

DEGREES OF FANDOM: AUTHENTICITY & HIERARCHY IN THE AGE OF
MEDIA CONVERGENCE

By

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Abstract

Although interest in fandom studies have grown in recent decades, there remain core issues that are under-addressed, including attempts to theorize about fandom in a general way (as opposed to focusing on individual communities) and the influence of transmedia elements on existing fan structures and hierarchies. This study explored the ways that fans engage with particular texts and the ways that they engage with one another. Specifically, it considered (1) what it means to be an “authentic” fan, (2) how hierarchies are established within and between fan communities, and (3) the impact that the changing nature of mediated storytelling has on both authenticity and hierarchy. A combination of 25 in-depth semi-structured interviews and participant observation in both an online (TelevisionWithoutPity.com) and offline (Comic-Con International) setting were used to explore these issues. This study uncovered the following: (1) a continuum of fandom, ranging from the non-fan or casual fan at one extreme to the “too big” fan at the other, with several variants on the levels of fandom in between. Participants indicated that there was a point at which one’s fandom can become “too big” or go “to far” and the behaviors associated with that level of fandom are less desirable; (2) participants identified several markers used to decide the size of one’s fandom: cost, effort exerted, socializing, knowledge, and quoting. Within fan communities, participants pointed to official authority, investment, cultural capital and social capital as means of hierarchy creation. Between fan communities, divisions were established in one of three ways. Participants either differentiated between communities based on the object of fandom itself, based on the behavior of fans common to that group, or based on the medium applicable to that community. Demographic markers such as age and gender were applicable both when

referring to the status within fan communities and between them. In keeping with common stereotypes outside fandom, women and young people were commonly highlighted as belonging to lower-status fandoms or engaging in behavior seen as less desirable; (3) participants presented both positive attributes of multiplatform media content or critiques of it or a combination thereof. This research contributes to fandom studies in three ways: (1) by suggesting that hierarchies do indeed exist, and that preferred placement within them is variable, (2) by focusing on multiple, diverse fan communities, as opposed to singular fandoms or communities related to them, and (3) by introducing a sliding scale of levels of fandom on which one can map and access fan behavior and activity, a concept new to the field. It also contributes to Bourdieu's theory of capital by establishing that social capital played a significant role in hierarchy construction.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

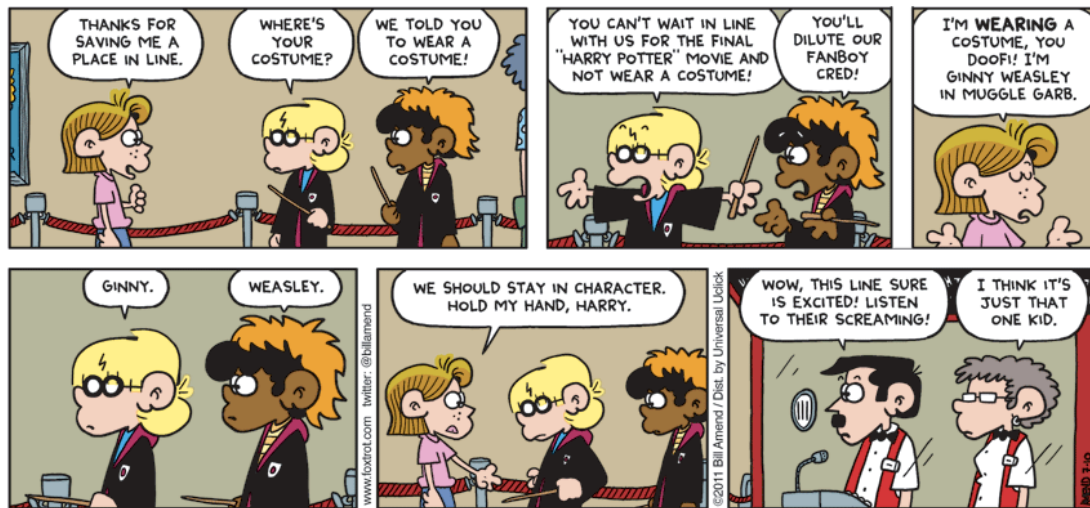


Figure 1: *FoxTrot* comic from 7/10/2011. Comic depicts the role of costume play in *Harry Potter* fandom.

In 2008 I attended my first Comic-Con, an annual convention of more than 125,000 fans of comic books, movies, television and popular culture. Discussing the trip with a friend, I remarked that it was nice to be around so many other people who shared my love for a particular television show: other “real fans.” My friend protested, arguing that I wasn’t “like them.” Pushed for an explanation, he replied that I did not dress up in costume to attend Comic-Con or other fan events. For him, the nature of being a media fan was strongly tied to an image he had seen of enthusiasts in full costume as their favorite character, fans dressed as Vulcans or Stormtroopers, but this is just one of many ways that people can choose to express their fandom.

Within academic fandom studies, there have been numerous efforts to describe types of fan activity and even to identify different types of fans (Brown, 1997; Costello & Moore, 2007; Fiske, 1992; Gray, 2005; Jenkins, 1992, 2006a, 2006b; Pearson, 2007; Tatum, 2009).

Fandom studies contribute to a long history of exploring the nature of media consumption. The “participatory culture” of fandom that Jenkins described as a fringe subculture in 1992 is now increasingly part of the mainstream: “Fan fiction can be accessed in astonishing quantities and diversities by anyone who knows how to Google. Media producers monitor Web forums such as ‘Television without Pity,’ planting trial balloons to test viewer response, measuring reaction to controversial plot twists” (Jenkins, 2006b, p. 2). Within these increasingly popular and mainstream communities, hierarchy is an important construct, as it helps us to understand not only priorities within fandom, but the nature of communities themselves. However, it is a construct that is rarely addressed explicitly within fan studies.

This work will explore the ways that fans engage with particular texts and the ways that they engage with one another. Specifically, it will consider (1) what it means to be an “authentic” fan, (2) how hierarchies are established within and between fan communities, and (3) the impact that the changing nature of mediated storytelling has on both authenticity and hierarchy in fan communities.

Purpose

The media has long been a topic of interest for academics, due in part to the important role that mass media plays: it both reflects and influences our understanding of the world. Research on fan communities is vital for academics and the producers of media. As academics, the study of fan cultures can tell us about consumers’ relationships with media and how they construct identities for themselves and other fans in relation to particular media texts. It also speaks to larger themes related to power and status and how communities function and organize themselves. For producers of media, a more complete

understanding of how fan groups operate and what they value will enable producers to understand how to create and facilitate fan experiences that are enjoyable and build loyalty to their media text. New ways of storytelling are emerging, making use of the myriad of methods for mediated communication now available. Some texts incorporate multiple platforms (often referred to as multiplatform media); a film or television show putting “extra” content (e.g., interviews with the cast, blooper reels, behind the scenes details) online is one example of this phenomenon. Transmedia storytelling takes multiplatform media a step further: transmedia stories are those in which viewers must engage a story across multiple media platforms with each text playing an important role in the overarching narrative (Jenkins, 2006a). That is, in order to consume the whole story, one must engage with more than one type of media (e.g., both televised and web-only content). As new ways of storytelling emerge, and producers make use of varying platforms for presenting their text, the ways that fans interact with that text and with each other are affected. This emerging trend in mediated works may also complicate hierarchies within fandom, shifting the definition of what is seen as appropriate or necessary fan behaviors. This study’s focus on the effects of transmedia storytelling across multiple platforms will contribute to a burgeoning field of study within media scholarship.

In order to address these questions, this project explores two different sites of fan activity. The first is the annual meeting of Comic-Con International in San Diego, a convention where over 125,000 fans of various pop culture phenomena come together. The second is a popular website, TelevisionWithoutPity.com, an online space for fans of all types of television to gather. Using these two research sites, this study will explore

how fans construct their own and others' identities as fans and the nature of hierarchy within fan communities. By studying multiple venues of fandom, and not focusing on one particular television show or even medium, I hope to create what Matt Hills refers to as a "general theory of media fandom" (2002, p. 2) in terms of how differentiation and hierarchy are created and expressed within fan communities.

Outline of Project

Chapter One provides a brief introduction to the topics of fandom, hierarchy creation, and multiplatform media and underscores the purpose of studying fandom in the selected sites. It also details the nature of the subsequent chapters.

The second chapter provides an overview of the theoretical framework for this study, including Bourdieu's (1984) conception of capital. It also examines previous and relevant research in this field as a foundation for the research questions and approach of this study. It covers the nature of fandom, various fan activities and prior research on the nature of hierarchy building for fans.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of the qualitative methods used to gather data for this study. Drawing from ethnographic approaches, a combination of in-depth interviews and participant observation were used. This chapter describes this process in detail, along with the rationale for this approach. It also describes the research sites and addresses the ethical concerns associated with this study.

Chapter 4 outlines the results of the first research question, related to the concept of authentic fandom, The fifth chapter presents the results to the second research question, which examines the construction of hierarchy and accumulation of status as

they relate to fandom. Chapter 6, the final results chapter, discusses the role of multiplatform media as it relates to the previous research questions.

Finally, Chapter 7 will clearly demonstrate the ways in which the three research questions are interrelated, along with contributions this study makes to studies of both capital and identity. It concludes with the limitations present in this study, and looks to directions for future valuable research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This study focuses on hierarchy creation within fan communities and the factors that contribute to its creation. More specifically, it addresses the nature of the authentic fan, how hierarchies are shaped, and the effect that emerging multiplatform storytelling has on both of these concepts.

This chapter will address the theoretical framework for exploring these topics, as well as a definition for fandom and an overview of research on fan activities and communities. The importance that fan communities play in identity formation will be addressed, as will the changing nature of the media and its effect on fans. In the course of this discussion, three research questions will be proposed which detail the purpose of this study. First, I will describe fandom in general, including fan activities and fan communities.

Fandom

There are many different definitions of what it means to be a “fan.” Although there is some academic debate surrounding the definition of fandom itself, this work will use the definition that it involves a “collective of people organized socially around their shared appreciation of a pop culture object or objects” (Baym, 2007). Fandom studies look at devotions to objects in diverse areas such as music, television, film, literature, sports, comic books, and video games, to name only a few. Those who study fandom look at these collectives to better understand the way they organize themselves and their activities related to their community and their pop culture object of choice. According to Fiske, “Fans create a fan culture with its own systems of production and distribution that

forms what I shall call a ‘shadow cultural economy’ that lies outside that of the cultural industries yet shares features with them” (1992, p. 30). These studies of such cultures are important for understanding how we orient ourselves in relation to cultural systems and make sense of the mediated world and our relationships with others in it.

Fan communities.

It has been established that the presence of “nurturing interactions” (Menon, 2007) and “agreed-upon, specific rules for speech and behavior” (Burke, 2001) indicate that fan spaces (e.g., conventions, mailing lists, zines, online message boards) function as communities. In the days before computer mediated communication, these communities were centered around face to face or written communication sent through the mail and organized around fan clubs and conventions (Bacon-Smith, 1992; Jenkins, 1992).

Conventions have been a key component of fan communities, with U.S. conventions for some genres dating back to the 1930s (Bacon-Smith, 1992). They “spatially and temporally organize the interaction between the community and potential new members, and serve as formal meeting places for the various smaller groups of fans who follow a convention circuit” (Bacon-Smith, 1992, p. 9).

However, many fan communities are now found online. Through internet-based communication, users are able to come together over a wide variety of topics and interests, in addition to overcoming geographical distance (Baym, 2007). This is particularly useful for fan communities. Before the proliferation of the internet, fans of a particular text might have difficulty finding others with whom to share their interest. The nature of the internet facilitates these types of groupings and as such the internet is an important site for the academic study of fan communities (e.g., Andrejevic, 2008; Baym,

2000; Bird, 1999; Jenkins, 2006a, 2006b; Shefrin, 2004). Regardless of what medium the community utilizes, fans are undoubtedly social in their fan activity.

Hierarchy.

Hierarchy and power are inevitable in community formation. One purpose of this study is to examine the means by which hierarchies are established and status is determined both within and between fan communities¹. Hierarchies have historically been understudied in this context. Other fandom scholars have considered the idea of hierarchy, but there is more study needed in this area, as no universal means of discussing hierarchy within fan communities has yet to be established (Hills, 2002). Camille Bacon-Smith (1992) asserts there is no hierarchy within fan communities, a utopian view that presents fandom as a great equalizer. Other scholars agree that there are hierarchies, but differ when determining upon which factors they are built (Hills, 2002; Macdonald, 1998; Thornton, 1996; Williams, 2004). An additional issue with past studies of hierarchy in fandom is their tendency to focus on only one community or a collection of groups all devoted to the same object. While these studies are most certainly valuable, they do not bring the field closer to the “general theory of media fandom” (Hills, 2002, p. 2) that Hills argues the field needs.

Inherent to hierarchy creation is the issue of power. Says Foucault (1980):

¹ “Within communities” refers to the relationships between members of the same group, based either upon location (TelevisionWithoutPity/Comic-Con or object of fandom (e.g., how do fans of *Star Trek* organize themselves in relation to one another?). Membership in these groups can be both multi-tiered and fluid. “Between communities” refers to the distinctions fans draw between a community they belong to and one to which they do not (e.g., how do fans of *Star Trek* compare themselves to fans of *Star Wars* or *Battlestar Galactica*?)

It seems to me that power *is* ‘always already there,’ that one is never ‘outside’ it, that there are no ‘margins’ for those who break with the system to gambol in... To say that one can never be ‘outside’ power does not mean that one is trapped and condemned to defeat no matter what. (pp. 141-142)

Fiske (1992) states that fandom is associated with “the cultural tastes of subordinated formations of the people, particularly with those disempowered by any combination of gender, age, class and race” (p. 30). This argument is made by Jenkins (1992) as well, as he states: “fans operate from a position of cultural marginality and social weakness” (p. 26).

Bourdieu and capital.

Within fan communities, hierarchy and power can take the form of capital. Bourdieu’s (1984) writing on capital is highly relevant in a discussion of hierarchy creation, and has been used previously as a framework by many scholars in discussing fan activity (Brown, 1997; Fiske, 1992, Hills, 2002). Specifically, as Brown (1997) argues, Bourdieu’s idea of capital provides us with an appropriate vocabulary for discussing how people attempt to obtain value in a culture, in this case within fan communities. Bourdieu’s model is particularly useful in discussing fan communities in that it not only shows how status is achieved or maintained through the association with particular types of culture, but also accounts for the possibility of movement and status change, dependent on capital accumulation (Fiske, 1992).

Born of an economic-based model, the notion of capital-building refers to the practice of amassing particular pieces that are of value in a society. Bourdieu presents culture as an economy in which a person is able to “invest” and accrue capital which can

then be converted to status or economic gain, and identifies three different types of capital: economic (monetary, asset-based), social (based on who you know), and cultural (based on knowledge of specific cultural works).

Economic capital is familiar enough to most: having wealth in some form (cash-based, property, investments) carries with it certain privilege and caché. Social capital, on the other hand, is not linked directly to monetary assets. Rather, social capital is acquired based on the connections one has. Bourdieu says those with high social capital “are sought after for their social capital and, because they are well known, are worthy of being known...they do not need to ‘make the acquaintance’ of all their ‘acquaintances’; they are known to more people than they know” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 52).

Like social capital, cultural capital is not rooted in monetary assets. Cultural capital is based primarily on the knowledge that people obtain from their upbringing and education, is often strongly linked to class, and is an indicator of status. “Cultural capital thus works hand in hand with economic capital to produce social privilege and distinction” (Fiske, 1992, p. 31). For Bourdieu, acquired cultural capital consists of knowledge and appreciation of the canon of a set of texts. In addition to these three main forms of capital, Bourdieu also described several subcategories, applicable to specific fields (e.g., linguistic capital, academic capital). In her study of the British “clubbing” culture, Thornton (1996) adds to these types of subcategories with her notion of “subcultural capital.” Subcultural capital is related to status, but not status within society as a whole. Rather, subcultural capital produces status for a particular observer, one who is a part of the same subculture; “subcultural capital confers status on its owner in the eyes of the relevant beholder” (Thornton, 1996, p.11). Under this conceptualization,

owning a particular limited-release album from a particular band may not garner much respect in general, but it would generate status within the fan community of that band. What Fiske (1992) calls “popular cultural capital” can serve similar functions as that of official cultural capital in the dominant class: “Fandom offers ways of filling cultural lack and provides the social prestige and self-esteem that go with cultural capital” (p. 33). This is not an objective measure, Fiske argues, as the amount of capital desired is relative. Fiske argues that most popular cultural capital cannot be converted into economic capital. Instead, its rewards are gratification and the “esteem of one’s peers in a community of taste” (p. 34). Obviously there are exceptions, as with the case of those fans who have made a career out of their fandom or who operate in parallel to existing industry practices (Baym, 2010). Thornton also provides evidence to dispute this claim, offering the examples of DJs, club organizers, and music journalists as those who actively convert their subcultural capital into economic capital.

Many scholars have used Bourdieu in a similar manner, although not all use “subcultural” as the preface to capital, and many omit additional forms of capital, a shortcoming that this study works to address. Fiske (1992) has used Bourdieu’s model of culture as an economy in which people invest, calling it a shadow, or moonlighting economy of the official culture.

Fiske points to two weaknesses in Bourdieu’s understanding of capital and culture. One is that it focuses on economics and class as the only dimension of discrimination, with little regard for gender, race and age. Second is Bourdieu’s lack of nuance in examining subordinate classes, underestimating their creativity and creativity’s role in creating hierarchy within the subordinate class.

For those who use Bourdieu to study fandom, Hills (2002) points out the tendency to choose only cultural capital as a theoretical framework, and ignore social capital. Several studies considered here (Brown, 1997; Jancovich, 2002; MacDonald, 1998; Richardson, 2008) adopt this frame, using cultural capital to consider the activities of fans of comic books, football, and cult movies, respectively. Although attempts have been made to redress this oversight (Williams, 2004), social capital remains an understudied phenomenon in fan research. To ignore it is to discount a significant portion of Bourdieu's description of how status is built within a society, and does a disservice to the complex networks of interconnected relationships that exist within fan communities. This study will address the role that social capital plays in establishing hierarchies within and between communities.

Taste and capital.

Drawing distinctions is an important act for fan communities (Fiske, 1992). In order to conceptualize these distinctions and the hierarchies they may create, we can, as many fan theorists do (Fiske, 1992; Jenkins, 1992; MacDonald, 1998; Thornton, 1996), draw upon Bourdieu's (1984) conception of taste. Tastes, and our ideas about their value, are rooted in our experiences and reflect class interests: "Taste becomes one of the important means by which social distinctions are maintained and class identities are forged" (Jenkins, 1992, p. 16). What is considered to be in "good taste" is dependent on the beliefs of those around us and reinforced by the institutions we are a part of. Through this process, particular cultural artifacts come to be seen as representative of "good" or "bad" taste.

One form of taste is associated with the distinction between high and low culture. Fans have traditionally been associated with low culture, or “poor taste,” phenomena (Fiske, 1992; Pearson, 2007) and the academic study of fandom tends to avoid the discussion of those invested in traditionally high culture artifacts (opera, Shakespeare, and classical music are oft-cited examples.)

When under attack for their investment in a text, fans may defend themselves by pointing to similarities between their object of fandom and what is typically considered to be “high culture” (Fiske, 1992; Pearson, 2007) indicating that there is something more acceptable about an emotional investment in the opera than a science fiction film, as an example. For some, fans are seen as threatening to the borders of “taste,” as they tend to place equal (or more) attention on pop texts in contrast to high culture (Jenkins, 1992).

But are there “fans” of high culture, too? Pearson says yes, and although they may call themselves “connoisseurs” or “aficionados,” their communities and activities look similar to fandom. She points to particular activities (e.g., journeys to Stratford upon Avon in honor of Shakespeare) as evidence that fandom is similar, regardless of the culture status of a text and posits that it is possible to be just as emotional about high culture texts as those deemed “low culture.” This negotiation of the high and low forms of culture speaks to the need of fans to organize and classify different types of fandom and engagement.

Fan activity.

Fans are defined, in part, by their common activities. For many scholars (see Jenkins, 1992; Costello & Moore, 2007; Fiske, 1992; Pearson, 2007), to be a fan means that one must do more than consume a cultural object or text. It requires a degree of

activity on the part of the person for him or her to be considered a fan. As Jenkins (1992) says:

Far from synecathic, fans actively assert their mastery over the mass-produced texts that provide the raw materials for their own cultural productions and the basis for their actions. In the process, fans cease to be simply an audience for popular texts; instead they become active participants in the construction and circulation of textual meanings. (pp. 23-24)

Fans have been found to engage in numerous creative practices as part of their investment in a media text. This section will discuss meaning making, poaching, collecting and knowledge building as key fan activities relevant to this work. These activities, and the extent to which fans participate in them, play a role in how hierarchies are established both within and between fan communities. While some of these practices have been investigated in terms of their impact on hierarchy with fan communities, that is not true for all, or for all in the same degree. This section will describe several types of fan activities and look at past work that has related these activities to hierarchy creation.

Meaning making.

One such practice involves active meaning making and interpretation regarding their text of choice. As “meaning makers,” fans are far from the passive viewers described by the Frankfurt School in considering media consumption. In the 1940s, scholars of the Frankfurt School (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1979) presented a vision of the media consumer as a “cultural dupe” and the mediated experience as uniform for all consumers. Instead, current fan studies depict fans as involved in actively drawing from a media text in order to incorporate it, in part or whole, to their own life experiences and

emotions. They are able to, and inclined to, evaluate texts at multiple levels as suits their needs (Grossberg, 1992). As we begin to consider hierarchy within and between fan communities (and non-fans), Burke (2001) draws a distinction between “social viewers” who merely consume a text and “fans,” in that fans collectively interpret a text in various ways, using it to understand the world. Fiske (1992) refers to this type of meaning making as “semiotic productivity.”

Semiotic productivity, according to Fiske, refers to the process of using media texts to make meanings of social identity and social experience. This is an internal process; when the meaning making turns external, Fiske argues that it transitions into enunciative productivity. “When the meanings made [in semiotic productivity] are spoken and are shared within a face-to face or oral culture they take a public form that may be called *enunciative productivity*” (Fiske, 1992, p. 37).

Meaning sharing.

Enunciative productivity can also be referred to as meaning sharing, highlighting the moment when the fan moves his or her thoughts from their own heads to someone else or into the shared space of a fan community. It is the act of taking meaning making from an internal to an external state, or the act of sharing it with others. While the acts of meaning making and sharing are crucial to the fan experience, Fiske’s separation of the two into discrete acts breaks down when applied to many fan behaviors. As Jenkins (1992) argues: “the moment of reception is often also the moment of enunciation...Making meanings involves sharing enunciating and debating meanings. For the fan, watching the series is the beginning, not the end, of the process of media consumption” (p. 278).

The act of critiquing, a popular one within fan communities, demonstrates the conflation of semiotic and enunciative productivity. Although fans have often been depicted as “worshipping” their textual object (Jenkins, 1992), this is far from the truth; critique and analysis are central to fandom.

Organized fandom is, perhaps first and foremost, an institution of theory and criticism, a semistructured space where competing interpretations and evaluations of common texts are proposed, debated, and negotiated and where readers speculate about the nature of the mass media and their own relationship to it. (Jenkins, 1992, p. 86)

For the fan, thinking about a text critically and sharing those critiques with others are intrinsic parts of the fan experience.

Conversation based on the text is a key component of most all fan communities, but is important for the individual, as well. In fact, some fans will engage with a text for the sole purpose of discussing it within their fan community later (Andrejevic, 2009; Baym 2000).

