is
based on Star Trek. How would a problem be solved if
we were in the 24th Century?"

T'rena talks a little bit about Star Trek as a culture,
saying:

Star Trek is a culture all its own. We are
virtually, through virtual reality, living in the
24th Century. And we think and act in the way that
we would if we were in the 24th Century. So it's
like almost an ethnic culture. Language is one of
the things that we share. Let's take some
technical terms - 'warp core breech.' To other
people that wouldn't mean a thing, but to us a
definite problem is a "warp core breech."
Communicating is "hailing frequencies." And

that's what really binds us together is this commonality. It makes us a little bit iconoclastic, but once a person expresses an interest…

T'rena doesn't try to hide the fact that she is a Trekker. Star Trek, she says, "influences how I feel about things, influences how I talk about things, it influences everything. My Star Trek life is more my life than my real life is." She wears her uniform to meetings and then out afterwards to restaurants. She wears Star Trek t-shirts to class (she is taking advantage of the senior citizen tuition waiver to earn a degree in anthropology). But she does try to keep the conversation on a "different level" if she meets someone who is not into Star Trek.

When the interview drew toward closure, I asked T'rena if there was anything else she wanted to add. She said that:

I really want to emphasize that Star Trek is a culture. It's like dealing with another culture. It's like dealing with someone who comes from a foreign country, who have [sic] their own ideas, their own traditions, their own attitudes, so you have to realize they're a culture.

Interview with Mary

Mary is a woman in her 50's, the only interviewee who was not a member of the local Star Trek club. We met at a local elementary school, where she was socializing with a group of people from the Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA). She was sitting with a group of women who were doing needlework or reading when I arrived. We adjourned to the faculty lounge to conduct the interview. Mary is very knowledgeable about science fiction literature and media, speaks at a fast pace, and enthusiastically talks about science fiction. However, it seemed that though she was willing to demonstrate her knowledge of the field, she was not as willing to talk about what it means to her personally. We talked for over two hours, but the majority of our conversation at first skimmed across the surface of her identity. It wasn't until well into the interview that she began to reveal what science fiction means in her life, saying,

> I basically watch pretty much any science fiction
> that's on TV, because, most of the time that's
> better than anything else that's on TV.

Mary started watching the original series of Star Trek when she was in high school, "but then I went to college and missed a lot of them at the end." The first time she saw Star Trek Next Generation, she was:

absolutely stunned, because the opening chords of
the theme came on, and it was like my whole body
welled up. It was like, my God, there was a hole
in my heart that I didn't know was there, and it
was suddenly filled with Star Trek. And I was
like "Whoo, yes!" I can't believe I didn't know
how much I missed it.

Mary is an avid consumer of science fiction of every
kind and says she "likes television sci-fi for the same
reason I like science fiction reading, because it's a medium
of ideas. You have to be character-driven, but for science
fiction fans, the best ones are the ones that deal with
ideas." She is enthused and knowledgeable about this topic
and rattles off television shows and episodes, focusing on
who writes episodes for which series and which characters in
each she finds particularly engaging. Mary spends very
little time online with anything related to science fiction.
She has an old computer with "not enough RAM to load the
good science fiction sites," which tend to have lots of
graphics. There are a lot of things she would like to do
online, but says, "I just know that my computer wouldn't
handle it, so what's the point… mostly, I read, watch
television, and go to movies." Though Mary talked
considerably about television programs and movies, she
always kept coming back to books and authors, and says she

uses the internet mainly to keep track of the many authors
she reads and when they have new books coming out.

Mary attends science fiction conventions whenever she
gets a chance. Because of the expense of traveling from
Alaska to the lower 48, she participates most regularly in
those on the West coast. She says when she goes to a
convention that she usually goes alone and she likes to get
there early:

> I go up to where they're registering people, and
> get there early and say, 'Hi, I'm here to
> volunteer.' I just love to help people register.
> When I did that at NorWestCon, I got to meet a
> whole bunch of new people, including Maggie
> Norakawa who used to write great Star Wars fan
> fiction in the seventies…and I got to gush all
> over her.

Mary talks about writers and how approachable they are
compared to the actors who play science fiction roles,
saying that, "a lot of writers were fans before they became
writers and most of them are still fans of other authors."
She thinks they are more "connected" with the genre than
actors. She seems somewhat contemptuous of actors, stating
that, "a lot of them don't know anything about science
fiction before accepting a role," especially if they

come in, say, through Trek, which is the most
codified and almost organized-religion type of
fandom, they're going to get a really interesting
eyeful from the beginning, because the fans turn
them into icons, and some of them break through it
and some of them don't.