Indeed, much of the pleasure of fandom lies in the fan talk that it produces, and many fans report that their choice of their object of fandom was determined at least as much by the oral community they wished to join as by any of its inherent characteristics. (Fiske, 1992, p. 38)

That is, the driving force behind watching a television program or seeing a film is not the experience in and of itself, but rather the anticipation of being able to engage with other users in discussing that text and belonging to a particular community.

These types of communication occur within social relationships and may include posting to an internet message board, or merely discussing the object of one's fandom with someone else. However, enunciation is not just talk; it is also expression through style and physical appearance. One is able to share their fandom through the clothes they wear and manner in which they style themselves, signifying allegiance to a particular community or subculture to the world at large. This may be as obvious to the casual observer as a costume, discussed later in this section, or more subtle, as in mimicking the haircut of one's favorite character.

In terms of hierarchy, choosing to actively enunciate the meaning making process has been used to separate particular types of fans. Costello and Moore (2007) suggest a continuum of those who participate in fandoms based on fan activity and ranging from lurkers (those who read but do not post or comment) to what they call "interpretive communities of outlaw fans" (who meet regularly to share information and socialize). Active viewers, they argue, want to make the text more meaningful, thus improving upon it. Active fandom takes more effort, but can also produce more pleasure (Andrejevic, 2009).

Poaching.

In addition to semiotic and enunciative productivity, Fiske (1992) outlines a third and final type of productivity: textual. Textual productivity refers to the fan production of texts—fan fiction, song or video creation, and so on. Fans are keen to use their text of choice as the basis for their own creative pursuits, or textual productivity. Possibly the best known work on this subject is *Textual Poachers* by Henry Jenkins (1992), which details the means through which fans borrow from a text, using pieces to make their own

stories and ideas come to life. According to Jenkins, it is possible for viewers of a piece of media to claim that text as their own, whether it be a television or film script or song lyrics from a particular band, and use it as a launching pad for their own creative pursuits. Borrowing a term from deCerteau (1984), Jenkins (1992) called this final process “poaching.” Fans “poach” mediated texts, footage and information in order to create their own writing, mediated product, and communities. Continuing to reference deCerteau, he says popular reading is “a kind of cultural bricolage through which readers fragment texts and reassemble the broken shards according to their own blueprint, salvaging bits and pieces of found material in making sense of their own social experience” (2006b, p. 39). This remaking or “remixing” (Grossberg, 1992) of texts is one of the most visible forms of fan expression. Two of the most popular forms of “remixing” are fan fiction and video creation.

Fan fiction.

Fan fiction is the practice of taking an existing text and using it as a starting point for a narrative of the fan’s creation. Fan fiction or “fanfic” usually refers to written stories that may be for personal use, but are more commonly shared with other fans via zines, and more commonly, online. Similar to the common themes of fan videos, much fan fiction works to explore themes absent or underplayed in the original text.

Jenkins (1992) outlines 10 types of fan fiction. *Recontextualization* focuses on offscreen activity and actions that were not included in the original text. Other pieces feature *timeline expansion*, telling stories from before or after the canonical text takes place (e.g., a fan-written prequel or sequel). *Refocalization* stories center around secondary or tertiary characters in the original text, while *moral realignment* stories

pend the reader's conception of who is a hero and who is a villain. A story featuring *genre shift* changes the type of story being told. For example, fan fiction may take a television show that is primarily action-based, like *CSI*, and use that as the basis to tell a love story or a story about the deep friendship between main characters. *Crossover* stories take characters from one story and put them in another (e.g., Harry Potter finds himself in the world of *House, M.D.*). *Character dislocation* represents a more radical change to the character, by giving them completely different personality traits or backgrounds.

Personalization inserts the writer into the story, while *emotional intensification* stories narrowly focus on moments of extreme emotional highs and lows. Finally, *eroticization* stories insert a romantic and sexual element into the existing storylines. This is also commonly referred to as "slash" fiction. Considering these 10 types of fan fiction pursuits, it is clear that this activity is both an apt example of poaching as Jenkins describes it, and that it also serves particular purposes for both the writers and readers.

Video creation.

A second creative outlet for fans is the art of video making using preexisting footage from a film or television show. The images, when purposefully arranged, become meaningful in relation to one another, often in a different manner than in the original text. This activity allows fans to explore themes or plots that may be absent from the original text. In describing the process of creating fan music videos, Jenkins (1992) says: "using home videotape recorders and inexpensive copy-cords, fan artists appropriate 'found footage' from broadcast television and reedit it to express their particular slant on the program, linking series images to music similarly appropriated from commercial culture" (p. 225). One of the most common types of fan music videos shows two characters who

are not romantically involved in the original text and edits and sets scenes to music to imply a romantic relationship (Ng, 2007). Advances in technology have made fan music videos much easier to create. Fans with the appropriate skill set and technology are able to take clips of their favorite films, television shows, and musical artists and edit them together digitally, producing a video that is fit for posting on blogs, personal websites, and video sharing sites such as YouTube.

Collecting.

In addition to meaning making, meaning sharing, and poaching, collecting is a fourth form of fan activity. Collecting is an activity that many associate with fan communities, and for good reason. The practice of collecting has a long history across fandoms of different media. Collecting is the practice of amassing specific items related to one's fandom object. For movie and television fans, this may include props or costumes used on the show or movie, the DVD collector sets, or signed scripts, just as examples. For comic book fans, the item to collect is most commonly the books themselves. Brown (1997) argues that comic book fandom is unique in that comics are a physical type of currency. There is a difference, he says, between the experience of watching a film or listening to music in comparison to possessing the comic: "...it is the possession of the actual comic that acts as the focal point for the entire community" (Brown, 1997, p. 22).

Moreover, Brown (1997) declares that the cultural economy of comic book fandom is built on the collecting of particular texts. In comic book culture, collecting is an "important marker of status" as it signifies that one is able to determine objects that are worth collecting and those that are not; the right collection will grant high status to its

owner (Brown, 1997). He goes on to say: “by possessing these comics, the reader substantiates his or her participation in fandom, building a knowledge of creators, characters and storylines” (Brown, 1997, p. 26). This remark indicates that the possession alone is not actually the sole foundation for cultural economy, but rather the fruits of that labor: the knowledge that comes from having read them thoroughly and the subsequent act of sharing that knowledge with relevant others within the community.

Collecting is a key feature of accumulating capital (Fiske, 1992). This is a point where cultural and economic capital intersect. Emphasis is on collecting as much or as many of something as possible. It is the size of the collection, not the value of individual items (although Fiske allows for exceptions).

Knowledge Building.

A final type of fan activity is the collection of knowledge. Fans seek to amass knowledge about their object. Knowledge can take on various forms, depending on the type of fan object and the individual preferences of a community or sub-groups within it. For instance, in some fan communities, such as the one Henry Jenkins (2006a) describes, dedicated to the television show *Survivor*, spoilers² are seen as the most valuable piece of information that a fan can possess. To have the desired knowledge is to be in a position of power within a community and to have the “right” types of information is to improve one’s position within the community. Fan cultural power comes from having knowledge of a show’s history and the ability to control how fans read and interpret the text; knowledge has thus been shown to be a form of subcultural capital (Williams, 2004).

² Spoilers are pieces of information related to future events that have not yet aired (in the case of television) or that are not known by the community or the public at large (in the case of film and literature). Examples might include upcoming character deaths, the outcome or winner of a reality program.

Fiske (1992) agrees, arguing that accumulation of knowledge is central to the accumulation of cultural capital. Creators and industries recognize this, and thus give the fan extensive amounts of information from which to draw. The television program *Lost* is an excellent example of this phenomenon, as its creators supplied alternate reality games (ARGs), podcasts, and Easter eggs throughout the span of the show for viewers to study and amass knowledge from.

Authenticity in fan communities.

These activities and the extent to which one performs them serve as markers by which to understand and categorize people in relation to their fandom. These acts help fans to understand and order their communities, setting expectations for acceptable and unacceptable behavior and thus shaping the role of the community as a whole. One means of drawing distinctions between fans and non-fans, as well as within fan communities, is based on authenticity. Authenticity has been explored as a construct both in terms of the object of fandom (i.e., whether a particular recording or text qualifies as “real” or authentic by the fans’ definition) (Hess, 2005; Peterson, 1997) and the fan herself (Campbell, 2006; Costello & Moore, 2007; Rademacher, 2005). In both instances, authenticity in relation to fandom is historically situated, apt to change and be renegotiated over time, and socially constructed by a community (Grossberg, 1992; Peterson, 1997; Williams, 2006). For fans, authenticity can be a central concern and topic of discussion for a community (Campbell 2006; Rademacher 2005) as members parse out which traits and factors are required to call oneself an authentic fan of *X* phenomenon. Using Bourdieu’s work to conceptualize fan communities as cultural economies, Fiske points to authenticity as a means to acquire cultural capital within a fan

community: “Authenticity [...] is a criterion of discrimination normally used to accumulate official cultural capital but which is readily appropriated by fans in their moonlighting cultural economy” (p. 36).

In past studies of fandom, authenticity is commonly conceptualized in one of two ways: in comparing fans to non-fans or within fan communities themselves (Jankovich, 2002). The first distinction is made between those who consider themselves to be fans and the public at large, similar to the earlier discussion of fans and non-fans. Fans are aware of the stereotypes usually associated with their group, and have expressed their desire to “[distinguish] themselves from the stereotypical couch potato viewer with remote control in hand, consuming large quantities of television pabulum in an unstructured and habitual fashion” (Costello & Moore, 2007, p. 130).

The second means of conceptualizing identity exists within the fan group itself. Fan community members negotiate what it means to be a truly devoted member of their group in relation to the object of fandom (e.g., the celebrity, television show, film, band of interest). One example of this can be found in music subcultures. A fan can claim to be a “punk,” for example, but still find that they are not “really punk” or “not punk enough” for members of the community who consider themselves to be the “real thing” based on agreed-upon markers of authenticity (e.g., clothing, hairstyle, allegiance to a given band, amount of time spent in the subculture) (Rademacher, 2005). Another factor that often impacts authenticity is the act of archiving or collecting particular materials; collecting artifacts related to one’s object can act as an important factor in building cultural capital (Fiske, 1992). For some music fans, for example, collecting the “right” works that belong to a particular canon can be a means of showing their authenticity (Bannister, 2006). Both

definitions of authenticity are related to what it means to be a fan, and where boundary lines are drawn in determining what constitutes fandom.

Peterson (1997) provides six different conceptions of the term “authentic” as it has been applied in country music fandom, some of which apply to the object itself, and others to the fans. The first four conceptions apply most accurately to objects: authentic objects are (1) not fake or fabricated, (2) originals, not copies, (3) relics, unchanged, (4) if reproductions, they are authentic, not kitsch. It is the final two conceptions that apply more neatly to the fans themselves: an authentic fan is one who is “credible in current context” (i.e., deemed authentic based on the current conventions) and “real, not imitative” or fake.

Authenticity has consistently been posited as a construct that is both socially constructed and serves an identity-formation function (Williams, 2006). Through interaction, we can see expressions of one’s social identity. “Successful identification rests upon expressing a similarity of self to one’s peers as well as a distinction from members of mainstream society” (Williams, 2006, p. 177). Authenticity is thus both interpreted by individuals and expressed through interaction with others. Through communication, authenticity and identity can be established, reaffirmed, or negated completely.

Moreover, authenticity is closely related to the means of establishing hierarchy within communities. “Authenticity,” says Fiske, “particularly when validated as the production of an artistic individual (writer painter, performer), is a criterion of discrimination normally used to accumulate official cultural capital but which is readily appropriated by fans in their moonlighting cultural economy” (1992, p. 36). Given the

multitude of definitions and applications of the term, authenticity proves to be a complex concept as it relates to fandom, and worthy of additional study. The existing conceptions of authenticity are lacking in an accepted definition, suitable for use across media fandoms.

Fan Identity.

Fandom can play an important role in one's self-concept. Fandom and identity are often intertwining concepts, as fans construct identities based on the object of their fandom, the shared identity with the group they are a part of, and through their interaction with others in this group (Pearson, 2007). In constructing identity around the object of fandom, fans will choose to associate themselves with certain texts or characters that they feel are reflective of their own personalities, that is, a personalization of a text (Baym, 2000). They choose to engage with certain shows or quote particular characters as a means of exploring their own identity in relation to them. As they become a more active fan and join groups to facilitate the discussion of those shows, they are able to form collective group identities with other fans who have chosen to do the same: "As individuals interact in internet-based cultural sites, they construct and affirm meaningful collective identities based on norms and beliefs that are personally important and that are supported by others" (Williams, 2006, p. 178). Joining groups related to fandom works to establish an identity that exists in relation to these groups and the texts that they admire and discuss. Past work (Baym, 2000) has shown how particular roles and behaviors within fan communities can establish particular identities, known both to the fan and to others in the group. This shared identity that fandom facilitates is constructed both around

the object of fandom, as well as around the space in which they discuss it and those with whom they share the space.

One's identification with and within a group has been shown to be quite strong. In Baym's (2000) work on online soap opera fan communities, users proved to be very protective of the community they had created and the nature of interactions within. As a result of new users attempting to participate without understanding the norms established by the existing members, or "old fogies," they were seen by many as a disturbance or threat. Changes to the norms of the community led to tensions within the group, infighting, and some members leaving the group.

Fannish dispositions.

Fandom is not commonly limited to just one text, or even one genre, per user; rather fans are likely to participate in multiple fan communities at once (Brown, 1997). It has been posited that some may simply have a "fannish disposition" (Pearson, 2007, p. 101) and are more inclined to adopt fandom into their life. Pearson draws a distinction between those who enjoy texts and those who "incorporate the cultural texts as part of their self-identity, often going on to build social networks on the basis of shared fandoms" (p. 102) and others have adopted similar definitions (Hills, 2002). If this is true, then it is reasonable that fans may have more than one overlapping fandom, as it is less about the texts themselves, and more about the disposition of the individual (those predisposed to engaging in fan activity vs. those who are not). For Pearson (2007), non-fans can engage with cultural texts, but fans incorporate it as a part of their self-identity and build social networks on the basis of shared fandoms. As such, being a fan becomes a part of their identity and they are likely to have overlapping fandoms.

In response to this existing literature, this study will address the following questions:

RQ1: *Within fan communities, what does it mean to be an authentic fan?*

RQ2: *How do fans create hierarchies within and between their communities?*

Fandom in the Age of Media Convergence.

New forms of mediated storytelling affect fan communities as well. We are in what Henry Jenkins (2006a) refers to as an era of media convergence. Media convergence is “the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want” (Jenkins, 2006a, p. 2). Convergence is about more than new technologies; “convergence represents a cultural shift as consumers are encouraged to seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content” (Jenkins, 2006a, p. 3). As these new means of media emerge and become integrated into the fan experience, it is crucial to examine how the incorporation or rejection of the convergence culture may impact the way fans organize themselves.

Relevant to the idea of media convergence are two related concepts, which must be defined. Multiplatform media refers to a scenario in which content is available in more than one medium, or platform. A related concept is the evolution of transmedia storytelling. In this way, they are distinct from features like DVD or web “extras”; they are integral to the story (Jenkins, 2006a). These transmedia experiences are often designed to attract different types of fans (Jenkins, 2006a) and may be enhanced by a collaborative approach within fan communities.

There has been some early study regarding the effects of media convergence and transmedia storytelling on fan activity, but much has been exploratory or attempts to define the concept (Booth, 2008; Deuze, 2009; Jenkins, 2006a; Perryman, 2008). Sundet and Ytreberg (2009) described motives for participating with a transmedia text (emotional engagement, socializing with others, and experimenting with new technology), but based these motives on media executives' thoughts, not the fans themselves. Evans (2008) has explored the identity conflict that results when viewers of a television crime drama are asked to put themselves in a first-person role in a video game that extends the story; participants found that this was not pleasurable and engagement with the text decreased. In a similar study of *Dr. Who* and its transmedia elements, Perryman (2008) found online games to be very successful with the target audience, as well as podcasts and other online interactive elements. Due to the newness and evolving nature of convergence culture as a theory, there is still more exploration needed as this trend develops.

In relation to hierarchies, media convergence becomes relevant as some fans are more or less able or willing to follow stories across multiple platforms and engage in this new type of storytelling. Participation in these new forms of media has the potential to disrupt fan economies and existing notions of capital accumulation and status. Additionally, producers must find a way to appeal to both the casual viewer and those who would choose to engage in the transmedia experience.

With respect to these topics, this study will address the following question:

RQ3: Now that media are extended across multiple media, how does engagement with the varying platforms around content play into the degree of one's fandom and evaluations of fans' place in hierarchies within communities?

Chapter 3: Methods

Chapter 2 has established the complex nature and multitude of behaviors associated with media fandom, as well as the potential for fan communities to serve as sites of identity construction, hierarchy creation and status negotiation. It has also addressed the way that new forms of media are influencing fandoms and the ways that users engage with their texts. In relation to these areas of study, the following research questions are being investigated:

RQ1: Within fan communities, what does it mean to be an authentic fan?

RQ2: How do fans create hierarchies within and between their communities?

RQ3: Now that media are extended across multiple media, how does engagement with the varying platforms around content play into the degree of one's fandom and evaluations of fans' place in hierarchies within communities?

For the purpose of answering these questions, two separate research sites were considered: Comic-Con International and TelevisionWithoutPity.com. In this chapter, I will first provide a brief description of each locale, and then present a rationale for their importance in studying fan communities. These sites both represent important spaces in fan communities due to their established status and popularity for fans of television, comic books, and pop culture in general. Additionally, they provide an opportunity to contrast an offline and online space and to consider any related differences.

Research Site 1: Comic-Con International

Fan conventions of varying size and popularity are held throughout the world on a regular basis. This description of a traditional convention provides an overview for the uninitiated:

Dealers, collectors, fans, whatever they call themselves can be found trading, selling, and buying the adventures of their favourite [sic] characters for hours on end. Additionally if at all possible, cons have guests of honour [sic], usually professionals in the field of comic art, either writers, artists or editors. The committees put together panels for the con attendees where the assembled pros talk about certain areas of comics, most of the time fielding questions from the assembled audience. At cons one can usually find displays of various and sundry things, usually original art. There might be radio listening rooms; there is most certainly a daily showing of different movies, usually science fiction or horror type. Of course there is always the chance to get together with friends at cons and just talk about comics; one also has a good opportunity to make new friends who have similar interests and with whom one can correspond after the con.

(Overstreet, A-53)

Probably the best known of these conventions is Comic-Con. Comic-Con International is an annual convention held in San Diego, California. It began in 1970 as a meeting of approximately 300 comic book fans and artists in the basement of the U.S. Grant Hotel in San Diego, and was originally named the San Diego Golden State Comic-Con (Comic-Con Press Release, 2010; Comic-Con Souvenir Book, 2009). Shel Dorf, an avid comic collector (and later in life, creator) and forming member of the San Diego Society for

Creative Fantasy, founded the convention out of a love for science fiction, popular culture, and, of course, comic books. Early conventions attracted some of the biggest names in comics and science fiction (Jack Kirby, Ray Bradbury, Forrest J Ackerman), setting the stage for a legacy of creators' and celebrities' interaction with the convention (Comic-Con Souvenir Book, 2009).

Over the past 40+ years, Comic-Con has expanded to include other areas of pop culture, most notably television and film. As the convention has grown, it has attracted a wide array of presenters and attendees interested in popular culture. While the convention has been housed in numerous facilities, expanding over its history to larger venues to accommodate a growing number of attendees, it is currently held at the San Diego Convention Center. With an audience that increases in size each year, Comic-Con has sold out every year since 2008, filling the San Diego Convention Center to capacity (Comic-Con.org).

Audiences of 125,000 flock to San Diego each July from all over the world to partake in this convention, the "largest of its kind in the world" (Comic-Con.org). Currently, the convention lasts for five days: Wednesday night is a "preview night" with limited access and special screenings of films and television shows. Thursday through Sunday each feature a full line-up of panels, screenings, autograph signings that run from 10am until as late as midnight each night. Available as well is an exhibitor's hall where both major entertainment organizations (e.g., Warner Brothers, DC Comics, Marvel Comics) and independent artists and authors pay a fee in exchange for floor space to promote their products.

Comic-Con serves as a particularly useful site for analysis because of several key factors. First, it is one of the oldest and most well-established conventions in the world, operating annually since 1970. Secondly, with over 125,000 participants annually since 2007 (Comic-Con Souvenir Book, 2010; Reid, 2009) it is one of the largest fan gatherings in the United States. Third, it provides a space for fans of multiple types of media to come together in the same space, allowing for observation of varying types of fandom (e.g., film, television, comic books). Finally, it is also one of the fastest growing fan gatherings, with attendance in the 1990s reaching a peak of only 45,000 (Comic-Con Souvenir Book, 2010). By contrast, the last five years have seen sold-out crowds and all passes for Comic-Con 2011 were purchased on the first day of sales. Its growing popularity has brought together old and new participants and different types of fans, a condition which makes hierarchy and status building of particular interest.

Research Site 2: TelevisionWithoutPity.com

The second case study will be conducted in an online space, TelevisionWithoutPity.com. TelevisionWithoutPity.com, or TWoP as it is called by its creators and users, is a website devoted to the coverage and criticism of television programs and is known for its witty or “snarky” viewpoint. It began in 1998 as a site called Dawson’s Wrap, borne of the creators’ fascination with and disdain for the program “Dawson’s Creek.” It has gone through several content and format evolutions over the past 10+ years, at one point being known as Mighty Big TV, before settling on the name Television Without Pity in 2002 (televisionwithoutpity.com). In March of 2007, TWoP was purchased by the Bravo television network, a subsidiary of NBC Universal and General Electric. Prior to this purchase by a major corporate conglomerate, TWoP

was independently owned and operated by Tara Ariano, Sarah D. Bunting, and David T. Cole, its original founders. One year after the sale (March 2008), the founders announced their departure from the site, ending their creative involvement in its maintenance and operations (Ariano, 2008) and relinquishing control to Bravo Media.

The site regularly features approximately thirty different reality, comedy and drama programs that are summarized and dissected by the site's staff. The other portion of the site is devoted to discussion forums; TWoP offers dozens of message boards dedicated to both current and off-the-air television shows. Each program has its own thread, though the forums of the thirty-odd featured shows are more detailed and broken down into sub-forums. These forums are meant to serve as an online space where users can come together to talk about television, both positively and negatively, and create a community of users invested in the medium of television.

Television Without Pity provides a somewhat unique opportunity for exploring fan culture. Firstly, much like Comic-Con, TWoP features a sizeable audience of participants. In 2007 it was estimated that TWoP was receiving over one million unique monthly visitors (Aspan, 2007), and current estimates place that number around 760,000 (Quantcast.com), making it one of the more popular fan sites currently in operation. Secondly, because TWoP acts as a fan community for such a wide variety of programs, data collection will not be limited to just one television show or genre. Instead, as is the case with Comic-Con, it will be possible to observe many different types of fans interacting in the same space. Finally, because the vast majority of community interaction takes place online, it provides a means for comparison to the physical, face-to-face nature of Comic-Con.

Data Collection and Coding

Participant observation was conducted for both research sites over a period of approximately two and half years. Fieldwork at Comic-Con took place over two separate convention meetings in July 2008 and 2009, each lasting approximately four days. Over the course of these trips, I became acquainted with the site, collected fieldnotes regarding my observations over that period, and made contact with potential interview participants who could act as informants (Agar, 1996). Observations focused on the behavior of attendants, with particular interest in activities that appeared to be associated with gaining or displaying status, such as the effort and cost of a participant's attendance at the convention, length of time spent in lines, effort exerted to obtain special merchandise, and conversations regarding one's own sense of fandom.

Participant observation of the message boards on TWoP was conducted over a span of approximately six months, from July – December 2010. Observations focused on the ways in which users discussed the nature of fandom itself, other users, and the nature of the posters at TWoP in comparison to other fan communities. Having been a casual to moderate user of the site since 2003, I already had a degree of familiarity with the workings and norms of this community before the formal participant observation began. This provided a solid background in the workings of the community and its norms (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995). As such, it allowed for a purposeful sampling of threads on topics related to this study. Threads of interest were those that were explicitly related to the nature of fandom generally, meta-conversation about TWoP, and show-specific threads related to degrees of fandom (e.g., “You Know You’ve Been Watching Too Much *The Amazing Race* When...”). Due to strict posting guidelines enforced by TWoP

moderators, there are a limited number of forums and threads in which discussion of issues such as these (those pertaining to fandom or TWoP itself) is allowed. Therefore, the threads sampled are representative of this type of relevant meta-discussion on the site. Relevant postings to the aforementioned types of threads were copied verbatim to text documents for analysis.

Both these message board postings and fieldnotes from Comic-Con were subjected to an open coding process to determine preliminary themes. Upon completion of data collection and development of a coding scheme, both sets of data were recoded using the completed scheme.

While these fieldnotes from both research sites provided valuable background and observations for analysis, the majority of data consists of in-depth, open-ended interviews regarding the nature of fandom and participation in Comic-Con and Television Without Pity. Interviews were completed with eleven previous attendees of Comic-Con. Participants were recruited via contacts made during fieldwork in 2008 and 2009, through a message board thread devoted to Comic-Con on a popular fan website, and through a snowball approach (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) in which participants reached out to their contacts on my behalf. The only stipulation was that participants needed to have attended at least one San Diego Comic-Con.

An additional eleven interviews were completed with posters to Television Without Pity. These participants were recruited via a direct correspondence through the site's message boards. Participants were selected based in part on recent log-in records, to increase the chances that the account was still active (TWoP is home to numerous

inactive accounts). The only requirement for participation was that users had previously participated in TWoP in some fashion.

Three interviews were also conducted with informants from the world of fan communities. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) define four characteristics of a quality informant: extensive experience in the cultural scene, a history of playing many different roles, respect from their peers/social networks, and knowledge of the cultural language. The first informant, Lane, fits all four characteristics. She has been involved in fan communities for more than twenty years, and has acted as an active leader of various communities for the last ten. She has served as a prominent fan and informal fan leader, event organizer, community moderator, and now works to influence fan behavior on behalf of clients across a variety of media. She is well-respected both within individual fan communities, and through her work, as an expert on fan behavior overall. The second and third informants, Ben and John, are the co-showrunners of a popular fan podcast. They have been heavily involved in fandom for at least seven years in their work on their podcast and monitoring their fan community. They have been both fans and creators in their role in their podcast and have attended Comic-Con both as participants and to run their own panel for fans of their podcast. They have regularly had the #1 rated podcast on iTunes, and have a loyal following of fans in their own right. For a description of each interview participant, please see Appendix A.

In total, this study had 25 interview participants (11 from each research site and three informants familiar with fandom generally). Interviews and coding overlapped in time frame, and interviews continued until a theoretical saturation point had been reached (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), and no new properties or dimensions emerged in continued

coding. As a result, I am confident that these interviews were significantly thorough in addressing the topics proposed in the research questions. In addition to the interviews, relevant data for this project was also gathered via participant observation of the TWoP forums and Comic-Con experience, in order to approach the data from multiple methods.

The interview process was used to explore emergent themes found in preliminary analysis of the participant observation (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999), as well as other areas related to participants' fandom including their history with the site, fan communities they belong to, reflections on other participants, and other topics related to the research questions (see Appendix B for interview protocol). Participants were also asked for general demographic information including age, education, racial/ethnic group, and location. Interviews took place via phone, as no participants were local to the researcher, and were audio-recorded and then transcribed for analysis. Interviews lasted, on average one hour with the longest interview lasting one hour and forty-six minutes and the shortest lasting only twenty. Transcription was done by the researcher, an undergraduate assistant, and a professional service. Transcripts from all parties were evaluated and deemed reasonably accurate for the planned analysis (i.e., not all vocalized pauses were captured) (Wetherell, Taylor, & Yates, 2001). Due to technical constraints, two participants were interviewed via email and their verbatim responses used in coding.

Completed transcripts were then prepared for coding using Dedoose, a web-based data analysis tool for qualitative and mixed methods research. All coding took place using this tool. The first stage involved what Lindlof and Taylor (2002) refer to as categorization: "characterizing the meaning of a unit of data with respect to certain generic properties....: concepts, constructs, themes and other types of 'bins' in which to

put items that are similar” (p. 214). These categories were derived in part by existing theory reviewed in the previous chapter (Bourdieu, 1984) and in part by the already completed participant observation, applied in what Lindlof and Taylor describe as an “etic” manner (2002, p. 214) in addition to more general categories derived from the data itself. From there, codes, the “linkages between data and the categories the researcher creates” (p. 216) were established using an open coding method. Although a partially etic approach was adopted in the categorization state, coding can be considered open as I had “not yet decided the range of categories or how the categories are defined” nor decided what would constitute a textual unit (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 219). Furthermore, data was categorized and coded based on “its coherent meaning” rather than by an “arbitrary designation of grammar” (see Spiggle, 1994, p. 493).

This process continued, with categories and codes being refined. As new categories and codes were added, previously evaluated material was re-coded, specifically looking for application of the new codes. In total, 24 parent themes were found, eight of which had sub-themes, for 63 total codes. Please see Appendix C for a complete Codebook. After coding was complete, all codes were evaluated in relation to the existing research questions. Codes that were found to be irrelevant to all three research questions were set aside. At that point, codes were renamed or regrouped as necessary to address the research questions and move from codes to the themes and sub-themes that will be discussed in chapters 4-6.

These methods allowed me to address the research questions in more than one way. This study analyzes both the public (behavior at Comic-Con, posts to a public forum) and more private (personal interviews) dimensions of this phenomenon.

Furthermore, it allows for a combination of my observations with participants' perspectives in their own words.

Ethical Considerations

Interview participants from both research sites were guided through a prepared oral consent statement (Appendix D) prior to the onset of each interview, so that each was familiar with their rights as a participant. Those observed during the participant behavior portions of data collection were not provided with oral or written consent statements, due to the public nature of the data collection sites.

Observations made during Comic-Con took place at the San Diego Convention Center during regular convention hours. Although there is an entrance fee for this event, anyone is welcome to attend, granting the convention a semi-public status without a reasonable expectation of privacy. While it is true that those with limited freedom to consent were certainly or likely present at the event (e.g., minors) they were not specifically targeted for observation, nor recruited for the interview portion of the study.

For the participant observation that took place on Television Without Pity, posts made to relevant threads during the observation period were included for analysis. The Association of Internet Researchers' ethics group has previously established that it is acceptable to collect data without informed consent if the environment is public and the material is not sensitive (Elm, 2009). TWoP is a public, open forum. Posts to these message boards do not require membership or subscription to be read, nor are the subject matters sensitive, and they are thus part of the public domain as outlined by the Association of Internet Researchers.

As a precautionary measure, pseudonyms have been applied to both interview participant names and TWoP screenames unless the participant has given permission for their real information to be used. To ensure privacy, transcribers agreed to a confidentiality clause, which can be seen in Appendix E.

Chapter 4: RQ1 Results

Fan Authenticity

RQ1 asked: “*Within fan communities, what does it mean to be an authentic fan?*”

This question is concerned with the nature of fandom, and what attributes and behaviors are considered to be markers of authentic fandom for members of fan communities.

Authenticity has been one method for evaluating fan activity and defining fan status in a community as established in the review of literature; whether or not one’s appearance, collections and behaviors were evaluated by members of a community as “authentic” has created distinctions between fans and non-fans (Costello & Moore, 2007) and within fan communities themselves (Bannister, 2006; Fiske, 1992; Rademacher, 2005). Despite this, “authenticity” was not the term that participants used to discuss their fandom, although they did attempt to create distinctions and identify different types of fans using related terms that will be described below.

Participants identified different types of fans: most notably, the true fan, the big fan, and the casual fan, creating a continuum of fandom on which one can exist. (Please see Appendix F for a description of the codes applicable to RQ1.) This chapter will describe the types of fan as identified by participants and explore the continuum they reside within.

Authentic fan.

Interestingly, only one interviewee, the informant Lane, used the term “authenticity,” and did so in relation to her joining new communities and not wanting her motives questioned by existing community members:

I don’t want anybody questioning the authenticity in which I am engaged because it really truly isn’t—you know, I may not know as much about this community but good people are good people and it doesn’t matter.

Lane uses her knowledge of fan communities to work as a consultant for media creators. In this role, she joins the fan community of a given television show, band, or celebrity, establishes herself as a leader (or what she calls an “alpha fan”) and models behaviors that her clients have marked as desirable. Because she is entering communities under these unusual circumstances, she is here citing authenticity as a concern. Her goal is to successfully infiltrate the community and she is motivated by her profession, rather than from a pre-existing affinity for a particular object. Because she is not a fan who has come to the community naturally, it is logical that she would be concerned about the way her fandom is perceived, and if she is viewed as authentic or not.

The fans included in this study are conceptualizing this idea in different terms, not using the dichotomy of “authentic vs. inauthentic.” This does not necessarily indicate that authenticity is assumed among all attendees at a fan event. Some participants described this dynamic in terms of the seemingly-related *true fan*, but most who did so used the phrase as an example of how *not* to characterize one’s fandom.

True fan.

The closest term to authenticity present in the interviews was the use of the term “true fan.” Several participants used this term in discussing issues that have been tied to authenticity in the past, as Leia does here:

A lot of things that I described about what makes a true fan—a lot of it is tied into interaction and knowledge and you share that knowledge and you talk about it with other people because when you’re passionate about it you can’t not talk about it with other people.

In discussing this “true fan,” Leia uses many of the same markers that other participants used when discussing “big fans”: knowledge, communication with other fans, and passion. These markers will be discussed further in RQ2, as they are key in hierarchy creation, as well.

Kara refers to true fans as those who display the devotion to invest a good deal of time:

Anybody in the masquerade line is probably a fairly true fan because that thing takes six hours to get through, and you to have some devotion.

The masquerade referenced here is the annual costume ball held at Comic-Con. The line is notoriously one of the longest at the convention, with participants and attendees devoting much of their Saturday (also a popular day for high-profile panels) to preparing or waiting in line, respectively. The line is one of the more grueling at the convention; those that line up too late in the day will find themselves out of luck. The pay-off to sacrificing one’s Saturday is the ability to be a participant or a spectator at a signature Comic-Con event and one of the largest cosplay³ activities of the year. Kara’s perception

³ Cosplay is an abbreviation of “costume play.” It refers to the practice of dressing in costume, in this case as a character from a mediated work.

is that to spend six hours on Saturday standing in an unmoving line, one must be a true fan of cosplay, the masquerade, Comic-Con, or a combination thereof.

Others, like Luke, spoke of the “true fan” in terms of their interests in multiple fandoms:

And I run into this fandom of people who only do one thing and they only do that one thing and there isn't any thing else, and [think] that anything else is superfluous or beneath their notice. Or that if you were a true fan you would only do one thing, and you'd only do that. “You're diluting yourself by not being totally focused,”—and I have trouble with the level of judgment where you say, “Everything else is crap. This is the only thing good in the universe.”

This excerpt presents the idea of the “true fan” as an ideal held by others, which Luke does not agree with. He is differentiating between himself, who has many different interests in different fan objects and those fan communities that see only room for one fandom in their members' lives. Luke describes groups who believe in “true fans” as “judgmental” and expresses concern with the idea of fans having a singular interest. In this instance the “true fan” is a construct that he does not himself endorse, but that he presents as a false construct used by others. He describes the “true fan” as an ideal held by these groups, but not necessarily as an ideal he would seek to achieve. The idea that true fans would participate in only one fandom runs counter to previous literature on the topic (Brown, 1997; Pearson, 2007), which argues for a “fannish disposition” as part of one's personality, making it more likely for fans to participate in multiple communities. Luke speaks derisively of those who would desire to be true fans as exclusionary, implying that he shares the viewpoint put forth by both Brown and Pearson.

Ann uses “true fan” in a similar way, as a means to express what she thinks others consider to be an ideal expression of fandom:

But there are some fans that—if you say Chuck and Sarah shouldn't be together, there are some fans that basically excoriate you because you're not a true fan and they start judging other people by how respectful [they are] of the show or whatever. I'm like, no, dude, it's a show.

Here, Ann describes a particular type of fan of the television show *Chuck*, one who wants the two leads together in a romantic relationship. This type of fan is often referred to as a “shipper,” short for “relationshipper.” Like Luke, Ann comments on the judgment expressed by these fans towards others who do not have a similar viewpoint. For both, “judgment” is characterized as negative; to judge who is or is not a true fan is cast as something that should not be done or that is not the act of a good fan. Furthermore, for both of these participants the “true fan” is not being held up as an ideal that they or other fans should aspire to, but rather as an imagined construct that other fans use to judge those within their communities. Ann goes on to say:

When [TWoP] had that big change⁴ [the moderators] really started coming down harder on people that basically said, “Well you can't be a true fan of the show. Why are you watching the show? Why are you watching the show? How can you say things like that?”

She continues in this excerpt to use “true fan” to describe projected desire of others within her fan community, rather than an ideal that she herself hopes to achieve.

Big fan.

Alternatively, other participants used the phrase “big fan” when discussing the relative devotion of one's fandom. Markers such as prioritizing activities around one's fandom, enthusiasm, and exerting effort are shown here to be signs of one's “big fandom.” As Alexis describes it:

⁴ The “big change” referenced by Ann here is the purchase of TWoP by the Bravo television network, a subsidiary of NBC Universal. After this buyout, many members of the community reported a noticeable shift in the way the forums were being moderated.

I love the TV show “Castle,” so I will watch it on Friday night; and I will make sure my night is free so I can watch it. That’s a pretty big fan.

She talks about the prioritization of her activities as an indicator of her fandom. She will clear her schedule to watch the show when it airs, despite the affordances of digital recording or online viewing, as a marker of her fandom for the show. It is prioritized over other activities or parts of her life.

Ron discusses being a “big fan” in terms of expressed enthusiasm:

Yeah, how excited they are, yeah. And I have seen that with just fans of even things that I’m not a fan of. I’m like, “Wow, that person is a real big fan of that” because you can tell with the enthusiasm in their voice.

Here, excitement is the marker of being a big fan. Even to someone outside the fan community, like Ron, big fandom is evident by displays of excitement and vocal enthusiasm.

Likewise, exerting effort is also cast as a marker of “big” fandom, as shown in this comment from Jack:

So you know they're a big fan when they do a podcast, or when they call in, or when they send an email, because... I don't know, if you send an email or do voicemail on these things—you know somebody's a fan when they send them the email or has some sort of point they want to get across.

Jack starts with the idea that when someone does a podcast, this indicates that they are a “big fan.” Podcasts are pre-recorded audio programs that are available for download, either through a service like iTunes, or from a creator’s site directly. Fan podcasting has become extremely popular in recent years, with thousands of podcasts dedicated to some form of media fandom currently available for download on iTunes. These programs are often a combination of creative activity (featuring original songs, fan art), discussion, and fan criticism. Podcasting is a form of content creation; creators commonly plan a show

lasting anywhere from 30 minutes to several hours, and spend a significant amount of time planning, recording, and editing this show and making it available for download by users (commonly done through iTunes). However, Jack quickly scales back to the mere participation in a podcast through calling in and leaving a voicemail for the hosts to play in-show or writing an email to be read during the show (both common practices in fan-related podcasts) as the marker of big fandom. If they “have a point they want to get across” or, in Fiske’s (1992) terms, have made some meaning out of the text for themselves and seek an opportunity to share it with others (enunciative productivity).

Synonyms for “big” were also used, as in this excerpt from Kate:

It was easier with *Lost*. *Lost* was a very complex show. Somebody who clearly spends a lot of time on *Lostpedia* and can provide a very complex but understandable explanation of an episode, that would be something that would make someone clearly a huge fan of the show and very knowledgeable about it.

Here, Kate uses “huge” in much of the same way that her fellow participants are using “big.” Fandom is related to knowledge of the object and the seeking of external information about it (in this case, on the fan site *Lostpedia*) both of which are used by other participants in discussing “big” fans and in participants’ descriptions of hierarchy creation as addressed by RQ2.

Those using the term “big fan” have described its characteristics using many of the same indicators as have been found in past works on authenticity in fandom: prioritizing activities around one’s fandom, enthusiasm, and exerting effort. However, the term clearly has its own connotation, separate from that of “authentic.” Moreover, while there were similarities found between the markers of “true” fans and “big” fans, such as

displaying passion or enthusiasm, or devoting a particular amount of time to the fandom, these terms are not interchangeable.

Firstly, “true” is described in binary terms; one is either a true fan or one is not. “Big fans,” as shown above are placed on a sliding scale in relation to their fandom. It is possible to be a big fan, a “bigger” fan, and even a “big huge psycho” fan, indicating that “big” can be modified to represent placement on a continuum.

Additionally, a repeated comment in relation to “true” fandom, was around the negative perception of those who felt it necessary to judge whether someone’s fandom was true or not. Multiple participants expressed that this level of judgment was inappropriate or undesirable behavior. However, while “big fan” and its modified versions were used several times in a similar manner (expressing judgment) no participants expressed the same disdain for this practice. One explanation for this discrepancy lies in the first point regarding “true” as a binary and “big” as representative of a scale. If there is only the true fan or the untrue, false fan, to express the type of judgment described by Ann and Luke may be deemed by fans as going too far in one’s judgment. Alternatively, if fans conceptualize a scale upon which a wider range of fandom levels can reside, it may be more palatable to express judgment about those who would take that scale to its most extreme end.

Casual fan.

While participants describe true fans and big fans as having similar characteristics, these are both contrasted with the casual fan. Casual fans were routinely referenced in opposition to the aforementioned “true” or “big” fans and markers such as a

lack of knowledge, a lack of devotion or willingness to undergo hardship or seek outside content about one's object.

In speaking about the knowledge of a particular object, Claire contrasts the casual fan to the big fan:

Just talking to the person – if they know about the show and what they're talking about, that's how I know they're a big fan or not. You can tell by talking to someone if they're a casual fan or a big-time fan by how much they actually know about that particular show.

For Claire, knowledge is the most important determinant of the level of one's fandom.

The ability to demonstrate this knowledge is paramount in placing them within a hierarchy of fandom, an assessment with which Fiske (1992) would concur and that will be explored in the next chapter's discussion of RQ2.

"Casual" was also used to denote people who lack a particular level of devotion, as described by Kara:

Okay – people who are sleeping on the floors. That's a good one because the casual attendee will say, "I'm tired. I'm leaving the building to go out and get some food or something." The devotee is in line and is sleeping on the floor because they refuse to give up their place in line. Or they're just tuckered out and they refuse to leave the building.

Comic-Con is a physically tiring event for most attendees. Someone who attended the full duration of the convention would be engaged from Wednesday evening for Preview Night until Sunday afternoon when the convention ends. Each day the convention starts around 9am, with panels lasting into the evening and late night showings and parties into the early hours of the next morning. As a result, attendees may find themselves exhausted from trying to attend multiple events all day long, coupled with the strain of walking the convention hall (approximately 615,701 square feet) and standing in long lines. Kara points to those who would choose to stay at the con, catching

a quick nap on the floor, rather than leave and go back to their hotel for a quick snack and rest, as “devotees.” Casual fans are shown as inferior to the “devotee” who will stay in the convention center regardless of their physical condition. The willingness to put oneself in physical discomfort is seen as a badge of honor, whereas the act of missing part of the convention to sleep or eat is seen as a marker of a fan who is “less than” in some way. Also, Kara describes here the possibility of a casual fan in attendance at Comic-Con; the fan who attends but who is not willing to endure exhaustion to stand on line or sleep on the floor can still be characterized as casual. This indicates that the way “casual” and other points on the scale are being conceptualized are in some way localized within the fandom. Looking at the broad population, the act of attending Comic-Con alone would elevate one beyond the standing of the casual fan. As Kara describes it, however, simply attending is not enough. One must be willing to push beyond that to escape casual fandom.

Jim uses casual fan to contrast with the hardcore fan:

But you basically have two types of people at a normal comic show, which are casual fans and hardcore fans. And hardcore fans can take on characteristics that are sometimes unsavory to people who are not prepared to deal with them... But at Comic-Con I think it's mostly—I would say it's mostly generally casual fans. There's casual fans, hardcore fans, and then there's a big in-between. That's not a very good breakdown, but I think the people in between are people who are fans of, I think [they're] the very most general people as a fan goes. Like a little bit of everything is going out in the show. It's like—I like superhero movies and I read *X-Men* when I was ten and I like taking pictures of people in costumes—they're general fans. And then the people in-between are the people in a costume who are like Sci-Fi wearing a Beetlejuice costume. I don't know how that relates to comics. It's Halloween for me. But you know, “I'm crazy and I'm gonna spend a lot of money and make a lot of noise at panels,” which is fun like they're excited. And like the super hardcore people are the people who have been going for like 20 years, they hate everything at the show, they hate what it's become but they can't stop going. And most of those people are not necessarily even fans; they are creators.

Jim lays out multiple types of fans here: the casual or general fan (he interchanges these terms here), the hardcore fan, and those in-between. The casual or general fan is characterized by a passing knowledge of relevant materials, emphasized here with reference to popular media such as superhero movies or X-Men comic books (arguably one of the most popular, best-selling and mainstream comic book series in the 20th century). These casual or general fans also play the role of the onlooker by “taking pictures of people in costumes.” The in-between fans raise the stakes from the casual or general fan. The in-between fans do demonstrate enthusiasm as a marker of their fandom (by making noise at panel presentations) and spend money on their objects. The hardcore fans, by contrast, are marked by the long length of time they have been attending Comic-Con and their dislike for the current state of the convention (Jim is referencing Comic-Con’s embracing of the mainstream media at the expense of comic books, a common complaint among long-time con-goers interviewed for this project). They have been a fan for so long that they have watched the event change from its initial state and are displeased with the changes they’ve seen, a stance that is common among those who have been long-time fans of particular objects.

Veronica uses casual again in contrast to an extreme, the rabid fan:

With them its like the people that are posting on the forum on Television Without Pity are fans but like semi-casual fans, and I know from other boards a lot of people who are like the rabid “read everything about what’s going on with the show” fan.

Here the level of fandom is closely related to the amount of content about the object that the fan has consumed. Seeking outside content emerges as associated with particularly high levels of fandom, as it contributes to the amount of knowledge that a fan has on the

topic. In this case, it is a very specific type of knowledge that also requires extra effort to acquire.

Alexis has also delineated differences between different types of fans, differentiating between a casual fan and a super-fan:

There's definitely degrees. ... I would say a fan is someone who gets excited about a piece of media and really likes it. A super-fan is someone who's going to go out of their way to incorporate that piece of media into their life. They're going to wait outside at midnight to see the midnight showing. They're going to go online and follow what the creator's doing now. They're going to buy a piece of culture that has to do with it. A super-fan will alter their life to include this piece of media in it. A casual fan will just appreciate it as it naturally flows into their life.

By her characterization, a super fan moves beyond casual fandom by exerting extra effort (“going out of their way”), seeking information across different sources, obtaining collectible items, and generally incorporating the object into their life. The “casual fan” is cast here as a passive recipient, enjoying the work, but not exercising additional effort to consume it.

The continuum of fandom.

Participants were able to describe a great number of different types of fan: most often the “big” fan or the “casual” fan, but also the authentic, the true, and a great many markers in between.

Modifiers to the term “big” denote a sliding scale of evaluation. One can be a “big fan,” but there also exist designations beyond that, as in Luke’s description of the “bigger fan”:

The bigger fan knows a lot about their character or their obsession, and they know about history. They understand how things connect. To a certain extent it used to be dressing up. It used to be the people who dress, [they] were the big fans.