Mary also does a lot of role-playing games. She
initially began with Dungeons and Dragons (D&D) and moved on
to other fantasy RPG's such as Runequest. She expressed her
disdain for Dungeons and Dragons, saying,

I find the gaming conventions of D&D to be
restrictive and I like more complicated games. My
group of players, my core group, played a
complicated and complex system.

She identifies stongly with the characters she creates.
When she started playing Runequest, she says she

bitched so much about the fact that Runequest
didn't have a fighting cult that welcomed women,
that a friend who was up here at the time
developed a cult just for me - one of Amazon
women. My characters and parts of my characters
from another campaign got published. It's just a
great little thing to have happen. The campaign
was so real that you could do that.

One of her characters is Ellyn Lanvaer, who, Mary states, "is very real to me. And in the other one I had a young tomboy named Mannie - I actually started writing up her journal at one point." She describes one of RPS games she played in great detail, focusing on the adventures of her character, saying, for example, "I was a skinny little kid, not a very good fighter at first." She refers to her character as "I" throughout the entire description of the game.

Mary's science fiction activities are "guilty pleasures." However, she also says she is very blatant, "I kind of just sort of lay it out in people's faces. I've raised a lot of eyebrows over the years." She states that she always has a book with her, and if she has to wait in a line "more than 30 seconds, I whip out my book and start reading." She adds that she has to be a little more discreet when she is with her needlework guild ladies, as they are mostly older and "much more religious than I am - at least they're all Christians."

Mary wishes she had more time to read than she does, watch more science fiction on television, and do some writing, saying "I regret the fact that real life intrudes so much into the things I would like to do."

Summary

The five narratives presented here are representations
of how each individual describes their identity as a fan
within a socially-constructed community of fans. Such
identities are created and maintained through the process of
self-narration (Gergen, 1994). According to Gergen (1994),
people develop self-identity within a given culture by
telling stories about themselves and noting the reactions of
other people to these stories. This "narration of self" is
constantly changing through the process of communicative
social interchange as one becomes more familiar with the
community and develops interdependent ties with other
community members. In such communities, self-identity is
shared, and people are located within a "manifold of
persons" (Harre & Gillett, 1994). Shared context is
important in the signaling of meaning. Shared context also
leads to unique ways of communication production and
interpretation, which give rise to distinctive words and
language patterns (Hymes, 1972), and formalized speech codes
(Philipsen, 1997). The purpose of the narrative interview
is to understand the lived world of the people interviewed
and the central themes of their experience. These five
narratives provide insight into the shared context of the
fan community as expressed in the use of speech codes, and

the themes that emerge through the co-constructive process of interpretation of these interviews.

Chapter 4

Analysis

Several steps exist for analyzing the conversational
interview. Kvale (1996) emphasizes that analysis takes
place throughout the research process. For this reason, I
conducted conversational interviews, rather than structured
interviews. In structured interviews, questions are
formulated in advance, allowing for little deviation on the
part of the interviewer. The interviewer merely asks the
questions and records the answers. In conversational
interviewing the researcher becomes the research tool. The
researcher is a part of the act of knowledge production and
cannot be separated from this process, and thus is required
to be self-reflexive. The researcher must be aware that
s/he is part of the lived experience of the interview, and
that what the researcher says and does during the interview
has a profound effect on the end product that results from
that interview.

For this reason, analysis must be ongoing throughout
the research. During the interview process, I not only
entered into the lived world of my interviewees, but I
became, in a sense, charmed by it. As I worked with them to
understand their lived experience, I, on one level at least,
became enchanted by the glimpses of their world they offered
me. As I analyzed these glimpses, I began to see new paths

our conversations could take and to come to new understandings about their experiences.

Another advantage of the conversational interview is the freedom to of the researcher to pick up threads of the co-researchers' conversations and to pursue those threads for either more detailed, or perhaps unexpected, knowledge. This process takes place not only during the interview itself, but in the transcription process as well. One of the strengths I found in using the conversational interview was that I had the chance to synthesize and analyze the conversations multiple times. Not only did I engage in analysis during the interview, but each interview was followed by a period of quiet reflection, in which I relived the interview experience and integrated it with previous interviews. Then, I corroborated these reflections during the transcription process. Finally, my analysis was expanded during the writing phase, as I balanced the need to produce my research findings, while at the same time remain faithful to the lived reality of my interviewees.