Here, Luke uses “bigger” demonstrating that one fan can be bigger than another. For Luke, this level of fandom is related to the level of knowledge around a particular character or object of fandom, including historical knowledge. It is also related to seeing a bigger picture around the object and making connections to past or related works. In closing this comment, he makes reference to cosplay, expressing the idea that for his fandom, the traditional means of determining one’s level of fandom centered around dressing up and creating a costume. This is a somewhat complicated conceptualization, as an appropriate amount of excitement (as determined by a fan community) can serve as a marker of fandom. However, over-excitement may be seen as a negative behavior, as in this anecdote from Lane, describing her time as a leader in the fan community for a popular band.

By the record company, I was given a room key to go down and bring people up that I felt were appropriate... The band wanted to know that it wasn’t going to be a freak show because...they wanted to know that they could relax but they weren’t going to have somebody screaming and freaking out just because you know [band member] was three feet away from them.... One time when a fan came barreling after him and ends up gloaming onto him and I ended up tearing them off—that was like just get to the elevator... We are the first and last line of defense so [the band] will tend to let us kind of circle around them.

As a leader of the fan community, Lane and her other fan leaders are charged with discriminating between fans that are “appropriate” and those that are not. It is undeniable that the fan who is prone to “screaming and freaking out” and other displays of excitement is a “big fan;” however, this is a clear example how this extreme end of the scale, or continuum, can be representative of undesirable behaviors. To display too much excitement is to be a “freak show” and unsuitable for direct interaction with the creators.

Angela discusses being a big fan thusly:

So I think just as an effort to like sort of – it'd almost be like keeping a buffer between me and like becoming a big huge psycho fan, rather than having that sort of dominating my life.

Again in this example, bigger fandom is not a desirable quality, but rather something that should be avoided. Angela takes steps to keep herself from being a big fan, here modified with the descriptor “huge” for repetitive emphasis, and “psycho” to demonstrate an extremity rooted in a hyperbolic lack of mental wellness. In this scenario, the object “dominates” the fan’s life, keeping him or her from pursuing other interests in a way that Angela would deem as unhealthy. She describes taking steps to keep her involvement in fan activity from reaching this level, indicating that “higher” levels of fandom are not necessarily more desirable. There is a point at which one’s commitment or involvement with a fandom would be seen as a negative quality, rather than a positive. While this point may differ in specifics from fan to fan, Angela associates it with taking up too much of one’s life.

The idea of allowing one’s fandom to dominate or consume a fan’s life was echoed by other participants. In contrast with the “casual fan,” Debra describes a big fan as such:

Because a casual fan of video games or a particular series or something—they have other things going on in their lives, so it only takes up a small part of their time. But for someone who’s more of a big fan it would take up a lot of their time, until it would get to the point where they don’t have other obsessions or hobbies they can really talk to other people about or relate to other people about, because they have gotten so into that fandom that they only really know how to relate to other fans in that fandom, so they may not be able to relate to other fans of other things.

For Debra, there could be people who are consumed by their fandom, to the point that they are spending a majority of their time on it, and are uninterested in other forms of fandom. In this description of the sliding scale of fandom, there is an end point at which

it would move from having multiple areas of fan interest, as Pearson (2007) indicates is the norm, to an extreme in which the fandom becomes an “obsession” and one is unable to relate to fans in other communities. Additionally, this description of the “big fan” plays into common fan stereotypes of social awkwardness and an inability to relate to others. As Debra describes the big fan, they fit within that existing stereotype.

On the topic of being “obsessed” in relationship to obscure information, Alexis said:

I know all of the cast of characters down to the guy who played Haldir who people don't even remember. If you're not obsessed, you don't care; but I am obsessed so I do care. I know the name of every single character with a name and the actor who played them. I'm going to go find the movies that they've done. I want to support them. It's totally arbitrary, but it's something I'm going to do because I'm a fan.

Again, the participant uses the term “obsessed” to denote her level of fandom; however, in her last statement she says simply that she seeks out such information because she is a “fan,” not an obsessed fan or even a big fan. This implies a normalization of the practice, possibly to distance herself from the “too big” or “obsessive” end of the spectrum.

While Alexis talks about the knowledge of obscure information as a practice she engages in proudly, some participants indicated that this was outside their level of fandom, as is the case in this excerpt from Phil:

I think in terms of how to identify the people that really, really love the show - I mean, certainly people that can rattle off details about previous seasons, like know which - like whoever Pia whatever her name is, Pia sang “All By Myself” last night on *American Idol*, you know, but she didn't do nearly as well as singer X, but she did it better than Y. Like people who know the history of certain songs - like, I can tell you that's a song that's been sung a bunch of times, and I can tell you maybe one person who'd done it, but I couldn't tell you all of them.

Being able to name not only which songs have been sung by multiple contestants, but also who sang them, when there are easily hundreds of participants from which to choose

from, is the type of encyclopedic information that is in some ways unobtainable to the casual fan or a level of fandom that is undesirable to obtain.

As a final example of a scenario in which achieving the highest level of fandom is not necessarily viewed as a positive, Ann describes a friend's experience related to the designations linked with each TWoP poster's name:

And I know somebody who became a Stalker and reregistered under a new name because he didn't like being called that. And I think he did actually get Stalker status again. It's like, ha, what are you going to do now?

Upon reaching 5,000+ posts, the user in question created a new account, seemingly to avoid the stigma of being characterized as a "stalker" on TWoP, only to quickly regain his status based on the number of new posts he had made. This demonstrates a lack of desire to be seen as someone who would make 5,000+ or 10,000+ posts to TWoP.

What has been constructed is a spectrum of fandom on which individual fans can reside. Using the language of this study's participants, this spectrum can range from the casual fan at one extreme and the "too big" fan at the other. Fandom that was too big was also characterized as obsessive or the acts of "crazies." Over the top vocal displays and knowledge of extremely obscure knowledge are positioned as behaviors indicative of this extreme end of the continuum. Less extreme than these terms, but near that end of the scale were terms like "rabid," "superfans," and "hardcore." More neutral terms included the aforementioned "big," as well as "devotees" and fans who possess "cred." Closer to "casual," one participant used the term "semi-casual" to qualify this term and elevate particular behaviors beyond casual fandom. While most of these terms were not presented in significant numbers by participants, they do demonstrate the broad range of

means of conceptualizing fandom, and sketch a scale upon which one's fandom can be mapped, using the markers outlined in this chapter.

For the most part, participants expressed a desire to move towards the "big" end of the spectrum. To be a casual fan can mean not having enough knowledge or exerting enough effort, or being seen as an outsider in fan communities. To be a big fan was regularly presented as a desirable state, but only up to a certain point, after which increased size of fandom ceased to be a desired state. Participants made it clear that it was possible to go too far and achieve a degree of fandom that was "too big" and no longer a desirable position to be in.

However, this point seemed able to move based on the participant and their particular community. This is one example of how the spectrum itself is dynamic and prone to shifting. Each participant's evaluation of what would qualify as "casual" or "big" fandom is invariably influenced by both his or her own activities and the norms of the communities that he or she is a part of. For example, if a participant considers him or herself to be a "casual" fan, then their own characteristics or activities are likely to be used as the markers of that level of fandom. In describing types of fandom further along the spectrum, they may be inclined to use their own fandom as a reference point, extrapolating on those activities. Likewise, what may be "too big" for one fandom could be perfectly acceptable in another, depending on the types of behaviors frequently practiced by members of that community.

Summary

Participants in this study did not use authentic vs. inauthentic to describe levels of fandom. Participants did, however, identify several other terms, most notably “true,” “big,” and “casual.” They created a sliding scale, or continuum of fandom, ranging from the non-fan or casual fan to the “too big” fan at the other end of the spectrum. A participant’s evaluation of fans on this scale is likely to be influenced by his or her own fan activities and fandom community, indicating that spectrum is dynamic in nature.

Chapter 5: RQ2 Results

Fandom Markers & Hierarchy Creation

RQ2 asked: “*How do fans create hierarchies within and between their communities?*” Participants described a number of markers used to establish hierarchies, which will be outlined in this chapter. They also differentiated between hierarchies *within fan communities*, which were defined by *official authority, investment, cultural capital, and social capital* and *between fan communities*, which were defined by *differences between objects of fandom* and *differences between fan behaviors*. Finally, several determinants of status were applicable *across communities*, including *social identity* and *appearance*. (Please see Appendix G for a full list of applicable categories and codes.)

The spectrum of fandom described in RQ1 is closely related to hierarchy but is not identical to it. As participants identified different types of fans, ranging from the casual to big to “too big,” with a multitude of markers in between, they also expressed judgments on those types, indicating some that were more desirable or powerful positions to hold within the fan communities they occupy.

Markers of fandom.

Throughout the previous discussion I’ve indicated that degrees of fandom are marked through engagement (or lack of engagement) in particular practices. This section summarizes and expands upon those markers. Cost, effort exerted, socializing, knowledge, and quoting were presented by participants as indicators related to the degree of one’s fandom and criteria used in differentiating between a non-fan or casual fan at

one extreme and various levels of “big” fandom at the other, as described in the previous chapter.

Cost.

One type of investment is monetary cost. Participants reference the amount that one spends as a fan as an indicator of their level of fandom and stake in the community. TWoP poster Rose mentioned that some fans take their interest more seriously than she does:

Interviewer: And what would that look like, taking it more seriously?

Rose: I don’t know, spending \$300 to go to Comic-Con to get an autograph. I know I can’t go across the country right now just to maybe get a chance to see a certain actor or actress. It would be a little bit—I wouldn’t have the time or money to spend on that. There is only so far my fandom goes.

Despite being unaware of this project’s interest in Comic-Con, Rose references the convention as an example of a fan activity that is beyond her level in terms of cost. The amount of money and the time and cost of travel are presented as barriers to his fandom (“There is only so far my fandom goes.”) The prospective payoff of getting an autograph or seeing celebrities is not worth the price of attending Comic-Con. Because she is unwilling to spend that money, she presents this as something that holds her fandom back from a more “serious” fandom.

Comic-Con attendee, Ron, echoed this sentiment in discussing why Comic-Con requires more investment than other fan activities:

Interviewer: So would you say it takes more effort to go to Comic-Con?

Ron: Yeah, because... you’re paying for it. There is more money going into it and so you’re actually having to pay. When you go to the movies you’re putting down 10 bucks. But 10 bucks in comparison to the—what is it this year?—it’s a hundred bucks for Comic-Con and that’s just the ticket. That’s not including anything else you’ll be buying there and all the hours

you're going to be spending there if you're going to be there for all four days. Again, you're spending 10 bucks for two hours most likely for a movie and then you're spending a hundred bucks for four days and so there's usually more commitment involved in going to Comic-Con.

Here, Comic-Con is again shown to require a significant amount of investment, both in terms of effort and time spent. The focus of Ron's comments is on cost, however. In comparing the cost of attending Comic-Con to the cost of attending a movie, he demonstrates the level of investment required to travel to San Diego and partake in the convention. Comic-Con clearly displays a higher level of commitment as Ron indicates, due to this high cost when compared against other fan activities. Because it is so expensive, several participants indicated that this would be a factor in keeping more casual fans from attending. Debra says,

And all these casual fans who maybe thought about trying it out don't have the opportunity, and the prices are going up as well so maybe someone who was on the fence about whether it was worth it to go, they're not going to be able to give it a shot because they aren't going to want to spend extra money.

As Debra describes it, one would need to be fairly committed to the idea of attending Comic-Con in order to make the commitment and spend the necessary money to do so. If someone were wavering in his or her fandom, as may be the case with a more casual fan, he or she may decline to attend rather than spend money on the cost of the ticket, which as Debra points out, is rising.

Unsurprisingly, with the exception of Rose's above mention of cost as it relates to Comic-Con, a significant number of TWoP participants did not discuss cost as a factor in the size of one's fandom. This is most likely due to the extreme differences in the cost to participate in Comic-Con (travel, accommodations, ticket, and daily expenses can put

expenditures into the thousands of dollars) with the cost to participate in TWoP (free, assuming computer and internet access).

Effort.

A second marker of fandom identified by participants was effort. “Effort” was used to describe actions that are in some way difficult or burdensome; they require that one exert a particular amount of time or energy towards completing a task. When asked if attending Comic-Con is an indicator of someone’s level of fandom, Kara replied:

It’s probably more of an indicator, because it requires more effort to go to another city and book a hotel in a city that has no hotel rooms at that time of year due to Comic-Con. Usually you’d have a much stronger reason to be at Comic-Con. I think that’s fair to say.

Like the participants who referenced cost as an indicator, Kara again mentions the travel as a key aspect of attending Comic-Con. However, she does not focus on the cost of this travel, but rather the effort. It takes work for fans to physically get themselves to San Diego. Also, the hotel booking process for Comic-Con is notoriously difficult for attendees. A particular number of rooms are blocked off at area hotels, and released at the same day and time and participants must compete for them. Hotel rooms are scarce, and affordably priced rooms are even more so. The work involved in booking a hotel and traveling to San Diego is an indicator of the size of someone’s fandom for Kara.

Effort is not limited merely to traveling to the fan site, however. John points to a very common Comic-Con activity as an exertion of effort: waiting in line.

You know they’re a fan when they get in line the day before just to see the panel of the show or movie they’re a fan of. I even seen some that get in line the day Comic-Con opens. Those people I would call super fans.

By this description, the degree of one’s fandom is directly related to the amount of effort they are willing to exert to wait in line. While almost every activity at the convention

involves some form of waiting, due to the number of attendees, the lines for some panels operate differently. For Hall H, for example, the line is outside, making it possible to line up overnight, or even days in advance for panel presentations hosted in that room. For John, to line up the day before, a large commitment unto itself, makes someone a fan. To line up multiple days in advance, implying multiple days of camping outside and the discomfort associated with it, elevates one to “super” fandom.

Another form of fan activity, discussed previously, is the fan podcast. Jack discusses the level of fandom required to create and produce a regular podcast:

And the fact that these people have podcasts about them, like these two guys...here are these two young guys, and you know, this is a show about 1960s advertisers. Why are they doing a podcast on it? But they really enjoy the show...So you know they're a big fan when they do a podcast.

Jack questions the podcast creators’ motivation in producing it; presumably it requires significant effort, and they do not seem like the typical audience for *Mad Men*, the object in question here. However, their production of a regularly released podcast indicates to Jack that they are “big fans,” the implication being that they are willing to spend a significant amount of time and effort producing it.

Similarly, Alexis references media creation as a sign of fan status, using the term “super-fan” as a high water mark:

A super-fan – maybe a super-fan is someone who incorporates into another level of media. They take it beyond the TV and into the internet. They start looking up people. I don’t just love this piece of music. I’m going to make a music video to it because I love it so much. They bring in a visual component. Or someone who loves the movie so much that says, “I’m not going to just love this movie. I’m going to print out pictures of it, and paste it all over my notebook.” I would say a super-fan is someone who will take a piece of media from its original incarnation and will bring it to another level of media interaction.

In addition to looking for outside information on one's object, which will be discussed shortly in this chapter, Alexis references creative pursuits like music video creation or the fashioning of a notebook collage as signs that someone is a "super-fan." Taking pieces of the original object and transforming it for their own purposes, a phenomenon Henry Jenkins has referred to as "textual poaching" (1992), is key in elevating one's fandom to the next level.

Socializing and sharing.

Socializing refers to the bonds created between fans when they converse and interact together, either specifically about their object of fandom or not. Luke describes this phenomenon as such:

One of things that I think of when I think of the bigger fans, are people who have been meeting together or know each other. There's this sense of inner circles and outer circles and people who have known each other over the years, have worked out some of their idiosyncrasies with each other. We all have ideological arguments with each other about characters and universes and how this is going to work, these are people who have had these discussions a number of times and have come to an understanding about so and so knows about this and so and so knows about that but we agree...

Luke describes the establishing of inner and outer circles, as well as long lasting relationships, features which are characteristic of communities in general, fan communities included. This also implies a certain length of time within the fandom ("over the years"), relating to a theme that will be explored further in Chapter 5.

Relationships created within fan communities can certainly be long lasting, and a particularly important part of one's fandom. Claire considers herself to be a big fan of *Lost*, and over the years has become friends with several people she met through that fandom:

I'm there for the whole experience. *Lost* is one of the reasons why I went. If it wasn't for *Lost*, I would have never gone to Comic-Con. But I like TV. I'm a big TV person. There are a lot of good TV shows that I'm interested in – meeting the celebrities, hanging out with friends. I have a bunch of friends who I met through *Jay and Jack* podcasts and message boards and Twitter. We met the past couple years at Comic-Con, so we're all friends now. We always hang out while we go. That's mainly why – half of it is to go hang out with friends. Half is for the actual comic experience.

As Claire says here, only half of her Comic-Con experience is related to the “comic experience.” A full half is related to being with friends, and interacting with those she met through the participating in the fandom by listening to fan-run podcasts and conversing over message boards and Twitter.

Socializing with other fans is emphasized here by Alexis as the “ultimate goal of fandom:”

Also, I think the way one is a fan is you talk to other fans. I think that's the ultimate goal of fandom. You find people who are fans of what you're a fan of. You build a relationship on that. I have an entire group of friends; and the only reason we're friends is because we love Joss Whedon and that was enough. That means that at the end of the day, something in you loved this story. And something in me loves this story. And therefore, something in me and you are similar enough that I know we can build a relationship even if it is only off this one thing...I think ultimately that's what Comic-Con is – a bunch of people walking around going, “You believe what I believe. You believe in the power of active storytelling. You believe in the power of characters that can change the way you look at the world.” That's ultimately what fandom is – it's saying that “I confirm the goodness of this story. Who else will join me?”...Also, it's like, “You love this. You make me seem less weird in the world.”

Here, the bond forged over a common love of a media object can be extremely fulfilling and important. Alexis has an entire group of friends based on a shared love of Joss Whedon's work and aesthetic. The relationship to SIT is evident here. Alexis identifies strongly with the other Whedon fans in her social circle (“You believe what I believe”; “You make me seem less weird in the world”) and finds that she is able to build personal relationships based solely on a shared interest in these pop culture objects.

At Comic-Con this sharing can be easy to observe. Kara describes how sharing the con experience with a non-fan romantic partner is a sign of one's true fandom:

But in terms of somebody's physical presence at that convention – if they drag their boyfriend or girlfriend to Comic-Con, that's a sign of being a fan. They want their significant other to know about their nerdiness and be exposed to it and swallowed up by it – or at least to tolerate it. They're not ashamed of it. It's not their secret D&D habit on weekends.

The desire to be open and honest about one's fandom is a sign that they are not ashamed to admit to even “nerdy” proclivities to their partner, but also that this is a large and important part of their life that should be shared. The degree to which one is willing to share their fandom with others can then be indicative of their level of fandom as well.

Knowledge.

Knowledge was a key marker of one's fandom for many participants. While some spoke of it in a general sense, other participants differentiated between specialized forms of knowledge, such as content outside the text itself and knowledge that would be considered “obscure” by most fans. As a demonstration first of the most general form, Debra feels that a certain amount of knowledge of an object is required to consider oneself a big fan.

...if they don't know as much as, say, I know. If they haven't read as much of the story or they don't remember some of the characters. I mean not if they can't get down to the really minor trivia. If they have the ability to talk about the thing that you like, the extent of their knowledge about the thing that you like. I think it's impossible to be a big fan of something without really knowing the thing that they are a fan of. If they really like a particular TV show because of the actors that are in it, but they don't really know anything about the writing, or about the character interaction, they just kind of like it because, hey that guy is cute. So they'll watch everything and can recite all the lines but they don't really understand all the deeper meaning that the writers are trying to put into the show.

In order to be a big fan, it is not enough to like an object for superficial reasons, such as the attractiveness of one of the actors. Big fans must possess the ability to talk

knowledgeably about their object, including the deeper meanings behind the writing of the show. For Debra it's not the knowledge of trivia that sets one apart as a fan, but rather the depth of one's knowledge and meaning making surrounding the show.

Some fans, like Angela, felt that for particular objects, the hurdle to gain the necessary amount of knowledge was too high:

I would say, honestly, in most cases [I'm] not as big of a fan. Just because the show—well, I mean for something like *Buffy*, you have to be like a giganto enormous fan to be a bigger fan than half the people who are fans. It's just not a matter of liking a show; it's a matter of knowing everything about the show like ever – that could ever possibly be known.

Although it is not stated directly, it is likely that Angela has chosen *Buffy* as an example here due to its reputation for having a particularly devoted and knowledgeable fanbase. The amount of knowledge one would have to amass in order to parallel the community's biggest fans likely seems overwhelming—a “matter of knowing everything about the show” in the most literal sense. This is also one means of differentiating between fan communities: certain fandoms have a reputation for being more knowledgeable than others, *Buffy* among them.

Rory provides an example of the impact of sharing such information with the rest of the fan community:

You realize that there's people who are really big fans because they have links—they constantly put in links to other sites. You know, Twitter feeds. They read up on the spoilers for example, [to know what's] coming in advance. They have particular fondness for certain actors and they will talk about this interview. They relate the actor's performance in the show to other things the actor's done. They will have funny nicknames for actors or the characters that relate to something else that they have done or episode two years ago. So I mean in a true sense you could really tell very quickly that this person is really into this show.

This seeking of knowledge that tentacles out, away from the show itself and into outside knowledge is one indicator of someone's level of fandom. Each of the activities that Rory

names requires that one move beyond the text to Twitter feeds, spoiler threads, interviews conducted elsewhere, and so on.

Knowledge of content outside the text.

It is important at this point to differentiate between knowledge of the text itself and that knowledge that resides outside of it. Knowledge of the text refers to the characters, the story and specific plot points and such information. Examples of relevant knowledge that is outside the text are interviews with cast members or show runners, behind the scenes information (e.g., casting, on-set gossip), and so forth.

This often comes from a fan's level of passion for the text itself, as indicated by Alexis:

And if I love a movie, I want to go on the special features and see what else they're going to give me.

The enjoyment of the original text creates a desire to obtain more information about it.

For Alexis, this means checking out the special features on a film's DVD.

Jack puts a fine point on his feelings around seeking outside information:

And then listening to these podcasts and stuff like that, I don't know. I think anything you do outside of watching the show, I think makes you a bigger fan of the show.

Here, he expresses that any outside information seeking whether through podcasts, which he mentions specifically, or through other means makes one a bigger fan of the show itself. This echoes Costello and Moore's (2007) means of differentiating between those who consume and enjoy an object and those who are "active" around its consumption by seeking other sources of information.

For some participants, the lack of knowledge about such outside content was viewed as a detriment to their fandom, and a marker of someone being a more casual fan, as described here by Veronica:

The questions that people posted in episode threads—there would be a lack of awareness and they would be asking a question about a character’s motivation, or something and I know that was discussed by the creator in an interview two or three weeks ago. But by their question I can tell that they are not aware of the interview.

In the surrounding discussion Veronica expresses an annoyance with these types of posters, implying that in order to participate in TWoP fandom, the onus of consuming this outside content is on the fan. Other fans, such as Veronica, will hold fans accountable for this information.

Contrary to the above interviewees, not all participants wanted to achieve this level of fandom. Several felt that despite considering themselves fans of a particular show, seeking outside information was beyond their level of interest. Ann says,

But I can’t. We watch *Chuck* and *White Collar* and *Hot Gear* and that’s it. I mean, I know people that they can’t even do it all because of their DVRs and I’m like, wow, how do you find that many shows that you want to watch? It’s like, wow. I don’t – I wouldn’t say that I’m as much of a fan as that and I’m not the type to really go looking – I don’t want spoilers and I really don’t want to find every single article written about Sherlock. It’s just not of interest to me and I think it’s because for me I just want to see the show. After I’ve seen the episode I might want to see a little bit behind the scenes but I just want to see the episode. With *Chuck*, I just want to see the episode I don’t really need to see everything behind it.