Each participant created a lived reality achieved through a process of storytelling about the self, although each "discursive production of selfhood" (Harre & Gillet, 1994, p.104), has led to a different result. For example, Mark plays the Star Trek customizable card game, Peter regularly participates in role-playing games, Trianna leads

the local Star Trek club and teaches and acts as a mentor for newcomers to Star Trek, T'rena plays simulation games online, and Mary attends conventions and reads extensively.

One of the attractions of Star Trek is not that it is a television program, but rather it can be treated as a foreign culture to be experienced and explored. Members of the local club produce their own movies about this culture. As Mark says, "we actually use a little 8mm camera, and then we have a bunch of editing equipment. We put in some special effects and then we cut scenes from some of the movies and put them in." This is in line with Tulloch and Jenkins (1995), who contend that the fan culture has evolved far beyond the program, and that if Star Trek was never again shown on television it wouldn't matter to many of its fans. As Trianna says,

> I really want to emphasize that Star Trek is a culture. It's like dealing with another culture. It's like dealing with someone who comes from a foreign country, who have [sic] their own ideas, their own traditions, their own attitudes, so you have to realize they're a culture.

Speech codes - Talking Trek

One aspect of a culture is that its members have unique ways of communicating, i.e., they use speech codes. According to Philipsen (1997), speech codes are

socially constructed symbols and meanings, premises, and rules within a cultural place or setting. The interview data for this study contains several examples of how Star Trek fans have appropriated many popular phrases and ideas from the television series. Not only have fans borrowed these phrases, but they have given them alternate meanings within the culture from which they originated, to make them into a kind of code within a code. For example, the term "hailing frequencies" was often used on the program to initiate communication with another ship or planet. T'rena's group has appropriated that term and uses it to mean intergroup or interpersonal communication, as in "I think there's something wrong with her hailing frequencies." T'rena says that the "language that we share is Star Trek. If we talked to someone who isn't in Star Trek, I don't know how we'd sound, because all of our talk is based on Star Trek."

Philipsen (1997) says that speech codes can be used to analyze the "historical, spatial, and cultural sites in which human connections are accomplished" (p. 121). He states that two ways in which effective use of speech codes can be determined is whether people are "participating intelligibly and appropriately in such a world" or "appropriating judiciously its resources for one's use" (p.

121). The Star Trek fans interviewed use speech codes and, if "participating intelligibly and appropriately" is defined as the amount of enjoyment they derive from this participation, then they are succeeding. Peter states that:

> As long as you're a Trekkie in general, you can meet another Trekkie and you can have oodles of conversation and not even know the guy's name… Once you know who they are and whether they like Kirk better than Sisco, you can instantly lock into this map of connections, and you instantly know all about them… When you meet another Star Trek fan, the details of your life aren't important. What's important is how much you know about Star Trek and what your opinion is of all its little nuances.

Nor is there any doubt that Star Trek meets the criteria for a culture as Philipsen defines it, not as a group, nation, or people, but rather as a culture that encompasses a group of people as a system irrelevant of their political or geographic boundaries.

Philipsen (1997) encountered speech codes in Teamsterville that expressed gender and ethnic differences. For example, men do not speak to their wives, girlfriends, children, or bosses. The symbols and meanings connected to social and physical space make up a culturally distinctive

system. In the Star Trek universe, one chooses an ethnicity and planet of origin, but once chosen, the symbols and meanings that go along with that choice are as immutable as the communication patterns of adult males in Teamsterville. Only a Klingon would believe that "it is a good day to die," and only a Ferengi would demand "show me the money" in a business transaction. The idea of a Borg greeting a human with the phrase "live long and prosper" is unthinkable. The Borg are only interested in assimilating other races, and, to them, "resistance is futile."

Like the Teamsterville males, Star Trek fans make inferences about other fans' personae based on what they claim as their ethnicity (race) and residence (planet of origin). Trianna talks about her Star Trek persona, who is half Vulcan and half Betazoid, saying "I enjoy the logic, but I also enjoy the passion. She was raised in a diplomatic family, went into telepathy and became a healer." A Star Trek fan would know that Vulcans are logical and repress all emotions, while Betazoids are telepaths and empaths. These inferences guide a complex system of communication with other fans, especially when simming or role-playing, and this communication encompasses the myths, rituals, and dramas related to the facets of Star Trek culture the fan adopts.