Ann recognizes that looking for this type of information would make her a bigger fan. She says, in reference to that behavior, “I wouldn’t say that I’m as much of a fan as that.” She considers herself to be a fan, but not to the degree that would require that level of outside information and effort. As we have seen more than once, Ann has a particular range within appropriate fandom takes place.

Knowledge of obscure information.

Several participants pointed to knowledge of information that can be considered obscure as an indicator of big fandom. Different from exclusive knowledge which is known by only a small group due to a lack of availability, obscure knowledge is also held by a smaller group, and not likely the fan community at large. It is knowledge of points that many, even fellow fans, would characterize as trivial or not necessary to remember.

A common example of this type of information is episode titles, as described by Jack:

Well, the knowledge that they have about what exact episode, or what part of the series you're watching. I don't know episode titles. Everybody just rattles them off, like it's nothing. So they're bigger fans than I am. Sure, I've watched the entire series, but I couldn't tell you all the episode names, or this particular episode where something happens—that level of detail.

Jack considers himself to be a big fan of the program *Lost*, but feels that he falls short in comparison to fans who are easily able to provide episode titles, or plot details based on title alone. This type of knowledge is somewhat difficult to become familiar with naturally, and would require a great deal of investment with a text to be able to “rattle them off” as Jack describes.

Quoting.

Closely related to knowledge of the text is the idea of quoting. Quotes are a very specific form of knowledge, in that they display both a memorization of the dialogue word for word, as well as an understanding of when in a social context it would be appropriate to use them. Several participants mentioned the ability to quote the text as an indicator of being a big fan, including Ann:

I happen to be a big fan of *Star Trek* and a big, huge fan of the original written works of Sherlock Holmes. I've read them all several times, I could practically tell you what the quotes, what stories are from.

Ann equates her being a big fan of Sherlock Holmes with the ability to quote from the stories and identify which quotes come from which books.

In a TWoP thread devoted to *Mad Men* obsession, one poster writes,

You know you're obsessed with *Mad Men* when you try and work the phrase "No. It's just my people are Nordic" into every conversation.

This is not a particularly well-known quote from the show and would indicate the level of someone's fandom when inserted into everyday conversation.

Appearance.

In addition to social identity, the other form of general categorizing for fans in this study was based on appearance. For TWoP users, appearance is based on signifiers like user names and badges. Kate says,

Well there is the actual status that the website usernames have. I think I am at Fanatic. I think to get to stalkers you have to get to 5,000 posts. I don't know if that rule has been changed but it was that way at one point. I will probably never get to stalker. Its an obvious thing, have occasionally looked them and realized that somebody making a not very insightful comment, or repeating a comment that was two or three pages back, and I will look and see that they only have two or three, less than 10 comments on the site, so maybe are not as familiar with how things are supposed to work.

In both cases, a lower badge is associated with a newer user, or someone who is unfamiliar with the rules. This was a common generalization that TWoP users reported when discussing the badges. However, because they are based on number of posts made and not length of time on the site or posts read, this assumption may be faulty. It is certainly possible that a user could act as a "lurker" for even several years, and be

completely familiar with the rules and norms of the community, while still having a low badge, due to a lack of posts made.

Badges are also used at Comic-Con to mark different levels of fandom. All attendees wear a lanyard around their neck for easy identification. They can denote whether someone is attending as a participant, an exhibitor, or a panel guest.

Accumulating multiple lanyards is a way of denoting the number of years one has attended the convention, as discussed in separate interviews, first by Logan, then Luke:

I can't remember if Comic-Con has this but at a lot of cons people will collect their name tags from prior years and wear them all... So that's a way that they can say, "Look. I've been coming here for 15 years," or whatever.

This idea of seniority—people who have shown up more than once, who have shown up a second time or a third time or a fourth time. Some people at Comic-Con do that, the idea of displaying badges and icons of every year that you've been or attended. That idea that you aren't just a neophyte, or someone who just shows up.

Wearing multiple lanyards at the same time, or wearing pins from previous years on one's lanyard is a way of visually denoting how long someone has spent attending Comic-Con, a clear fandom level marker.

Aside from badges, the clothing one chooses to wear can be indicative of one's fandom. The size of one's fandom increases when the item is harder to obtain:

Interviewer: At a smaller con, what kinds of things would tell you they were a bigger fan or more geeky than you?

Alexis: They would probably be wearing a T-shirt that you can only get at this one specific place that you send to, or on this one tour that they've done.

It can also mean cosplay. Claire says,

Or they're dressed up. I saw someone this year wearing a Dharma jumpsuit. That's the first indicator, you can tell.

Committing to the wearing of a costume can be an indicator of a particular level of fandom for observers. In one instance, described by Logan, cosplay also served as a marker of group identity:

It was pretty hard to get parking down there so I took the train down and I remember I don't ride the Amtrak very often so I was thinking am I on the right train? And so I get on the train and I look down one side and I see people with orange hair and with, you know super hero props.

Unsure of whether or not he was in the right place, Logan was instantly reassured by the site of super hero props, dyed hair and signifiers of fan identity.

While wearing something fan affiliated is certainly not done by all attendees, it is a popular means of expression at the convention. Kara says,

Again, I would just say style and dress is the big indicator in terms of – casual dress doesn't tell you anything as to whether or not someone is a fan; but certain styles of dress would tell you more if someone is a fan.

As Kara describes it, the lack of a costume or fan-centered outfit is not an indicator of a lack of a fan in and of itself, the presence of those items does lend credit for those observing. There are types of casual clothing, however, that may indicate that someone is a non-fan, as Leia describes:

Then the last group I think best exemplified by one person that I saw, he got out of his white Hummer wearing his Bret Favre jersey, and I'm like that guy is here to see the *Iron Man* movie and that's it.

The “last group” Leia is referencing is that of the casual fan or non-fan (she used these terms interchangeably). Here, she paints a clear picture of someone arriving at Comic-Con in a high-end SUV, wearing the jersey of a popular football player. Based on those two factors, Leia is able to make the assumption that he is at Comic-Con only to see mainstream presentations, such as the trailer for *Iron Man*, one of the most popular and mainstream objects featured at Comic-Con in 2008.

The markers described in this chapter (cost, effort exerted, socializing, knowledge, and quoting) are used to identify and categorize fan activity. Some of these markers, and additional markers described below, were also used in determining the construction of hierarchies for fan communities. While previous discussion of markers were limited to descriptions or placement on the continuum of fandom, the discussion as it relates to hierarchy involved the discussion of power structures and relationships. Participants' comments were categorized by whether they were discussing hierarchy creation *within* a fan community (hierarchy amongst members of the same group based either upon location or their object of fandom), *between* communities (hierarchies between a community that the participant belongs to and one they do not, or *across* communities (applicable to either of the aforementioned scenarios).

Within fan communities.

One type of hierarchy creation occurs within communities, in this case within the communities of TWoP users or Comic-Con attendees, or within fan communities devoted to a particular object. Participants described hierarchies within the communities they consider themselves members of using *official authority, investment, cultural capital and social capital*.

Official authority.

Official authority is granted by the organizers of the community itself. For TWoP, official authority is bestowed upon the writers of the site as well as the moderators who enforce site rules within TWoP's forums. For Comic-Con, official authority exists for those who are working for the convention in some capacity, whether it be running panels,

working security, or volunteering in various roles to keep operations running at this large event.

A demonstration of this type of authority was captured in an exchange on the *Grey's Anatomy* forum on TWoP. In a thread about general forum procedures for this show, a conversation emerged surrounding the closing of a popular thread devoted to one of the show's stars, Patrick Dempsey. This dialogue spanned several days and involved about 10 of the forum's readers; what follows is a representative excerpt. TWoPMars is a moderator, Strega is one of the head bosses for TWoP, called a "Network Executive," and the user is one of many disappointed and frustrated by a decision Mars has made.

TWoPMars: ...And, finally, as the moderator, I am allowed to lock a thread, or multiple threads, in this forum. I do what I can to keep this forum enjoyable for you all, but I also cannot let certain threads monopolize my moderating time and attention. This is not a full-time job, and I can't let it become one. The actor threads are a tough call and one I will be making soon. I didn't want to respond right away, because I was still weighing what to do. The entitlement in this thread is making my decision easier, though, so thank you for that.

User: In addition, what disappoints me most is the sense of retribution from you, Mars. No one asked about the thread closing in a rude way, yet your response was rude. Yes, you're the moderator and we know you have power, but why not treat posters politely, as required by board rules for all of us? In the PD thread, you've recently stepped in to clarify a question about proper posting on June 27th, which is a month ago, and previously on April 5th, then March 7th. Compared to your other moderating posts, this seems to be less time consuming than, say, *Lost* was. Once a month or so doesn't seem unreasonable, even if it is part-time. I am not aghast but I am surprised, because I guess I'm not aware of the many times you've locked the thread. I asked you up-thread if we should be utilizing a different space on the Grey's forum for this type of discussion. So, for clarification, may we bring discussion of actors to that thread?

Strega: Since obviously not everyone is clear on this: Mars is the boss here. This situation got as bad as it did because a subset of posters decided that the rules did not apply to them. And when pressed about it, they felt that they could overrule the mod with threats and tantrums. That's not acceptable.

This exchange is a clear demonstration of Mars and Strega's positions of power within the community. All three participants make direct references to Mars' power ("I am allowed...", "...we know you have power...", "Mars is the boss here.") In this case, said power has been demonstrated in closing a popular thread, an unpopular decision amongst the community, but one that will directly benefit the moderator in the form of reduced time spent monitoring and moderating.

Investment.

The amount one is able or willing to invest in a particular fandom can also play a part in the hierarchy creation process. These investments can be economical as is the case with investing money or purchasing collectibles, or can be less tangible investments of time and effort.

Collectibles.

Collectibles are pieces of merchandise related to one's fandom that fans have either obtained or purchased. These items take some form of investment to procure. In some cases, it is monetary, while in others the collectible is free, but fans must expend time or effort (e.g., waiting in line, entering contests) to procure it.

Comic-Con attendee Logan regularly brings his teen children to the convention, as they are interested in the types of content featured there. His son is able to obtain specific promotional items that aren't available elsewhere:

My son is really into World of Warcraft and he has a few comics that he really likes. He can engage in those promotional items as well...He can get some caché for being down there, encountering maybe – maybe he'll get something promotional that his friends won't have, who are also into the same gaming stuff.

For his son's friends who share similar interests, the ability to get particular promotional items by being at Comic-Con would garner an amount of caché. This caché seems to be brought about by two factors: both the possession of the item itself and the exclusive nature of the collectible. It is in part because they aren't able to get it themselves that the "caché" is created.

This exclusivity can strengthen bonds between fans that recognize another's item as unique, as described here by TWoP poster Kate:

I actually have to this day a messenger bag that I bought from their Café Press that has Mighty Big Television on it, and I remember a fan, some other TWoP fan, commenting on it and it felt like a special code that we were passing amongst each other.

Mighty Big TV (MBTV) was the name of Television Without Pity in one of its early incarnations in the late 1990s. Having purchased an item from the site's store on Café Press, a popular online shop for customized products, Kate's bag became a more exclusive collectible after the site changed names and MBTV items were no longer available. Kate indicates that having another TWoP fan appreciate it felt like a "special code." The messages communicated by this item are that Kate has been a TWoP user for a particularly long length of time, since the days of MBTV, as well as the fact that she cared enough about the site at that time to purchase a bag with its logo. The other fan recognizing the specialness of this item is also recognizing Kate's status as a TWoP fan and they share a moment of exclusivity between them.

However, collectibles are not universally sought after by fans, as described by Leia:

...merchandise purchasing—somebody owns all the figurines of something, that's a pretty good indicator of cred. That I personally don't value that as much because I'm personally not a collector type, but I do recognize that as a physical

manifestation of your passion that you enjoy being around these highly collectable figurines. That's just not my thing.

Leia points to one of the more common types of collectible here, the figurine, and indicates that collecting is not for everyone. She points toward a “collector type,” someone who is predisposed to collecting or who has a particular personality type. Additional reasons why one may not be a collector could include a lack of time or resources to maintain the activity. Despite this, even as a non-collector, Leia recognizes that collecting is a “manifestation” of one’s passion as a fan and as a “pretty good indicator of cred” within a fan community. Cred, short for credibility, naturally is associated with a certain amount of status—to lack credibility is to have less status.

Finally, in discussing casual fans of Comic-Con, Leia offers a counter example as it relates to collectibles:

There are people who go to get the free swag just to auction it off. Who would do that? And those are the bad people, and its not “Oh, you don’t belong here,” but really, why are you here? This isn’t your passion, this isn’t your love, this is just something for you to piss away a weekend.

This is a phenomenon mentioned by several Comic-Con attendees. The free gifts given away as part of attending Comic-Con have become so coveted by collectors that there are attendees who collect them merely to sell them at a profit on auction sites like eBay. These items are not commonly inherently valuable; some of the most popular items include t-shirts, buttons, and canvas bags. It is the fact that these items can only be obtained by attendees of Comic-Con that make them high-ticket items on the secondary market. While sharing or giving of these items to those who couldn’t attend is seen as an act of altruism, selling these items for a profit is seen by Leia as the act of “bad” person, for whom the convention and fandom is not their passion and who is not embraced by the

convention's fans in return. The fans who acquire swag just to auction it off are reminiscent of the "investors" in Brown's (1997) work who purchase comics merely for the investment, which Brown calls "the act of a heartless villain" (p. 27).

Effort.

An additional form of investment as presented by fans interviewed for this project is effort. Effort refers to the amount of work a fan has exerted or is perceived to have exerted in the course of their fan activity.

While few TWoP participants mentioned effort as a key form of investment, one who did again referenced travel as a prime component. When asked how he knew if someone was a fan of a particular show, Phil replied:

Well, certainly flying to New York and going to a party with other Television Without Pity members is a pretty good sign.

Here, Phil is referencing one of the most popular TWoP meet-ups, the party to celebrate the finale of *The Amazing Race* (TARCon). TARCon is held at the close of every season of the popular reality show, and has traditionally had a significant number of contestants from the show in attendance, making this a popular event for TWoP users on *The Amazing Race* message boards. Like Kara above, Phil indicates that travel and physically being present require a particular amount of effort, above and beyond what the average fan might do. This is reminiscent of the findings of Richardson and Turley's 2008 study of English football fans. They found that stories of how far a fan has come and how difficult it was to get there are rewarded with cultural capital within the community (Richardson & Turley, 2008).

In order to conduct participant observation of Comic-Con, I did, in fact, travel a great distance, from Lawrence, Kansas, to San Diego, California. Additionally, the first

trip in 2008 could be characterized as “difficult.” Being a “newbie” to Comic-Con, I had waited too long to make my travel arrangements and found that in order to get to the convention I would need to (1) fly into Los Angeles, instead of San Diego, (2) rent a car for the 126 mile journey, and (3) return each night to my hotel in La Jolla (14 miles from the convention center) which was the nearest available hotel. In talking with other attendees, the topic of where we had come from and how we had arrived in San Diego was a common icebreaking conversation.

From fieldnotes: ...He asks what has brought me to Comic-Con and I tell him a little bit about the project. When I mention that I’m working towards a Ph.D., he asks where, and I tell him the University of Kansas. His eyes go wide, and says “So, you’ve come all this way? For this?” He then comments on how his journey takes only a few hours by train, and is easy by comparison, and that he couldn’t imagine traveling such a long distance to attend the con. Although I’ve seen and spoken with several people from much farther away than Kansas, I do get the impression that this man thinks the trip I’ve made is a bit silly, or not worth it.

My experience here demonstrates the conundrum of exerting effort towards a fan practice: too little marks one as a non-fan, but too much can also be met with derision or result in a loss of status with some people. Similar to the fans discussed in Chapter 4 who view some fan activities as “too big,” my effort was viewed by this fellow con-goer as too much effort. My travels and effort granted me no cultural capital in this interaction, although others with whom I had similar conversations appeared impressed at the length of my journey.

Beyond travel, there are additional forms of effort that impact one’s status within fan communities. Comic-Con attendee Logan references cosplay as one means of evaluating someone’s fandom.

So the immediate –if you’re at Comic-Con, the immediately visible or obvious things are the costume. So if somebody has put a lot of – and it might actually be a false system because maybe they just bought the costume, somebody else made it. But it is definitely the first thing that might impress you and make you think, “Oh, this person really is a fan.” So if they have a really elaborate costume...I actually feel guilty sometimes because a lot of times I just throw stuff together for what seems to me to be kind of last minute.

Because costumes are immediately noticeable upon meeting someone, Logan points to them as the most obvious indicator of someone’s fandom. If a costume is quite elaborate or detailed, it would seem to indicate that the wearer has put a certain amount of effort into its creation, as Logan starts to say before stopping himself to interject that this may be a “false system.” In some cases, it would be difficult to tell upon seeing someone’s costume whether they had made it themselves, purchased it commercially, or paid someone else to make it for them. Logan’s implication is that there is something more valuable about having expended the effort oneself. He implies this again when speaking of his own costume creation. To put something together at the “last minute” in such a way that implies little effort (“throw stuff together”) causes Logan to feel guilty, as though he has not behaved appropriately for a fan.

Time.

A key form of investment for participants is related to time. This presented in one of two ways: some participants discussed the amount of time put into fandom (e.g., spending four hours waiting in line, or nine hours per week engaging in discussion on TWoP), while others talked about time in a broader, longer-term sense (i.e., having been a fan of a particular object for so many years, or having been a Comic-Con attendee since a certain year).

For participants who described this first meaning of time, they commonly discussed things like the amount of time spent preparing for an event, or hours per day spent on the message boards, long stretches of waiting in line at Comic-Con and so on. Logan describes a friend who is a regular participant in the costume ball at Comic-Con and other conventions:

I have at least one friend who tries to compete in some of those balls that they have at many of these cons. She spends weeks and weeks usually with a team of people...preparing her costume. So I do more preparation than the person who just puts on jeans and a t-shirt, but I know that I definitely don't do anywhere near as much as my friend Kate does.

Logan had previously described himself as someone who did wear costumes to Comic-Con, but that they were usually fairly simple or made from leftover Halloween costume parts. He proposes a direct comparison between that behavior and that of his friend Kate, who regularly spends several weeks working to prepare an elaborate costume that she then uses to directly compete against others in the masquerade.

In the second conception of time, fans that have been with the community or object longer are described as the group with more status and power. Leia says:

I kind of want to go back to [the idea of] being a true fan and being an onlooker. Because on one side there is a huge tendency for some of the hard-core nerds to get a little elitist about stuff. I have a tendency to do that. People will tell me, "Oh I play a warlock in World of Warcraft and it's super easy," and I'll go, "You should have played it when it was really hard. I have played a Warlock since then. It was really difficult."

Leia articulates an issue that is common for communities with regularly new members joining in: the idea that there was something more challenging about being a part of the group at an earlier time. Leia is differentiating her experience of playing World of Warcraft from that of a new player, by presenting it as more challenging or more worthy of praise and credit at some unnamed time in the past. She equates the tendency to make

such claims with the “true fan” and the “hard-core” nerds. Later, when discussing different types of fans and fan behaviors, Leia is asked if she believes there are certain types of fans who don’t belong at Comic-Con.

I don’t want to say don’t belong, I feel like that’s a little elitist, we all start very noob, not knowing anything about it. I started playing D&D—I’m planning on DMing [Dungeon Mastering] a game at PAX...I would be really sad if someone was like, “You’re not welcome, since you haven’t been playing since second edition.”

In this comment, Leia is again concerned with the idea of appearing elitist and shows an empathy for the “noob” fan, a slang term used to refer to new members of a community, or “newbies.” She shows empathy for the noob, both by recognizing that all fans start as a newbie at one point or another, and by her confession that she is a relative newcomer in the Dungeons & Dragons community. Despite the official authority that is granted to her by acting as a Dungeon Master, the player in charge of running the game, at an upcoming fan convention called PAX East, Leia recognizes that there is always likely someone who has been a member of the fandom for longer than you have (i.e., since the second edition).

New members of a community are regularly characterized as not being familiar with the rules or norms or not behaving in a way that is in keeping with the rest of the community. This is documented by Baym’s (2000) research on soap opera Usenet groups, in that “young turks” or newcomers to the community were marked by particular behaviors characteristic of their newness to the community. Similarly, Rose says:

The big obvious one is that the new users have the “Just Tuned In” badge on their name. People who have been there or posted a lot, have a title under their names. And then there is people, how they post. If they are not familiar with the rules, they might break the rules.

On TWoP, new posters are easily identifiable through the badge under their user name.

User names are all tagged with a designation, indicating how many posts they've made to the site and how new they are.⁵ Rose indicates a concern expressed by several participants: those who are new have not taken the time to review the rules for posting at TWoP, of which there are many, and therefore their posts negatively impact the quality of the board as a whole, placing new users in a disadvantaged position.

Rory also casts the new user against the more respected long-time user at TWoP:

One of the things that has struck me over the years that I have been online—and I have been online for a while—that there's certain ways in which you can tell whose opinion is respected in online communities versus newbies. Because of the way people will quote certain people and not others . . . this is someone who [has] made a name for him or herself in the thread and this gets quoted a lot and you can see this time and time again. I think that for people who are new [they] can feel a little alienated because they are post light it might feel like that they are getting ignored until they [have] established themselves or however they might do that. But I seen that happen quite a bit, not just at Television Without Pity, but elsewhere that you can see who the 500-pound gorillas are versus people who might be brand new or something like that.

Here, the long-time user is the 500-pound gorilla in the community: he or she carries authority, is quoted often in other users' posts and are a part of the "established" community. New users, or newbies, on the other hand, may find themselves left out of the conversation, as quoting is often used as a way to establish a dialogue in a message board with multiple topics of conversation existing in the same thread.

⁵ In most cases, the number of posts one has made corresponds directly with how long one has been a member; older members tend to have more posts, and participants characterized it as such in our interviews. So while the "Just Tuned In" badge actually indicates that a poster has made 0-10 posts to the site, most TWoP users interpret that as someone who is new to the site, rather than a long-time user who posts very infrequently.

Cultural capital.

Cultural capital is amassed by fans through a number of different strategies. The dominant sub-themes related to cultural capital to emerge from this data are *creativity, exclusive knowledge, knowledge of content outside of the text, knowledge of obscure information, quantity of knowledge*, and the ability to *quote the text*.

Creativity.

Although not all participants were able to describe a complete hierarchy for their fandom, several tried, as Kara does here for her sub-community of fan fiction writers.

So instead what you get – instead of a hierarchal thing from above, you get a very free-form, democratic, loose connection of people online, where your status – and I think this is one of the topics you’re trying to get into on your dissertation – your status is basically determined by how well you play with others, and at what you give back to the fan community. Somebody who just lurks and never comments on fic and doesn’t write or produce any content of their own is at the bottom level. The next level up would be somebody who comments on fic fairly regularly and says nice, but constructive things, but doesn’t release any content of their own. But they’re at least active and providing an active audience. The next step up would be somebody like me, who does write and produce some content. The next step up would be somebody who runs an archive for various fan-fic of a show or a comic or TV series. If you’re running a site, you’re doing a lot more administrative stuff, and not necessarily so much fun stuff.

From here, Kara goes on to describe the top level of fandom, consisting of the “big name fan.” These are fans that through their own contributions to the fandom, in this case by the writing of fan fiction, have achieved a level of recognition and fame within the fan community. Lurkers (those who read but do not post) are ranked at the bottom here, with status increasing as the amount of contribution increases. Those who post comments are ranked above lurkers, with those who are creating original content ranked above them still.