According to Philipsen (1997), there are three acts
through which a person can demonstrate familiarity with
speech codes, i.e., totemizing rituals, myths, and social
drama. Greetings are a common form of totemizing ritual.
Trianna mentions in her interview the greeting rituals
pervasive in the Star Trek universe. For example, a Vulcan
will always greet or be greeted with the right hand raised
and the middle fingers split. The proper expression is
"live long and prosper." Someone who has adopted a Klingon
persona would greet someone with fist closed and arm across
the chest in the style of Roman soldiers, saying "KaPlagh"
and the first name with "son of" or "daughter of" and then
the father's name.

Cultural membership is also demonstrated by a knowledge
of the cultural myths. Because of the nature of Star Trek,
the television episodes and movies provide the basis for the
cultural myths that constitute the Star Trek universe.
However, some myths are more accessible than others. Peter
observed that people who watch the episodes know a great
deal about the cultural myths of Star Trek. For example,
Captain Piccard was captured by the Borg, assimilated as
Locutus, and sent back to facilitate assimilation among
humans. He was saved by the strength of his humanity and
personality and the loyalty and assistance of his crew.
However, there are other cultural myths less accessible to

casual viewers, but well known to cultural insiders, such as the story of the Kobayashi Maru told to me by Peter. This is the name of a ship used in a simulation at the Star Fleet Academy to put cadets into a no-win situation in which they must choose between two very bad options. Captain Kirk is the only cadet ever to beat the Kobayashi Maru scenario (he cheated by reprogramming the simulation). Thus, knowledge of the Kobayashi Maru story would emphasize a strong self-identity as a Star Trek fan.

The last aspect of speech codes is that of the social drama. In the social drama, someone criticizes or challenges another's conduct. Social dramas are common within Star Trek groups. T'rena told me a story about one of her sims, in which there was a tragedy involving several Star Fleet personnel who were killed. A Ferengi contacted the friends of the deceased, offering to sell personal effects of the victims back to their friends and families. From a Ferengi point of view, this was a good opportunity to make a profit. The Ferengi are a mercenary race who live by the "Rules of Acquisition." The Ferengi was immediately challenged by sim members about his reprehensible behavior. T'rena was clearly personally outraged at the behavior of this Ferengi, raising her voice and tapping her ring on the table in an agitated manner. "Let me tell you," she stated,

"you should have seen some of the emails going back and forth this morning about that one!"

The fans interviewed for this study see the Star Trek universe as a "promised land." Through self-narrative and storytelling with other fans, they took what Aden (1999) describes as a "purposeful, imaginary-but-real journey" to the promised land. When they got there, they liked it so well they settled in and went "native," adopting the ways and customs of that culture, making a viable life for themselves there. Although they each came from a different background to reach this promised land, there is an epifinality to each one's journey. The next questions then, are what brought these people here, and why do they stay? The answers to these questions emerge as themes common in the lived experience of each of the interviewees.

Emergent themes

During the course of this study, I participated in interviews with five very different self-described "fans." Each person is unique in his or her outlook and interests, yet each interview reflected commonalties of shared experience. Owens (1984) states that a theme emerges when there are recurrences of meanings, repetitions of words and/or phrases, and forcefulness of vocal inflection. Throughout the interviews, participants repeatedly emphasized certain concepts by all of these methods.

Several ideas and phrases were common in most or all of the interviews. Points were emphasized not only by vocal inflection, but by physical actions as well. For example, T'rena, when expounding an idea, would tap her ring forcefully on the table top, making enough noise that during transcription it was sometimes hard to understand her words over the drumming of the ring on the table next to the tape recorder. By analyzing the interview transcriptions using Owens (1984) criteria, several themes emerged. The major themes that emerged through this discourse with the interviewees are: (1) a dis-affection with mundane life, (2) acceptance within the Star Trek fan community, and (3) a sense of hope that the world they created would somehow be the "normal" world of the future. These three themes were identified by applying Owen's criteria to the data from the narrative interviews, and looking for themes that organized the conversations.

Tulloch and Jenkins (1995) suggest the media depiction of Star Trek fans is one of overweight, single or divorced women, and "geeky" guys. The five co-researchers for this study fit roughly into one of these categories. This may be because, as the media says, these are the kind of people Star Trek attracts, or it may be because these are the type of people the media focuses on. Perhaps not coincidentally, one of the themes that emerged from the data (capta) was

that of a dis-affection of the interviewees with their mundane lives. None of these people were in positions of power or authority, so it could be argued that each interviewee felt a need for control in at least one aspect of their lives. Star Trek fans are not necessarily unhappy people trying desperately to escape from the "real" world. These interviewees were not escaping or running away from their mundane lives, as much as they are running toward something they perceive as a better way to live; a place they like more than the one they presently inhabit. For example, several times in her interview, Trianna mentions that she enjoys helping people. Not only does she run the local club, but she is a "virtual volunteer" and spends a great deal of time online working for Star Fleet International. She sees Star Trek as a way to,

> be creative, to give back to young people. You
> have to find a way to nourish your soul… Star Trek
> was a place for me to use my science background, a
> place to use my computer skills I was learning
> from work.

Peter, on the other hand, is fascinated with technology. Star Trek intrigues him. He complains that "real life bores me…I want something that's really different. I don't want something I can see outside my own window."

We are all, in some sense dissatisfied with our present lives. Some people change jobs, move to another city, or seek a new significant other in hopes of making their lives more meaningful and creating a more satisfying self. These fans self-create the place they prefer. We are all looking for the same place - one in which our lives are validated. These fans, rather than seeking a physical place, have created one for themselves in their imagination. As Peter expresses it, "part of what you're doing when you're a fan is looking for your own place, trying to find something you're good at, something that validates your existence."

Star Trek presents an idealized version of the future, in which there is no poverty, little disease, and the world is at peace. There is no monetary system, everyone receives what they need in life, and every species is accepted for what they are, whether warlike Klingon, logical Vulcan, or greedy Ferengi. A major attraction of Star Trek for these fans is that acceptance of people for who they are within the Star Trek culture. Trianna's words express this theme when she says that:

> in Star Trek, we as humans are reaching out and
> other people are accepting us, and we are learning
> to get along with our galactic neighbors and this
> comes right back home. It says that I accept you
> even though you can't speak two words without

stuttering, even though you're blind. I accept

you just because, and there's no other reason.

Peter reiterates Trianna's ideas, saying:

everyone I've ever known that gets into Star Trek

does it because there's something about life they

can't fit into or can't cope with. They turn to

Star Trek because they get some level of

acceptance they can't get elsewhere.

T'rena sums up the desire to dwell in the "promised

land" with the statement that,

I wanted to live in the 24th Century. I wanted to

live in the Star Trek world. I fell in love with

the concept of IDIC, infinite diversity in

infinite combinations. It's the answer to

prejudice. It's an acceptance of everything.

In "real life," the message reflected by the media and

accepted by the public at large is that only a certain type

of person (slim, attractive, physically fit, not too

intelligent) is acceptable. Harre and Gillet (1994) discuss

the sense of self constructed through the appropriate use of

symbols and language, and organized through norms and

conventions, stating that every person has a "social place,

a location in a manifold of persons, ordered by status, age,

reputation, and the like" from which we "perceive, act, and

am acted upon," (p.104) and we ourselves perceive. All the

interviewees indicated that each had found a special place, a social place, within the Star Trek/science fiction culture, in which they developed a strong sense of identity. The establishment and maintenance of this cultural identity through communication and the development of relationships with others in this community gives them a sense of pleasure. Several of the interviewees expressed regret at the intrusion of "real life" into the ongoing development of their Star Trek personae. For example, T'rena says, "My Star Trek life is more my life than my real life is." Trianna puts it another way, saying, "As I get older and older, more of my life is spent on Star Trek activities and communicating with other Trekkers."

A final theme that emerges from these interviews is a sense of hope. There is hope that people will realize what Star Trek has been advocating all these years and start accepting people for what they are. T'rena describes some of the difficulties she has with acceptance because of her age, saying

> A lot of judgements are made because of face-to-
> face. In other words, some of these younger
> people would see me as an older person, as an
> elder, as a grandmother, but would not talk to me
> the way they do now, when they don't know how old

I am. All I tell them is that I'm over 21. I
have some very, very close friends.