This construction of hierarchy is echoed in Jim’s Comic-Con experience:

There are times where I felt like the biggest comic book fan in like a mile of anybody who was at the show. And then there are often times where I felt like I was definitely like out-nerded by somebody who is way more knowledgeable than me about comics or somebody who was like an actual creator who had done a lot and you know, I haven't made a comic. I haven't published a comic.

This comment points first to the fluidness of the hierarchy that exists within fan communities. At one moment, he feels on top in comparison to other attendees. When confronted with particularly knowledgeable fans or comic creators, however, Jim feels as though his position changes, and that he has been outdone or “out-nerded” implying a lowering of his status.

Knowledge.

Another form of cultural capital is amassed through knowledge. This category is similar to the use of knowledge as a marker described in the first portion of this chapter. Here, the amount one knows about their object is key to hierarchy construction and can be divided into sub-themes of quantity and exclusivity.

Quantity of knowledge.

The sheer quantity of knowledge a fan has about their object is a factor in determining their status within the community. Put very simply by Claire:

Just talking to the person – if they know about the show and what they're talking about. That's how I know [if] they're a big fan or not. You can tell by talking to someone if they're a casual fan or a big-time fan by how much they actually know about that particular show.

As we have seen previously, she cites knowledge of the object itself as the primary way to determine someone's status as a fan. Leia agrees that this is the most important way to determine someone's level of fan “cred.”

So, one is definitely knowledge. Out of the criterion nerd cred on, the most important is knowledge. I would say that is the biggest thing, when one nerd starts

talking to another they see how deep the conversation can go, with the things that they really enjoy. Like if someone wanted to talk to me about Star Wars, I could hold my own, if somebody wanted to talk to me about all the different X-men, I really wouldn't be able to hold my own. I know the big ones but I really don't know a lot of them, and that would reduce my cred in that region.

Here, Leia demonstrates that credibility or status can be limited to particular objects.

Having a high status or credibility in discussing Star Wars does not necessarily transfer over when discussing X-Men.

Lane describes how someone becomes an "alpha fan," as she calls them, in the communities she has been a part of, with knowledge being an important determinant:

Everybody refers to them so there is just some kind of authority that their name keeps on coming up. When someone says, "Well, who knows this?" and it always points to one of three or four people and then when that person or those people respond back it's usually directed to people that they know. They will usually answer first to people that are in that second round if you will.

Particular users develop a reputation for having an above average amount of knowledge on topics relevant to the community. As such, other users mention them by name, targeting questions directly to them, and increasing the perception that these alpha fans would be seen as a source of information. In turn, the responses of these alpha fans tend to involve a second round, or tier, of users, associating them positively with the alpha fans themselves (social capital will be discussed in further detail below).

Exclusive knowledge.

One type of knowledge for fans is the exclusive knowledge. This is information that is not available to the general public or won't be made available until later. For the fans interviewed for this study, there was an amount of caché to be gained from having access to information that could be considered exclusive.

The idea of getting to the information first is an important element of Comic-Con. Due to its nature as a press-generating event, the information presented at Comic-Con quickly becomes available online. Videos and summaries of panels are posted online quickly after they conclude and in the days following the convention; much, if not all of the information presented will be made available to the general public by the studios. The benefit of being there in person is to receive the information first.

From fieldnotes: As the room is now dark for this portion of the panel, it's easy to see the number of attendees documenting this in some way. I can see five people in my close vicinity taking notes onto a laptop, seemingly trying to document every moment of this panel. Despite the announcement prior to the panel starting to please not record video portions of the presentation, a woman in the row in front of me is covertly videotaping the special video presented by the creators of *Lost*. I wonder if this is for her personal use or how quickly it's going to turn up on YouTube.

Although I was not able to confirm the motivations of those documenting this panel, it is likely that they were doing so with the aim of sharing it with others through their blog, website, or publication. These actions make it possible for those who could not be in San Diego for the convention to gather the same knowledge as the attendees. However, those in physical attendance are still able to lay claim to the badge of having received the information first.

Attendees will wait in long lines for hours, sometimes sleeping outside overnight to ensure that they are able to get into the panels that they want to see. Alexis says,

But at Comic-Con, that is the end-all. The person who's here for the first time and the person who's been going here for 50 years are on equal footing when they're waiting in line. Even though the guy who's been going for 50 years has more geek points, when you finally walk out of the ballroom at the end of the day, you've both seen the cutting edge of cool. So now one is not cooler than the other. You both are just cooler than the rest of the universe who wasn't at Comic-Con.

Alexis presents Comic-Con as an equalizing force for attendees. All those who waited in line and got to see their desired panels are on the same playing field, and in an enviable position to everyone else who is not there. The group of attendees is contrasted against the outgroup of “the rest of the universe” not in attendance. Alexis compares a newcomer such as herself to someone who’s been attending for 50 years (a slight exaggeration, though not by much; the first Comic-Con was held in 1970), saying that their access to the exclusive knowledge Comic-Con provides places them on equal footing with one another. However, in this same sentiment, she refers to the veteran’s “geek points” indicating that there is indeed a status differential within Comic-Con, in this case based on one’s length of time in the fan community.

Quoting of text.

Quoting of relevant texts has been previously established as a marker of fandom earlier in this chapter. Here, as was the case with knowledge, there is evidence of quoting as a means of determining status and hierarchy. The power of quoting both in establishing hierarchy and establishing bonds within a community is evident in the following anecdote from Alexis:

When I meet someone in a non-geek setting – I was just at a party last night, and I started talking to this guy. We’re both film majors. So we have something in common. We’re both at this party, so we have a base thing in common. We know the same person...So you like visual storytelling at some level. So then, I mentioned my Joss Whedon project, and he quoted “Serenity” the movie to me. At that point—he was an okay-looking guy, but at that moment, I thought he was the most romantic man in the world. It was just that realization that you cared about that story enough to commit a line to memory; and then you unabashedly said it to me in public. It blew my mind. “Now I must know who you are. We must exchange information because you have won me in that way.”

The ability to quote from the show raises Alexis’s opinion of the other fan, and works to establish a bond between them. This demonstrates both knowledge on behalf of the other

fan, which we have seen marking fans as high in status previously, as well as establishing that in terms of identity, there is a similarity that exists that is, at least in part, based on the fandom of this particular Joss Whedon work.

Social Capital.

Social capital refers to the benefits one gains from those they are associated with. Their network of connections brings with it a particular value for the fan. Participants made reference to social capital in terms of proximity, socializing, and sharing with one another.

Proximity.

Proximity refers to a fan's ability to associate with someone with celebrity status within the community, such as the creator or actor on a television program, or even a particularly Big Name Fan.

It may be the case that a fan would get some form of caché merely by associating with a celebrity or creator. Alexis says,

They would name drop, "I've met this person, and let me show you pictures so you can bask in how cool I am."

This coolness is clearly a direct result of being associated with a particular person. The photo serves as evidence of them having met and can be shared with others within the community. Interestingly, Alexis presents this with a degree of derision. Rather than being impressed or interested in a fellow fan's experience, this instead seems to be perceived as bragging or disingenuous in some way ("name dropping" being an unnatural, purposeful attempt to impress others with one's proximity to particular people).

Lane describes here how she uses proximity with the celebrity to solidify her status as an alpha fan in a community:

Lane: But then the ultimate legitimacy is when [a celebrity] acknowledges. So if I throw something up on the board—let's say it's on their Facebook page—to turn around and have the celebrity actually make a comment to me?

Interviewer: Huge.

Lane: Look, I can't even tell you. At that point: inner circle.

Lane is able to use her relationship with the celebrity to establish herself as a leader in the group. Once this has been done, she can use that position to model positive behaviors and scold negative ones.

At an event like Comic-Con, the opportunities for proximity are great. Alexis describes the types of attendees as such:

The Comic-Con attendee is someone who knows way more about the internet than any other person, and who follows and writes blogs. That's the interesting thing. I would say about 20 percent of the people walking around Comic-Con are people whose internet names you would recognize if you were on the internet for ungodly amounts of time looking up pop culture things. It's kind of weird to think that everyone walking around you is two steps away from being quite famous and influential in the internet world. Then of course comes the question – what percentage of the population reads those blogs and cares? And how influential are they really? But for the people at Comic-Con – the people who blog – like i09 is a sci-fi blog. Those guys are walking around. Those guys are going to influence so much on the internet, and they're just walking around and looking just like you. I think that's the most unnerving thing about Comic-Con – Felicia Day is in line with me to go to the bathroom.

This excerpt demonstrates not only the likelihood of having such an encounter at Comic-Con, but also the fact that proximity does not necessarily mean “celebrity” in the traditional sense of the word. There is proximity here both in terms of celebrity (Felicia Day) and big names within a particular community (the i09 bloggers). The degree to

which having met the bloggers from i09 would be impressive to someone, or result in an elevation in status is variable, and unique to particular groups.

Alexis describes the ways in which an event like Comic-Con can break down the barriers and status differentials between creator and fan:

Because Comic-Con gets such a mass of a very particular type of entertainment person, you really can make connections like that. Being able to say – we went to the signing, and I sat on the sidelines of Joss Whedon and Marissa, his wife, for signing *Dollhouse* posters with the new comic book coming out. They walked past me, and I said, “Hey, can I get an interview with you guys?” He said, “Oh, tweet at us. We’re on Twitter. We don’t know if we have time, but ...” That sort of being able to be that casual – but only because we were in Comic-Con, and we know that we only have four days before everybody goes back to being “Talk to my agent. Talk to my publicist.” That was great, because we had such close access. We got to really get close to people who were very high up, who would have taken months to jump through hoops to prove what we were doing beforehand. But because we were there and we were able to say, “I have a camera right here. Here are our credentials. Can we do an on-the-spot interview?” Comic-Con was a great equalizer in that everybody knew that at the end of the day everybody believes the same things about pop culture.

Harry echoes a similar sentiment:

So it’s just a nice melting pot in these bars around conventions, where all of a sudden, everyone is at these different levels. They have their reputations within the industry. You get there, and it’s just a melting pot. Instead of being – a community of different freelance artists and different comic book companies that are spanning all corners of the globe – it’s all people who are comic book fans under one roof, having some beers, having a meal and just talking about their passion, which is this medium of comic books and pop culture that has led to this phenomenon that is Comic-Con.

The first excerpt focuses on increased access to creators in a professional sense. Alexis is concerned with her ability to procure interviews and interact with creators without having to go through publicists and assistants. Harry, on the other hand, references the tearing down of barriers in a social sense, the ability to grab a beer and talk about comics with

some of the big names in the industry. Both speak to the ability of Comic-Con to put fans in a position to access those at the top of many groups' hierarchies: the creators.

For several fans, their involvement with a fan community was the direct cause of their being able to meet a show's creators. For a time, Phil was associated with a *Veronica Mars* fansite for the show, a role that led to his being invited on set.

I can't speak for now, but at the time [it] was pretty much the primary *Veronica Mars* fan site online, which I realize the terms I'm using is bragging, and I'm not really sure I am. And through that was actually able to - during the final season, actually went out - we were invited to the set, so about 4 or 5 of us flew out to San Diego and spent 3 or 4 days hanging out on the *Veronica Mars* set, and talking to the cast, talking with the crew, interviewing people for the website, taking pictures, that sort of thing. So that's probably a sign that somebody's pretty into that show.

If not for his involvement with the fansite, he would not have had the opportunity to meet the cast and creators of the show. In this way, the proximity and degree of his fandom are heavily intertwined with one another.

Sharing.

Sharing is about bringing others into one's fandom. Inviting non-fan friends and family members to be a participant in one's fandom is one example.

Sharing within a fan community is highly valued. The willingness to be giving within the community is, for some, a marker of their status. Looking again at Kara's description of hierarchy:

So instead, what you get – instead of a hierarchal thing from above, you get a very free-form, democratic, loose connection of people online, where ...your status is basically determined by how well you play with others, and at what you give back to the fan community.

As Kara describes it, a hierarchy is very much in play, but it is not imposed by an official authority in a top-down manner. Rather, this hierarchy is directly related to one's ability

to share and function within the existing community. “Giving back to the fan community” can be interpreted in a number of different ways, dependent on what the community values. In a spoiler community, for example, giving back may be having the most up to date information on what’s going to happen next, while giving in a fan fiction community would look much different.

Between communities.

To this point, this chapter has discussed the ways in which fans attribute status and create hierarchies within their own fan communities in which they consider themselves members, either broadly within TWoP or Comic-Con, or more narrowly (e.g., within *Veronica Mars* fandom). This section will focus on the ways in which fans draw distinctions *between* communities (i.e., distinctions between a community they belong to and one to which they do not). Participants did so in two main ways. Differences were established based either on the object itself (e.g., fans of *Star Wars* vs. fans of *Star Trek*), based on the fans’ behavior as a group (e.g., quiet appreciation vs. screaming and shrieking), or based on medium. We will first explore status based on different objects.

Status based on object.

In the broadest sense, fans of media objects are separate from those who consider themselves fans of non-fictional or non-mediated works. Jim describes,

That’s the part that’s portrayed from the outside that looks a little odd, because it looks odd to people to argue so fiercely about what’s going with a character, or what was a great event, or what was in continuity or out continuity, some of those things I tend to be more polite, and say that if you get a couple of war historians together they do the same thing, the problem is that we get obsessive about fiction and these are people who get obsessive about fact. A fan is someone who has defended their ideas and discussed their ideas maybe, and have worked to understand the other points of view out there, or at least has confronted them.

Here, Jim articulates a classic conflict for media fandom. The behaviors are very similar to those of someone who are very interested in history or any number of non-fictional, “serious” forms. It is the object itself that is the key differentiator, with non-fiction being lent a higher status in the world at large due to its “realness.”

This type of differentiation continues between fans of different types of fiction. At Comic-Con one of the distinctions made by many users was between those who are there for mainstream interests, and those who are there for panels that are less commercial.

Leia says,

And that’s the kind of thing I mean when I say that it’s getting really commercial. It’s like you’re only here for the one thing, and I don’t know, you’re just here to see a clip for a movie that you think is cool and you live in the area, and you’re not really here for the whole Comic-Con experience, who don’t care about comics, you are not invested in the culture or anything like that... So I don’t want to say that they don’t belong, it’s just when I see them interact with the thing that they are present for, is that they don’t seem to have the same type of passion, they aren’t there to, I guess, interact. They are just there to absorb and to take, a lot of things what I described about, what makes a true fan, a lot of it is tied into interaction and knowledge and you share that knowledge and you talk about it with other people because when you’re passionate about it you can’t not talk about it with other people.

For Leia, those that attend Comic-Con only to pursue a commercial interest are less worthy of participation in the convention than those that attend out of a long-lasting investment with the Comic-Con culture. The reference to effort should be noted, as well. Here, the idea of the casual fan or non-fan is associated with not needing to travel or exert much effort in order to attend (“you live in the area”). The casual fan, there for mainstream interests, is also less likely to be passionate or engage with other attendees, according to Leia.

Overwhelmingly, the most popular “other” fandom to call out by name was *Twilight*.

- Jack: But like, this year's going to be crazy because *Twilight's* there. I was kidding with a friend of mine, because they were saying - oh you know, the *Twilight* crazies are going to be there.
- Ron: More, like I think it started with just it was an easy like, *Twilight* is an easy target, and then they started seeing how it was affecting their enjoyment of the entire event. Because when you have people there just for one thing and then they're gone, they take up space though when they're there so they're not a non-entity. They end up making everything, everybody, they take from others. That's what I usually was hearing was, especially for the *Avatar*, when *Avatar* was coming out, they had a panel right after and people were really upset that, like this woman I was waiting in line with, she really wanted to see the *Avatar* panel and she couldn't because of the *Twilight* people because they pushed the line back so far so they could get in. So they could get in, the line was pushed back before she ever got to get in to see what she wanted and everybody else also had to get in line even longer because if you wanted to get in for something, you had to go in hours earlier than just maybe like one hour or two, you had to go three to four.
- Leia: On one side I'm like, "Yay people are reading that's cool," on the other side, I'm like, "*Twilight* really isn't fantasy. It isn't paranormal at all, it's just a romance with vampires tacked on to it, so it kind of just misses the whole point," I guess. On the flipside its kind of its detracting from the original intent of the con I guess, It's a comic convention in name only.

Twilight fandom is presented as a clear negative influence on the convention itself and the attacks take multiple approaches. Leia critiques it on the basis of genre; *Twilight* does not fit into the boundaries of what she has marked as appropriate for inclusion at the con, as it isn't properly "paranormal." Ron, on the other hand, points to *Twilight* fans amount of effort as a reason for criticism. Because they put *too much* effort in, by arriving too early to the line, they've taken the place of the *Avatar* fans in line,⁶ and as such are the

⁶ This participant is referring to the process of waiting in line for Hall H, the largest room at the San Diego Convention Center and the place where the most popular panels are held each year. Hall H is unique from all other panels at Comic-Con in the manner in which the line works. First, it is the only line that is outside, meaning that attendees can start lining up at any time, even the night before a panel. Second, the room is not cleared after each panel, as it is in every other room. The effect of this is that attendees can claim a

objects of scorn. Finally, Jack uses *Twilight* fans to play into one stereotype associated with fandom: that of the “crazy” fan.

Status based on behavior.

An alternative means of differentiating between fan communities is to do so based on fan behavior.

Part of posting on TWoP means following a fairly strict set of guidelines and rules for interaction. Meant to keep the level of conversation high, they have led to TWoP’s reputation as a site that is different from other fan sites with regard to the quality of the writing, as described here by Veronica:

I find that the other people that use Television Without Pity are generally very intelligent people and that’s what draws me to the site. It is to have that kind of discussion with people that are interesting and can use capital letters and punctuation and can understand plot structure and character development, you don’t find that on a lot of other boards. That’s kind of what makes it special, or a more special site.

TWoP is compared to other message boards and is described here as a special site, with a higher level of conversation, conducted by intelligent people. This is in implicit comparison to the rest of the fan message boards available to fans, which are presumably populated by users that discuss at a lower level of discourse.

seat in the hall and simply wait for their panel to start, even if it does not begin for hours (e.g., say the *Avatar* panel begins at 10am and the *Twilight* panel begins at 1pm. *Twilight* fans could camp out in line overnight to be the first in the door when it opens for the *Avatar* panel. Although they’re not interested in *Avatar*, they’re able to claim a seat that they can sit in for the three hours until the *Twilight* panel begins. Meanwhile, those who are there to see *Avatar*, but who lined up later or did not camp out, are unable to see the *Avatar* panel, as there are *Twilight* fans filling the hall.) This act is seen by some as strategic or a means to guarantee oneself an opportunity to see the panel they are passionate about. Others find this practice both annoying and unfair, as it may actually be keeping others from seeing their passion at the con.

Status based on medium.

In studying both an online and offline community, many participants discussed the differences between the two, clearly differentiating from fandom that takes place online and fandom which involves an offline or face to face component. With regard to status, participants do not agree on whether or not it will transfer from one venue to another.

Previously, in discussing proximity, Alexis stated:

But for the people at Comic-Con – the people who blog – like i09 is a sci-fi blog. Those guys are walking around. Those guys are going to influence so much on the internet, and they're just walking around and looking just like you.

Here, the status of influential online bloggers clearly carries over into the offline world of Comic-Con. While she may not recognize them, she is aware that they are present at the convention and expresses that they are influential, not just in an online setting. Kara presents an opposing point of view:

No. Nobody can see when they see you what your status is. Any cred that you acquired online does not lap over into the Comic-Con experience.

Upon first looking, she says, it is not immediately apparent what a user's status is. If someone has amassed a certain amount of cultural capital or credibility online, that will not transfer over into Comic-Con. She does present one scenario as an exception, however:

It might at a smaller more fandom-run conference because the attendees are all coming from the same online group. So if you have your name badge with your alias, they'll be like, "Shit, you're so-and-so. I love your work."

In this case, the size of the community is the key factor. A smaller convention, wherein the same set of members interact both online and off, is more likely to see "cred" transfer from one setting to another, due to name recognition and familiarity within the group.

Across communities.

One theme related to status applied both within and between fan communities (i.e., across communities): demographic characteristics.

Demographic characteristics.

Several commonly studied types of demographic characteristics were coded in analyzing data for this study: race, gender, sexual identity, able-bodiedness, and age. Although this study was primarily concerned with participants' identity and power struggles as fans, their other social identities and status in society outside of their fan communities remains relevant. Age and gender were mentioned the most often, with other categories receiving only passing mentions, as described below.

Sexual identity was mentioned only three times in passing, with no positive or negative connotations in terms of hierarchy. Race was also mentioned very infrequently, fewer than 10 times. The majority of these mentions focused around the whiteness of the Comic-Con crowd (Logan: "But it is almost all white and baby boomer.") or the discussion of racial issues on TWoP. Again, no clear link was made between talk of race and talk of hierarchy creation.

Only one participant mentioned fans with different abilities or the experience of not being able-bodied in a fan setting, and did so to express positivity around the conditions at Comic-Con. Luke says,

Anyone who's been for a few years—one of the joys of Comic-Con, which is really odd, is handicapped service. You have some of the most positive handicap services that you've ever met because there is this whole core of fandom, science fiction fans who were disabled and they have been able to run an organization so it feels like their place too. And the whole idea that I think of fans, comic fans, and science fiction fans as inclusive, and so that's one of these things where it's more than making sure that access is available, it's making sure that people feel welcome. It's having a huge desk in the lobby so that if people have trouble you

can always talk to them. It's people walking around trying to remind people don't get crazy in the line too long, let's see if we can make it work for you. I think we will miss some of that, the people that volunteer that part of who they are. There is probably a core there that you don't see, but it's really important.

This description portrays fans, and comic fans in particular, as an inclusive group that is accommodating to different groups and their needs. This, in turn, elevates them beyond the outgroup of non-fans who would be likely to discriminate.

The two types of demographic characteristics that were referenced the most often were age and gender.

Kara describes the makeup of fans at Comic-Con:

I see people of all – most genders, ages, older people, younger people, and just a lot of people who don't really seem to be there for any one thing, just sort of to spectate. It seems to draw a lot of casual non-fan attendees.

Here, the presence of an array of different demographic groups is associated with the casual or non-fan, someone who is there only to observe as an outsider.

Generally speaking, younger fans were associated with less knowledge and a lower standing in the community.

Rose: I think sometimes, you can tell between users who are younger and users who are older.

Interviewer: How can you tell the difference?

Rose: Well sometimes it's just basic trivia. If they post something and they're like I've never seen this before, and other users will post "that's a reference from a movie from 1970 something" and they don't know about that because they are younger and not familiar.

Age is shown here as a cause for being less familiar with references within the fan community. While it may be true that users are not familiar with media objects or trivia from before "their time" this lack of knowledge is not necessarily linked solely to age.

Younger posters on TWP were also associated with certain objects or types of behavior that are seen as undesirable:

Leia: Then you have a lot of the teenybopper types who are there for like *Twilight*

Rory: ...generally speaking, the people who post tend to be well educated like college students or above and tend to be a little on the older side. By older I mean 25 or older. That's the general sense I get from the kind of discussion because there's not too much teenage squealing and stuff. We don't really see so much of that and I appreciate that because that's Twitter's downfall you know.

Rory makes the assumption that TWP's audience is in the 25+ age range based on the fact that there is a limited amount of "squealing." This idea of "squealing" or "squeeing" was introduced by several participants and was characterized by an overly excited reaction to the text and a lack of in-depth thought in one's comments. It was commonly paired with age, as Rory has done here. To be associated with a younger group was invariably presented as a negative, as in this discussion of fan fiction from Pam:

You know, fan fiction has kind of a teen girl reputation. You know what I'm saying?...And my god! The fan fiction thing I kept that on the DL too. Because again that has such a weird, such a juvenile connotation: *Twilight* kind of stuff.

The "teen girl reputation" associated with fan fiction is clearly a negative for Pam. It is so much so, in fact, that she references keeping it on the "DL" (down low) or as a secret from those close to her because of its association with being "juvenile."

Being associated with young people presented as an issue for Comic-Con goes as well; Kara says,

There's a perception that despite the fact that many mature adults have been pulled in the last 20 years, there's still a perception that comic books are still a kids medium. And that whenever something comes up that isn't for kids, they're like, "Comic books aren't just for kids anymore." It's like "Yeah, no shit. They haven't been for the past 20 years. Where have you been?"

The association with comic books as a kids' medium is a topic that is fraught for many fans of the genre who seek to have comic books taken more "seriously" as an art form. The perception that all comic books are inherently for children is a point of frustration for many comic book fans, including Kara.

Conversely, being older did not present the same sort of issues, at least for one TWP user, Lana:

Television Without Pity is a safe place to have your opinion. It's not that people won't call you out on them. They will. It's not that people won't disagree. They will. But it's also just the fact that it is a safe place for a nearly 50-year-old woman to [think] that Tom Welling is kind of cute.

Lana, a woman in her late 40s, expresses here the idea that older users are free to express their opinion without fear of repercussions, designating it a "safe place." If TWP represents a safe place, there is an implication that there are fan spaces in which age is problematic.

Much like with age, gender was referenced often by fans as being associated with negative perceptions of fandom. In comparing current behavior with past, Leia said,

I was a bigger fan of things through high school. I haven't been as crazy fan-girlly as I used to be.

Here being a "bigger fan" is associated with the fan-girl phenomenon, which clearly has its counterpart in the "fan-boy" stereotype. But fan-girl here is paired with crazy, linking overzealous fan activity and gender together.

Gender is again paired with overzealousness by Alexis:

Then you have the 20s and 30s super-pushy people who are going to get in your face and want you to leave because what they have to do is more important than what you have to do. Also in this category is the overweight women who are going to kill you if they don't get to see their *True Blood* panel. And those are just

the panic people who are like, “If I miss this one thing, my life will end. I don’t care if I have to stab you in the eye with a pen. I’m going to get what I need.” There are the frantic conners, who need what they need. This is their god.

The female fan here fits several stereotypes: she is overweight, a popular stereotype for both male and female fans, but also panicking, frantic, violent, and obsessed with a vampire-themed television show.

For several TWoP users that I spoke to, the show *Supernatural* was suggested as a site of particular interest. The fans posting to TWoP forums for this show were engaged in years long debates over who is the “better character” of the two main character brothers, Sam and Dean Winchester.

Ruby: There is this whole Dean girl versus Sam girl, which I think is a bit obsessive.

Lana: There are the squee-ers. Your best examples of that right now are over at the *Supernatural* area. You have the Dean girls and the fan girls, and never between shall meet. God forbid if you’re in [the middle]... I did try to watch the first several episodes of season one. I was bored out of my mind and didn’t watch it after that. I will never be a “fan” and I certainly will not have a “Sam girls” versus “Dean girls” opinion.

Although surely *Supernatural* has both male and female fans, the debate over which character to favor is clearly associated with females. Moreover, the female fans in question were consistently referred to as “girls,” a term that carries with it implications about not only gender, but also age.

Twilight fans represent the intersection of both age and gender for many fans, particularly Comic-Con goers. Jack says,

I think that's the general consensus, the *Twilight* fans are pretty much tween girls or even the girls into their late-20s. They like the romance, and it gets really—people like to pick on people no matter what social group they're in. Someone's always going after who you think is the weakest, usually the case of the *Twilight* fans or something like that. So that's just human nature, you know, to always

want to make fun of somebody and feel superior. *Twilight* crazies. I'm crazy, but I'm not that crazy.

Jack clearly articulates an aspect of SIT at play. In othering *Twilight* fans as “crazy” other fans can increase their positive perceptions of themselves, and reduce the degree to which they see their own negative attributes. This exchange continues:

Interviewer: So are they seen as being the most over-the-top with their fandom?

Jack: Oh definitely, yeah, because it sort of angers some of the fans because what happens is, it makes it difficult to see the other panels afterwards, because all the *Twilight* girls get there early. Say the panel is at 11:00 in the morning, and your panel is at 1:00 for something else. You're basically in competition with all those *Twilight* girls to get a spot so you can get in the room and get -- and sure, you'll probably get in the room because all the *Twilight* girls will probably get up and leave, you know, and that means all the other people waiting outside will be able to come in; but there'll be enough of a crossover within the group that'll rush towards the front and stay, grab spots or keep their really good spot, and that means you don't get your really good spot near the front. So I think that's what I think probably tick some people off, stuff like that, I'm sure that's it.

This is characteristic of what several participants expressed about the *Twilight* “girls.”

They arrive in mass numbers, are extremely committed to seeing *Twilight* panels and events, and create difficulties for other fans that must interact with them, as in the above example where all con-goers must wait in a common line.⁷

Ann continues with the teen girl fan stereotype:

But I think when I say fannish I mean – it's almost like the teenage girls that are just all over Justin Bieber or whatever his name is. You know where they just be like he's theirs and they claimed him and if you don't like him then you know they can just say all these nasty thing about you. Where it's not really given a chance to just be accepted, it's own merit. I think there are some fans that get a little too emotionally – not emotionally, but they just get a little too possessive of it and they take it very personally when you disagree with them and I don't think they understand the distinction between, “well I disagree that the writer was

⁷ Jack is again referencing the daily line for Hall H at Comic-Con, where fans from one fandom may find themselves competing with another fandom for space in the same line at the same time.

trying to do this. I found this to be a really good choice by the writers to make,” you know, to create this drama. To me that’s more, you know, taking a step back and seeing the television for what it’s worth.

The same tropes emerge: teen girl as overly zealous, overly possessive and personally invested in their fandom, clarifying the low status of the young woman at Comic-Con.

Summary

In this chapter, participants identified a number of markers to identify levels of fandom: cost, effort exerted, socializing, knowledge, and quoting. In marking status among community members and determining hierarchies, participants drew upon particular types of investment, as well as forms of cultural and social capital to boost their standing with their fan communities. Between different fan communities, the object itself, the fan behavior associated with it and the medium used by fans for communication can all serve as markers to hierarchy. Finally, applicable both within and between communities (what I have termed “across communities”), primary social identifiers, such as age and race, have the ability to influence one’s status in relation to fan communities.

In closing, Alexis paints a complete picture of the typical Comic-Con attendee in her mind, complete with traits and behaviors discussed throughout this chapter (demographic markers, knowledge, time spent in the fandom, etc.):

Alexis: The quintessential is going to be a 50-year-old man with some sort of facial hair, overweight, who has a *Star Wars* T-shirt – or anything else geeky – on that is tucked over his beer belly into his cargo shorts; and he is going to have his baseball cap with a logo of some silly geeky thing; but half the Comic-Con will understand. Then over his shoulder, he’s going to have every single free bag, poster, carrier, free thing that you can pick up--he has managed to finagle and get for himself. He’s going to walk around like this is Disneyland, and he is going to know more about everything than anyone else. He is not going to go up to anybody and be like, “Let me tell you about this new movie ‘Tron.’” What he is going to do is wait for someone who’s less knowledgeable than him to mention it; and he’s going to comment with, “Let me tell you, young plebe, all about this super geeky thing I have been following since I was 20.” They walk around

because they've been to Comic-Con a million times, and maybe they have one thing they're really excited for. But the quintessential Comic-Con attendee is a very calm, but very geeky 50-year-old man.

Chapter 6: RQ3 Results

Multiplatform Media

The first research question addressed the means of differentiating particular types of fans and non-fans, positioning them on a sliding scale from “most casual” to “biggest.” The second discussed the intertwined nature of power into that sliding scale, demonstrating means of achieving or losing status within and related to fandom. RQ3 asked: *“Now that media are extended across multiple media, how does engagement with the varying platforms around content play into the size of one’s fandom and evaluations of fans’ place in hierarchies within communities?”* That is to say, how does participation in multiplatform and transmedia storytelling impact participants’ role in the aforementioned hierarchical structures?

When asking about multiplatform elements of their fandom, I found that participants had varying levels of familiarity with this term and topic. Multiplatform elements are relatively new, and are not always known by this term. For participants who were not immediately familiar with the topic, additional explanation and examples were provided. However, if after two clarifications from the interviewer, respondents were still unclear the subject matter was dropped. For those who were familiar with the term, responses focused largely on comics (for non-comic primary objects), webisodes and online game play associated with their object of fandom.

Although all participants considered themselves “fans” of their particular text, not all engaged with the multiplatform or transmedia elements available to them and there was not a clear consensus as to whether or not these elements were an overall positive or

negative development in mass media. Furthermore, because each experience is different, at times a participant would have conflicting views, considering one transmedia or multiplatform effort worthwhile, while another unworthy of time and effort. Two themes emerged, establishing a divide between multiplatform media as a valuable part of the fan experience and multiplatform media as non-essential. Please see Appendix G for a complete list of relevant themes.

Positive attributes of multiplatform media content.

Many participants found multiplatform media to be a valuable contribution to their fandom. For objects that they were especially engaged with, engaging with multiplatform elements seemed only natural and provided additional gratification and enjoyment. For these fans, two sub-themes were present: (1) Passion motivates multiplatform engagement and (2) these elements make the story more enjoyable for them.

Passion motivates multiplatform engagement.

For several participants, engagement with multiplatform elements was a direct outcome of their passion and enthusiasm for their object of fandom. As Debra describes it, this passion is a fundamental reason for seeking out multiplatform content.

But I think that if it were a show that I was totally into than I think I would follow it into all mediums that I could.

Alexis echoes this sentiment, and specifically mentions webisodes, one of the more popular types of multiplatform content.

If I love something that I've seen on TV, I want to go online and see if they made geeky webisodes.

For both, it is their enthusiasm for their objects of fandom, television shows in this case, that provide the impetus to “follow it” into other platforms and seek out additional content. Alexis articulates the motivation behind this activity,

I like everything Joss Whedon has ever done. I don't read comic books, but I have read “Serenity: Better Days,” and I'm starting to read “Buffy” Season Eight...If you love something, you want to love it on every level. You want to incorporate it into your life in every way possible. So multiplatform storytelling becomes essential because an uber-geek is going to look for you, and they're going to look for you on the internet, TV, comic books. You want to be able to experience it at that level.

Alexis describes a scenario in which, while she is not a regular reader of comic books, she has sought them out because of her love for content producer Joss Whedon's other materials. She indicates that this form of storytelling is, in fact, essential for those most-dedicated fans, as it is something that they have come to expect and seek to integrate into their media consumption experience. She also speaks to the responsibility of the media creators. “An uber-geek is going to look for you” implies some level of disappointment, should the content not be found.

Multiplatform elements provide enjoyable experiences.

A second sub-theme relates to gratification derived from multiplatform elements. While there was some discussion of multiplatform elements being enjoyable in their own right, as Angela does:

It wasn't hard when the Office had webisodes, to go on and watch a three-minute webisode every week. It was actually kind of something I would look forward to, particularly in the summer.

Here, Angela is addressing the need for television viewers to supplement their main viewing experience with additional content in order to pass the time between episodes, or in this case, between seasons.

In addition to providing enjoyment based on their own merits, multiplatform media can also work to enhance the overall narrative for viewers. As discussed in the literature review, the ideal use of transmedia storytelling is for “each medium [to do] what it does best” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 96), playing to its strengths to enhance a story. In describing the comic book that extended the story of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* after the television show’s cancellation, Phil says,

[Joss Whedon] basically said, “Well, I can tell it for as long as I want, so it’s 40 issues rather than 22 episodes. And eventually he realized, I have an unlimited special effects budget now, because it costs just as much to draw a close-up of Buffy fretting as it is to draw a large-scale three-way battle between slayers, the army, flying insects, insects dive-bombing the battlefields in Zeppelins, and large Tibetan goddesses coming to life -- I mean, for the whole thing, basically, essentially, he realized he had an unlimited special effects budget, but he can tell the story without the limitations of television.

Liberated from the constraints of network television, the story’s creator was able to take advantage of the freedom provided by the comic book medium in terms of both scale and special effects. Phil points to these elements as instrumental when discussing his motivation for consuming and enjoyment of the *Buffy* comic book series.

When discussing transmedia storytelling, Jenkins also points to the ability of these components to provide “new levels of insight” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 96). On this subject, Pam says,

They had webisodes between season two and season three that I and other people were watching like we were investigative reporters—trying to figure out if there were any clues about what was going to happen in season 3.

For Pam, part of the enjoyment of this multiplatform element was in pursuing those new levels of insight, or materials from the webisodes that would provide clues as to the future of the canonical text.

Critiques of multiplatform media.

Despite the strong praise delivered upon multiplatform media by some fans interviewed for this study, there was far from a universal consensus on the matter. A second theme emerged, indicating that this type of storytelling is not essential to the fan experience. Several sub-themes emerged to support this sentiment: (1) multiplatform media requires too much time; (2) multiplatform media requires too much effort; (3) commercialism makes it less enjoyable; and (4) it is unnecessary.

Multiplatform media requires too much time.

Engaging in multiplatform content requires additional time, beyond the time spent engaging with the original or primary text. Fans must set aside extra time to engage with this additional content, and this commitment may vary from just a few minutes a week to several hours, dependent on the amount and type of multiplatform content consumed. For some users, time constraints were provided as a reason why they did not feel it necessary to engage with this type of media. Ann says,

I wouldn't do that. I don't go to the *Chuck* websites. I don't go to *The Office* webisodes. I would never follow an online comic. I mean, only if you paid me. If you gave me money I would. But I just – I really don't have time. It sounds stupid; I really don't. I have to share my laptop with my children.

Ann gives “time” as the primary reason why she does not engage with the multiplatform content available for two television shows of which she is a dedicated fan. Because she considers her time limited, she chooses to engage with the primary texts only, and not follow them to additional platforms. She highlights a key issue at the end of her sentiment, as well. Depending on the platform chosen, there may be additional constraints on time. In her case, her time online (the chosen platform for extending *Chuck* and *The Office*) is limited by sharing a family computer. Were these shows extended in

ways that could be accessed without a computer, or were the extensions available in multiple forms, she may not feel the same time constraints are relevant.

In this regard, not all fans expressed a unilateral position on multiplatform media. Some may be more or less worthy of a fan's time. Claire says,

I kind of like it when shows don't [have a multiplatform element] because I don't have a lot of time to do all that stuff these days. It's nice when they don't have it, because then I'm not missing anything. If they have it, I feel like I have to find out if it's important or if it enhances the experience. I have to do it, and usually it doesn't.

Referencing the constraints of time, Claire is interested in consuming multiplatform content when it plays a meaningful role in the primary story or "enhances the experience" in some way. She expresses relief at the idea of shows not providing this content at all, thus saving her the time of even evaluating it on its merits as to whether or not it is worthy of being consumed.

Time can also be an issue in terms of what it indicates about a fan's priorities. As Kate says when asked if she engages with multiplatform content,

It actually makes me a little sad to spend that much time on television and I say this as somebody who owns a TiVo.

In this case, Kate has not indicated that she does not *have* the necessary time to seek out multiplatform content. Rather, she has stated that she does not *want* to spend the necessary time. By qualifying the time as "that much" and stating that it would make her "sad," Kate implies that there are more worthy expenditures of her time, even while qualifying that she is a dedicated television user by the mention of her TiVo digital recording device. She has drawn a boundary between the time spent to view television, including programs viewed in the time-shifted manner provided by TiVo, and the time

spent to engage with multiplatform content. Again, we can see a case of there being a line which fans are loathe to cross, separating the big fan from the “too big” fan.

Multiplatform media requires too much effort.

A second sub-theme emerged around the idea of effort. Many expressed that, beyond the time required to seek out and consume multiplatform media content, it often requires a level of effort and aggravation that is considered burdensome.

One type of effort is related to having to look for different components in various locations (e.g., on television, online, in print). As Jim says,

You shouldn't have to go on a scavenger hunt to get a story. The story should just be where it is. You should be able to just get it.

This comment expresses the desire for content to be easily accessible, implying that it should be in just one place (i.e., “where it is”), rather than spread across multiple locations in which fans would need to consult. Jim continues, citing the multiplatform content associated with the 2010 film, *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World* as an example of multiplatform content done well.

Universal and Ubisoft and everyone else involved in all the multi-media tie-ins to *Scott Pilgrim* have done a pretty fantastic job and it's all—everything is at face value. You know where to find everything. You don't have to log into some secret website and enter a code you got in the Sprite bottle to, like, figure out the secret character on page eight's name. That stuff is so ridiculous. It's not cool. It's not fun. You're not gonna get anything out of it and the more—the nerdier you make that kind of stuff the more it takes you out of what it all means and what like you enjoyed about it.

Jim points to a complicated process (e.g., secret websites, codes) in pursuit of learning a relatively small piece of knowledge (i.e., a secret character's name), indicating that this scenario is not enjoyable and is not providing significant value to fans. His comments

imply that multiplatform content that is easier to find requires less effort on his part and that this is a key factor in his enjoyment.

Echoing these sentiments, Kate says,

I don't understand the people who really got into the *Lost* online game. I understand the game in and of itself was something they enjoyed, but I always thought that what you got in terms of story and plot was never going to justify the amount of aggravation of hunting it down.

Similar to Jim, Kate expresses the idea that some pieces of multiplatform content are not worthy, in terms of the amount of information or plot development exchanged for the effort (or aggravation) of acquiring it. There is also an implication of judgment for those who “really got into the *Lost* game” indicating that their participation was not going to be worthy of the effort they put in. As effort was established in RQ1 as a marker of “big fandom,” to exert too much may push a fan into those biggest levels—those deemed undesirable and “too big” by many. Thus, it is acceptable not to pursue the biggest levels of fandom (i.e., exerting the effort required for engaging multiplatform media) without losing any status.

Commercialism makes it less enjoyable.

An additional reason fans felt multiplatform content was not essential was related to the concept of commercialism. For fans that feel the multiplatform content's purpose is primarily marketing (in contrast to advancing or expanding the story), the content then becomes less enjoyable. Jim says,

I remember when *Cloverfield* came out, I liked it a lot when I saw in the theaters, but there was just so much viral stuff attached to it that it just became a mess. I was interested for half an hour because there was some *Cloverfield* manga and I was like, “I'm gonna write about this. I'm gonna read this comic, and I'm gonna find out what this big secret is behind this monster.” And, you know, there was no secret. Like it was just a bunch of misdirection and it was all very corporate. It

was all very motivated by buzz ... You know, you go from really being excited about a story to just hating it.

For Jim, his initial interest in the film *Cloverfield* and its related content was tampered significantly by what he perceived as an overabundance of commercial intent from creators. He was excited about the manga extension of the film, enough so that he expressed intent to both consume it and write about it. However, upon realizing that there was no additional information provided about the mysterious creature featured in the film, his opinion shifted. The final sentence of this excerpt indicates that it was not merely a case of losing interest where it had once existed. Rather, his feelings shifted to “hate,” an example of the type of backlash creators can endure when their multiplatform media is not executed to fans’ liking.

Integrating additional platforms is a decision that is loaded with meaning for some fans. When discussing the move between comic books and film, Kara says,

My basic beef is that it’s considered – it’s like if the screenwriters of Hollywood take an interest in your comic book—“Oh, crap. You’ve arrived. You’re a real art form now.” And no, you were a real art form to begin with. I don’t like the fact that the film is considered a more serious medium than a comic because it tends to make more money.

Kara expresses a common concern for comic book fans (Brown, 1997), and one that exemplifies an association of status with the object and medium: that comic books are treated as less worthy of respect than film or other forms of storytelling. The focus on which platform will make more money is representative of a commercial approach to multiplatform media that makes it less enjoyable for this fan.

It is unnecessary.

Finally, many fans describe multiplatform content as being simply unnecessary.

In discussing multiplatform media content, Claire says,

I think it's probably just filler. A lot of times it's not necessary... It's a little diversion, but it's really kind of pointless. That web comic for "Heroes" – I think they were cool, but not necessary. You watched the show, and you get everything you need. They were just kind of extra. It's just not necessary, I don't think. It doesn't really enhance my experience too much.

The phrase "not necessary" is used several times in this short excerpt. While Claire considers multiplatform elements to be somewhat enjoyable (i.e., a diversion, cool), her overall assessment is that they do not contribute in a significant way to her experience in viewing a particular television program. They are seen as extraneous to the primary text.

Claire goes on to say:

It's kind of nice to have that... but I just feel like I don't need it. I watched a show. I like the show. I'm a TV person. I put the kids in bed, and then it's TV time. Some people get on the internet. Some people listen to music or watch movies. I watch TV. That's what I want to do. I don't need extra stuff online, although sometimes it's nice.

Although she returns to her previous point of multiplatform content not being necessary ("I don't need it"), she provides here a more specific reason. Multiplatform content takes her away from her preferred platform of television. As she considers herself a "TV person" to integrate content from additional platforms would necessitate a shift in her identity as a media consumer. It would also require changing her habits as she describes them ("I put the kids in bed, and then it's TV time."). Although she admits that the content is sometimes "nice," it is not worthy or necessary in such a way as to make it required viewing.

A final example of this subtheme is shown in Phil's statement:

I don't watch a lot of webisodes of things. I don't generally spend a lot of time either watching or reading the online components of a television show. I certainly feel like—and this might be 20th century thinking in the 21st century—I feel like I shouldn't have to engage in any of the cross media whoziwhatsits in order to enjoy a television show. I feel like that should be supplemental. That might be naïve in the current media landscape, but that's -- I feel like there's so much out there that I don't want to -- like unless you really love *Community*, I don't care to spend time on the NBC website and check out what web extras they have or whatever.

Like Claire, Phil expresses that multiplatform content is not, and *should not* be required viewing in order to derive gratification from an object of fandom. In marking his viewpoint as “20th century thinking” and “naïve,” Phil implies that his thinking may be outdated, as an increasing number of content producers are embracing this type of content.

Summary

When participants talked favorably about multiplatform media they discussed both the passion they had for an object as a motivator and the enjoyment they gained from consuming in the multiplatform elements. When discussing it unfavorably, they indicated that it took too much time or effort, was marred by commercialism and was generally unnecessary. In relation to hierarchy, fans may suffer a loss of status from investing in a multiplatform element that demands too much or has too little payoff.

Chapter 7: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the inner workings and hierarchy building criteria of fan communities. Specifically, this study addressed the concept of authenticity as it relates to fan communities, the criteria through which status is determined and hierarchies are created, and the effect of multiplatform media elements on both of these.

This chapter will provide a summary of the findings as discussed in Chapters Four through Six and discuss how these findings are related to one another. It will also detail the theoretical contributions made by these results. Finally, I will discuss the limitations of this work and provide recommendations for future studies of fan communities, both online and off.

Summary of Results

RQ1 asked: *Within fan communities, what does it mean to be an authentic fan?* Results indicated that, for the most part, “authenticity” was not the term of choice used by participants to discuss their level of commitment or position within a fan community. The closest term was “true fan,” but participants also regularly used “big fan” and “casual fan” as markers. However, in using these terms, participants regularly referenced the same types of determinants commonly used in past studies of authenticity in fandom, indicating that there may be some crossover in the popular usage of these terms as they relate to fandom. Most significantly, results indicated a sliding scale or continuum of fandom, ranging from the non-fan or casual fan at one extreme to the “too big” fan at the other, with several variants on the levels of fandom in between represented in participant

responses. Generally speaking, participants expressed a desire to be further along the continuum in terms of the degree of their fandom, expressing preference for behaviors associated with bigger fan behaviors as opposed to more casual. However, this was only true to a point. Although it may vary by person, a number of participants indicated that there was a point at which one's fandom can become "too big" or go "to far" and the behaviors associated with that level of fandom are less desirable.