This is the hope that Trianna described as wanting to "live
in the 24th Century." She expresses this idea several times
throughout her conversation, saying, for example, "it
becomes your life. It's fantastic. It's like living in the
24th Century, which is what I wanted to do anyway." But Star
Trek fans also give each other hope - a hope that if they
aren't validated in the "real" world, they can go to this
promised land they have created and be accepted there as
they are. It is a place where acceptance means equality
regardless of differences. In the Star Trek community, they
can share their dis-affection with others like themselves
and find satisfaction. There is hope that it is still
possible, at least in this place, to have the experience of
acceptance and lead a competent life, even if they don't get
that experience in the mundane world. Perhaps T'rena
expresses it best, saying, "I knew I'd found what I was
looking for…I'll never leave it, because it portrays
everything, it contains everything that I need and want."

These three major themes emerged from the data.
However, the expression of these themes by the participants
raises some other questions that could be the focus of
future study. One idea that emerged, although it was not, in
actuality, a theme, was the concept of a hierarchy among

Star Trek fans. For example, Trianna, who teaches classes at Star Fleet Academy (an online Star Trek "university"), says, "I have a lot of titles behind my name for Star Fleet International." A slightly different variation on this is Peter's statement that, "what's important is how much you know about Star Trek and what your opinion is of all it's little nuances." The concept of hierarchies in fan communities has been discussed by McDonald (1988) and would make an interesting area for further research.

Another aspect of one of the emergent themes that would merit further exploration is that of acceptance. The interviewees all expressed the perspective that they were accepted in the Star Trek community, both in the local club and in online Star Trek forums. Peter, for example, says about joining the local club, "I fit right in there although I was the youngest person there at the time." Trianna, as head of the local club fosters acceptance of people, stating that "we can come to the meeting, be accepted for who we are." On the other hand, in their virtual lives, both Trianna and T'rena admit that they conceal part of who they are from the other members of their online community. Trianna expresses the fact that online "you don't have to be a short, fat 53-year-old anymore." T'rena doesn't tell anyone that she is 72 years old because "they would not talk to me the way they do now, if they knew how old I was."

From this duality, other possible perspectives can be extrapolated. Are these people deceiving themselves when they express feeling of acceptance both in the local club and online, or is there truly a difference in the kind of acceptance they receive? One could also, however, speculate that in the local club members are accepted in spite of their physical attributes, whereas online, physical aspects become irrelevant. Trianna says about her online persona that "pretty much who I imagine my character to be is a lot of what I am inside." The answers to these questions are beyond the scope of this project, but would be an interesting topic for further research.

Conclusion

Star Trek is a television series based on life in the future. The premise of the series is a starship of explorers who "boldly go where no one has gone before." However, for many fans it has become a symbol of what life here and now should be like, but isn't. Star Trek opens the door to the "promised land." The starship itself isn't important. Nor are the individual characters, such as Spock, Kirk, and Piccard. They are, as Jenkins (1992) states, like heroes of bygone days, acknowledged and even revered for their influence on present-day culture, as a George Washington or Abraham Lincoln might be, but with little import in everyday life. The main characters

themselves have been subsumed into what they represent, and are no longer in themselves of great importance. For example, Spock is not so much an individual as he is a representative of the Vulcan race, with its philosophy of logic, restraint, and the IDIC (infinite diversity in infinite combinations).

The five participants interviewed have talked about their self-identities within the culture of Star Trek and science fiction, and how they use speech codes to create and transform these identities as their experiences and expertise within the culture increase. Trianna, T'rena and Mary have literally created identities for themselves in RPG's and sims, and become so heavily involved in these characters that they have written journals about those lives. Nor are these identities static. The identities evolve and transform as they interact with others within the Star Trek culture on an ongoing basis. Schutz (1977) states that "social reality contains elements of beliefs and convictions which are real because they are defined as so by the participants"(p. 230).

During the course of these interviews, three main themes emerged. Although the themes have here been treated separately, they are all intertwined. These fans are dis-affected. They are not completely satisfied with their lives and the culture they live in and are looking for a

better place, a promised land. In this promised land they are accepted as they are. No one says, "if you were only prettier, or slimmer, or not such a geek." Not only are they accepted with their individual differences, but they come to believe that this is the way the "real" world should be. Star Trek fans also have a sense of hope. They believe that if they can experience satisfaction in the community they construct, then perhaps someday everyone will be able to live in such a community. For these Star Trek fans, the 24th Century is the real world in which they dwell, and the 21st Century a nuisance in which they are physically confined. One gets the sense that they are always on yellow alert, waiting for the Enterprise to show up and beam them away to a better life.

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