RQ2 asked: *How do fans create competing hierarchies within and between their communities?* Participants identified several markers used to decide the size of one's fandom: cost, effort exerted, socializing, knowledge, and quoting. Within fan communities, participants pointed to official authority, investment, cultural capital and social capital as means of hierarchy creation. Different types of "investment" emerged as sub-themes related to collectibles, effort, and time. "Cultural capital" presented in the sub-themes of creativity, quoting of the text, and four different types of knowledge: quantity of knowledge and exclusive knowledge. "Social capital" was demonstrated through sub-themes of proximity, socializing and sharing.

Between fan communities, divisions were established in one of three ways. Participants either differentiated between communities based on the object of fandom itself, based on the behavior of fans common to that group, or based on the medium applicable to that community.

Finally, demographic markers such as age and gender were applicable both when referring to the status within fan communities and between them. In keeping with common stereotypes outside fandom, women and young people were commonly

highlighted as belonging to lower-status fandoms or engaging in behavior seen as less desirable.

RQ3 asked: *Now that media are extended across multiple media, how does engagement with the varying platforms around content play into the degree of one's fandom and evaluations of fans' place in hierarchies within communities?* In response, participants presented both positive attributes of multiplatform media content, or critiques of it. It should be noted that several participants shared both, weighing both the positives and negatives against one another or comparing efforts from different creators as more or less enjoyable. The two sub-themes of positive perceptions of multiplatform media were (1) that passion is a motivator for participation and (2) that multiplatform elements are enjoyable.

Those who offered critiques of multiplatform elements did so around four sub-themes: (1) it requires too much time, (2) it requires too much effort, (3) commercial elements make it less enjoyable, and (4) it is unnecessary.

Analytical Discussion

While past studies have focused on authenticity as a key factor in evaluation someone's fandom, this study found that this term was used very infrequently. Instead, participants tended to use "true" or "big" when referring to factors that have been traditionally associated with fandom. This was contrasted with the "casual fan," which was the overwhelmingly preferred term when presenting the alternative to "true" or "big." There may be several explanations for this. The first is possible design error in the interview protocol. The protocol deliberately avoided the use of the word "authentic," with the aim of coming to the topic naturally, and letting participants use their own words

to describe their experiences. As “big,” “true,” and “casual” were not part of the research question or commonly present in the literature related to these topics, these words were not purposefully omitted from interview protocol and could have influenced participants’ responses. Furthermore, while it is worth noting that “true” is the closest term to “authentic” in terms of shared meaning, this specific vocabulary was roundly preferred to “authentic” in contrast with the existing literature which speaks to fandom in authentic vs. inauthentic terms rather than true vs. false.

Secondly, it may be that participants interviewed do not think of fandom in “authentic vs. nonauthentic” terms. Many of the past studies exploring “authentic” fans specifically have been of fans of music (Peterson, 1997; Rademacher, 2005) or objects not related to popular culture, such as Campbell’s (2006) study of skinheads. This study, of course, omitted both of these categories, focusing instead on fans of film, television, comic books, and literature. While there are certainly degrees of crossover between these different types of fandom, it may be the case that authenticity is one element that does not cross over.

Aside from the terms used to define the level of one’s fandom, the most significant finding for RQ1 was the development of a sliding scale by which to measure one’s fandom. Engage in too few fan behaviors, or fail to invest enough effort or cost, and one is labeled as a casual fan—someone who may consume the object but who is not on the same level as the other fans. Invest too much or have too much knowledge of a particular object and one risks venturing too far to the other side of the continuum and being seen as a fan that is “too big” or “too obsessed.” It should be noted that the participants’ perceptions of others’ levels of fandom is naturally influenced by their own

experiences and relative position on the continuum. What for one participant may have been categorized as casual fandom, may indicate big fandom to another, relative to their own activities, communities, and experiences. Each fan may have their own ideas about where precisely that line should be drawn, but a level of fandom does indeed exist that many do not want to achieve or are embarrassed to achieve. I would speculate that this can be at least partially attributed to an internalization of the negative stereotypes of fans presented consistently in the mass media: obsessive, immature, social misfits (Jenkins, 1996). While certain fan behaviors have become more acceptable in recent years, exemplified by the growing popularity of Comic-Con as one example, this stigma is still present in some mainstream media writings.

With regard to the creation of hierarchy, in analyzing the results it becomes clear that fan communities do have a means for organizing themselves, both within communities and in the larger picture in comparison to other fandoms.

Official authority was described by participants from both Comic-Con and TWoP in reference to the event staff and forum moderators, respectively. In both cases, those with official authority were recognized as such and their power delineated, but in a means that kept them separate from the fandom at large. That is to say, despite the fact that many Comic-Con staff members are volunteer attendees or fans themselves and that many TWoP moderators also participate in the boards as a fan, these members of the communities are kept separate from the fans (those lacking official authority). While their role may provide them status within the community, it does not provide them status *as a fan*.

In this study, in order to achieve status as a fan, one must engage in investment, or in the accumulation of cultural or social capital. These themes showcase a very direct relationship between the amount invested or accumulated, and the payoff in terms of status within the community.

Across the board, participants reported that increases in the amount of official authority one has, the investment one has made or the cultural and social capital one possesses results in an increase in status within a community and a move upwards in the overall hierarchy. Those who invest more or have more capital are more likely to be placed at the top of the hierarchy than closer to the bottom.

Again, the “top” of the hierarchy is a complicated concept, as many participants expressed that there was a danger of becoming “too big” a fan or taking one’s fandom “too far.” This works against a traditional understanding of cultural and social capital, wherein the goal would be to achieve as much as possible, so that it may then be transformed into economic gain. While some (Fiske, 1992) argue that cultural and social capital in fan communities cannot be converted into financial gain, I would argue that this is plainly not true, as is the case with the informants in this study who have turned their fan practices from hobby to profession.

Age and gender were two markers that affected status at multiple levels of fandom. Overwhelmingly, it was the young woman and her objects of fandom (*Twilight*, Justin Bieber) that were identified as being low on the hierarchy. These were the panels and the fans that were called out as lowering the level of conversation within the TWoP forums and taking the place of more worthy fans at Comic-Con. Sadly, this arrangement of status is not unique to either of the research sites considered here, but is fitting with the

overall trend towards the level of status attributed to young women in a variety of matters.

With regard to multiplatform media, the first item of interest to note is that this was an unfamiliar concept to many of the participants. Many were not sure of the meaning of this term, and remained unclear even after it was explained. I attribute this to two, possibly interactive factors. First, the use of multiplatform media content and transmedia storytelling is relatively new. For participants who may not keep abreast of industry news and developments on a regular basis, these concepts may simply still be foreign and unknown to them. In considering the participants who were familiar, several were in the comic book industry, one was a comic book writer, and one had been affiliated with a television network, giving them a heightened perspective in terms of these developments. Second, some participants may have been aware of these concepts without being actively aware of it. So for example, while they may not have known “multiplatform” or “transmedia” as terms they were able to provide appropriate examples of each, but were not clear on the delineation between the two or what elements are required to make something multiplatform or transmedia.

For those who were familiar with the terms or who came to be more clear during the interview process, both positive attributes and critiques of the practice were highlighted. In terms of positive attributes, participants pointed to reasons why one would choose to engage; the most common responses were that someone would have to be quite passionate about the object, or be seeking a pleasurable experience from the multiplatform content itself. These themes are a logical progression in relation to the fan experience. If a fan enjoys *Harry Potter*, for example, it stands to reason that they would

seek out other, related, pleasurable experiences associated with it. If they appreciate *Harry Potter* to the point that they would be classified as “passionate” about it, it would be reasonable that they would seek out additional information related to the text, and in our convergent culture, this means multiplatform experiences.

However, not all participants felt positively about multiplatform media. Also, even those who expressed a generally positive opinion often referenced one or more examples of a text incorporating multiplatform elements unsuccessfully, in their opinion. The main critiques were related to time and effort; it would take too much “extra” time or effort in order to track down information that is “unnecessary.” By unnecessary, participants are referring to content on additional platforms that is not part of the canonical text or that would not be directly referenced in the corresponding film or show. This finding echoed that of RQ1: there is a level of investment, in terms of time and effort, beyond which fans are loathe to go. Several participants indicated that if it was “worth it” they would be willing to make such an investment, but only if they felt there was to be something gained from it.

The final sub-theme was related to commercial elements. Several participants expressed that some multiplatform elements felt too much like marketing. When there was no story or content of value to be gained, and the only purpose of incorporating another platform was to advertise, this was seen as decreasing the enjoyment associated with the object. Also, if one felt that the creators were pandering to them in some way, that was also seen as a negative.

Theoretical Contributions

This research contributes to fandom studies by suggesting that hierarchies do indeed exist, and that preferred placement within them is variable. It also contributes to fandom studies by focusing on multiple, diverse fan communities, as opposed to singular fandoms or communities related to them.

It contributes to Bourdieu's theory of capital by exploring his notion of social capital as it relates to fandom. Although many have used Bourdieu's cultural capital to explain fan behavior, far fewer have incorporated his ideas on social capital. This research found that social capital played a significant role in hierarchy construction, in that proximity to particular high status community members or celebrities was found to improve fans' status, as well as the status achieved by sharing one's knowledge with others within the community.

It further contributes to fandom studies by introducing a sliding scale of levels of fandom on which one can map and access fan behavior and activity, a concept new to the field. Additionally, it furthers the discussion of fandom and hierarchy by discussing in terms of multiplatform elements.

Limitations

This research is not without its limitations. This research could be strengthened through the incorporation of participants from additional fandoms and additional methods of data gathering. In addition to the fans represented by Comic-Con and TWoP, there are a great number not represented here or represented in small numbers (e.g., music fans, gamers). Incorporating their viewpoints, could only strengthen this study's attempt to develop over-arching theory related to fandom. In addition, considering the large pools of

possible participants at both TWoP and Comic-Con, a quantitative survey could have provided an overview of activity from additional community members. In combination with the ethnographic methods used here, a quantitative approach would have only strengthened this work.

Directions for Future Research

This project represents only a start in understanding what is happening within and between fan communities in terms of fan identity and hierarchy creation. Future research is needed to further explore these concepts. Future studies should focus on additional sites of fan activity. Comic-Con and TWoP both represent very popular sites of fan activity, and it would be valuable to explore activity in lesser-known locales for use in comparison.

In addition, there is an opportunity for additional theoretical approaches to be applied, including various approaches to understanding power and Bourdieu's own additional forms of subcapital.

Finally, there is an opportunity for the continuum of fandom developed in RQ1 to be expanded upon and refined in future research, with the goal of creating a tool that can be consistently applied across fandoms.

Conclusion

This study worked to further illuminate the nature of media fandom and the workings of its communities. It does so in the context of a changing media environment that includes multiplatform and transmedia elements. While there is more work to be done in understanding these communities and the role they play in shaping members' identities and relationships with one another, this research contributes to the theory of

these areas and points toward practical recommendations that media creators can employ to empower and engage these powerful communities.

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Appendix A

Participant Data

Participant Name (Pseudonym)	Fan Site	Highest Education Level Attained	Race/Ethnicity (participants were able to self identify in preferred terminology)
Pam	Television Without Pity	College	White
Veronica	Television Without Pity	Masters	White & Hispanic
Logan	San Diego Comic-Con	Some graduate school	Asian & Caucasian
Kara	San Diego Comic-Con	College	White
Debra	San Diego Comic-Con	College	Caucasian
Luke	San Diego Comic-Con	Two Masters Degrees	Caucasian
Leia	San Diego Comic-Con	Some graduate school	White, Polish
Ron	San Diego Comic-Con	Some college	Mexican American
Lana	Television Without Pity	Some graduate School	White
Rose	Television Without Pity	College	African-American
Kate	Television Without Pity	Masters	Caucasian
Jim	San Diego Comic-Con	College	White
Claire	San Diego Comic-Con	Some college	White
Alexis	San Diego Comic-Con	Some college	White
Harry	San Diego Comic-Con	Two Bachelor's Degrees	White
Ruby	Television Without Pity	MBA	Black

Angela	Television Without pity	Masters	White
Lane	Informant	Masters	White
Ben & John	Informants	College	White
Rory	Television Without Pity	Ph.D.	African-American
Ann	Television Without Pity	College	White
Edward	Television Without Pity	College	Black
Jack	San Diego Comic-Con	College	Asian
Phil	Television Without Pity	Masters	White

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

Comic-Con Participants

Attendance at Comic-Con International

- How many years have you attended Comic-Con?
- How did you prepare for this trip?
- Why do you attend? Why do you think others attend?
- Can you describe your activity during this year's convention or past years'?
- How do you feel about any of the changes to the convention in recent years?
- What types of presentations/exhibitors are you here to see?
- Can you tell me about the other attendees?
- Can you characterize the other attendees? Are there different types of attendees? What are they?
 - Can you describe their behavior?
 - How can you tell the difference between them?
 - How do you feel about them?
 - Would you say that you are more or less of a fan than the other attendees?
 - How do you know if someone is more or less of a fan than you are?

Outside Comic-Con

- What types of fan activities do you engage in?
- What other fan communities, if any, do you participate in?
 - What types of differences exist between those communities and Comic-Con?
- Do you engage in any types of multiplatform media as a part of your fandom?
 - Tell me how this plays a part in your fandom, if at all.

TelevisionWithoutPity.com Users

Use of the Site

- For how long have you used TWoP and how often do you use it?
- Why do you use this site? Why do you think others use it?
- Can you describe your typical activity on the site?
- What types of conversations do you typically participate in?
- Have you noticed changes to the site since you began using it?
 - If yes, can you describe the nature of these changes?
- Can you tell me about the other users?

- Can you characterize the other users and posters? Are there different types of users? What are they?
 - Can you describe their behavior?
 - How can you tell the difference between them?
 - How do you feel about them?
 - Would you say that you are more or less of a fan than the other posters you regularly interact with?
 - How do you know if someone is more or less of a fan than you are?

Outside TWoP

- What types of fan activities do you engage in?
- What other fan communities, if any, do you participate in?
 - How do those fan communities compare to TWoP?
- Do you engage in any types of multiplatform media as a part of your fandom?
 - Tell me how this plays a part in your fandom, if at all.

Appendix C

Codebook

Antifandom

- Mentions of engaging around an object that they don't like or enjoy

Appearance

- Specific references to one's physical appearance, including clothes, hair, body type, screenname
 - Cosplay: mentions of costuming, making, wearing, observing
 - Badges & other displays of category

Bad Fan Behavior

- Undesirable displays, behavior talked about negatively

Changes

- Any mention of change to the fan community over time
 - Specifically appears often as "Changes from the way it was"

Collectibles

- References the act of purchasing, obtaining merchandise related to one's object of fandom or fansite

Commercialism

- Mentions of a fandom's level of interest in money, making money, appealing to different groups to increase commercial viability

Cultural Capital

- Knowledge of Object: How much does someone know about their object of fandom. Differentiated from knowledge of community
 - Outside content: Seeking materials outside the original text to bolster knowledge
 - Obscurity: Knowledge of little known facts
 - Quantity: Knowledge that is considered to be extensive, more so than average
 - Quoting: The ability to accurately and relevantly quote from one's text.
 - Exclusive knowledge: Knowledge unknown to most people, not made widely available yet
 - Nicknames: Nicknames for characters
 - Inside Jokes: Jokes that rely on knowledge of object
- Creativity
 - Mentions of a level of creative output: fanfiction, art, unique ideas

Differentiating between groups

- Marking of differences between types of fans, different conventions

- Other fan communities: referencing a different fan community
- Elitism: privileging of one group over another

Diversification

- Descriptions of one's fandom or site branching out to include different types of people, different types of acceptable objects

Gratification

- Mentions of happiness, pleasure

Great Quotes

- Repository for particularly articulate thoughts on themes

Investment

- Descriptions of ways in which fans extend themselves to their fandom. Broken down into:
 - Activism: Formalized efforts to save an object, exact change upon an object
 - Cost: Monetary output into fan activities
 - Effort: Exertion extended on behalf of one's fandom. References to things being difficult, trying, are included
 - Incorporation into Everyday Life: bringing parts of one's fandom into unrelated activities. e.g., seeing references to the show where they are not intended, bringing partners to SDCC
 - Length of time in fandom: Number of years attending SDCC, Number of years reading/posting at TWoP, Number of years as a fan of X object
 - Passion/Enthusiasm: a description of the level of excitement, interest in engaging in one's fandom
 - Quality of Contribution: Mentions of "good" or "high level" activity or conversation
 - Time: How many hours are spent engaging in, preparing for, fan activities
 - Volume of contribution: e.g., the number of posts one contributes to TWoP, the amount of fanfic one writes

Knowledge of Community

- Rules/Norms: Mentions of how familiar one is with the community at hand (TWoP, SDCC, other). Do they know what to expect, how to behave, what types of behaviors or posts are acceptable?
- Name Recognition: Recognizing other user names
- Inside Jokes: Jokes that rely on knowledge of SDCC or TWoP

Labels

- Marks of when participants refer to themselves or others by the following labels, or variations thereof: Geek, nerd, casual fan, big fan

Multiplatform Media

- Mentions of media that is presented across platforms

Obsession

- Mentions of variants of the word “obsess” or regarding fandom dominating parts of one’s life. Distinct from passion by way of negative connotation.

Official Authority

- Authority that is granted by a governing body, working on behalf of TWoP, SDCC

Online vs. Offline

- Comparisons between online and offline interactions, behaviors

Popularity

- The degree to which a particular object or fan community is popular with a general audience. Relative measure.

Shipping

- Description of activity related to talking about relationships between characters, actual or speculative

Social Capital

- Network of fan friends/acquaintances, access to producers
 - Fan & producer: mentions of blurring the line between fan and producer
 - Proximity: getting to meet producers linked to object
 - Sharing w/ others: participating in fandom with someone else, creation or extension of that network
 - Socializing: friendships within fandoms, talk about outside topics

Social Identity

- Mentions of social identity markers in the context of participation in TWoP, SDCC, fan communities
 - Able-bodiedness
 - Age
 - Gender
 - Race
 - Sexual identity

Spoilers

- The practice of seeking or sharing information about future developments in a media text

Talk about Object

- Mentions of talk, discussion, conversation around the object of fandom

Appendix D

Oral Consent Format

This interview is being conducted through the University of Kansas to better understand issues of fan culture at Comic-Con International/TelevisionWithoutPity.com. It is part of dissertation research that is affiliated with the Department of Communication Studies at KU, but not affiliated with Comic-Con International/TelevisionWithoutPity.com. It is my professional and ethical obligation to protect interview participants and as such, (1) your participation is completely voluntary and you may stop the interview at any time; (2) your name will not be associated with any findings or reports, unless you request that it be; and (3) only those directly involved with this study will have access to the information provided in this interview.

If you choose not to participate or later withdraw, this will not jeopardize your attendance or future attendance at Comic-Con International/participation in TelevisionWithoutPity.com. Every effort will be made to protect your identity; your real name and other identifying data will not be divulged. I will use your name with quotations only at your request. The audio recording of your interview made during this research will be used only for analysis. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings. These recordings will be archived by the researcher for use in this project and related future projects.

We will discuss for approximately an hour your experiences and thoughts regarding Comic-Con International/TelevisionWithoutPity.com. Do not feel obligated to participate in the interview. If you do participate, please feel free to stop and ask questions at any time so that I may be responsive to your thoughts and concerns. Should you have any questions about this project or your participation in it you may ask me or my faculty supervisor, Nancy Baym at the Department of Communication Studies, University of Kansas. She may be reached by phone at (785) 864-9876, email at nbaym@ku.edu or by writing to 1440 Jayhawk Blvd., Room 102, Lawrence, KS 66045.

Completion of the interview indicates your willingness to participate in this project and that you are over the age of eighteen. If you have any additional questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call (785) 864-7429 or (785) 864-7385 or write the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7563, email mdenning@ku.edu.

Michelle McCudden, University of Kansas
Bailey Hall
1440 Jayhawk Blvd., Room 102
Lawrence, KS 66045
(785) 864-3633
MLM1@ku.edu

Appendix E

Transcription Confidentiality Agreement



CONFIDENTIAL DISCLOSURE AGREEMENT

THIS AGREEMENT (the "Agreement") is made between The Transcriptionlive with offices at 5228 N Sheridan Road, Suite-410, Chicago, IL - 60640, and Michelle McCudden that entered into this Agreement on 18th December, 2009

NOW THEREFORE, in consideration of the mutual promises and covenants contained in this Agreement, the mutual disclosure of confidential information to each other, each undersigned party (the "Receiving Party") and the other party (the "Disclosing Party") agree as follows:

1. Confidential Information and Confidential Materials

"Confidential Information" means nonpublic information that Disclosing Party designates as being confidential or which, under the circumstances surrounding disclosure ought to be treated as confidential. "Confidential Information" includes, without limitation, information relating to released or unreleased Disclosing Party software or hardware products, the marketing or promotion of any Disclosing Party product, Disclosing Party's business policies or practices, and information received from others that Disclosing Party is obligated to treat as confidential.

Confidential Information disclosed to Receiving Party by any Disclosing Party Subsidiary and/or agents is covered by this Agreement.

"Confidential Information" shall mean all tangible materials containing Confidential Information, including without limitation written or printed documents and computer disks or tapes, whether machine or user readable, and know-how acquired as a result of contractual relationships.

"Confidential Information" includes product specifications, customer lists, sub-contractor lists, business strategies and sales and marketing information.

"Confidential Information" includes technical information; methods; processes; inventions; machines; computer programs; research projects, and business information as well such as pricing data; sources of supply; and marketing, or development.

2. Exclusions from Confidential Information

"Confidential Information" shall not include any information that:

(a) is or subsequently becomes publicly available without Receiving Party's breach of any obligation owed Disclosing Party,

(b) became known to Receiving Party prior to disclosing Party's disclosure of such information to Receiving Party,

(c) became known to Receiving Party from a source other than Disclosing Party other than by the breach of an obligation of confidentiality owed to Disclosing Party, or

(d) is independently developed by Receiving Party.

3. Disclosure

Disclosing Party agrees to disclose, and Receiving Party agrees to receive the Confidential Information.

4. Non-Disclosure & Nonuse

Receiving Party shall not disclose, make use of or disseminate any Confidential Information to third parties. However, Receiving Party may disclose Confidential Information in accordance with judicial or other governmental order, provided Receiving Party shall give Disclosing Party reasonable notice prior to such disclosure and shall comply with any applicable protective order or equivalent.

Receiving Party shall take reasonable security precautions, at least as great as the precautions it takes to protect its own confidential information, to keep confidential the Confidential Information.

Receiving Party may disclose Confidential Information or Confidential Material only to Receiving Party's employees or consultants on a need-to-know basis during execution of the project(s). Receiving Party will have executed or shall execute appropriate written agreements with its employees and consultants sufficient to enable it to comply with all the provisions of this Agreement.

Confidential Information and Confidential Materials may be disclosed, reproduced, summarized or distributed only in pursuance of Receiving Party's business relationship with Disclosing Party, and only as otherwise provided hereunder. Receiving Party agrees to segregate all such Confidential Materials from the confidential materials of others in order to prevent commingling.

5. Exclusions from Nondisclosure and Nonuse obligations

Each party's obligations under Clause 4 ("Nondisclosure and Nonuse") with respect to any portion of the other party's Confidential Information shall terminate when the party seeking to avoid its obligation under such Paragraph can document that a disclosure of Confidential Information:

- (a) occurred in response to a valid order by a court or other governmental body,
- (b) was/is otherwise required by law, or
- (c) was/is necessary to establish the rights of either party under this Agreement

Such a disclosure as described in this clause 5 shall not be considered to be a breach of this Agreement or a waiver of confidentiality for other purposes; provided, however, that Receiving Party shall provide prompt written notice thereof to enable Disclosing Party to seek a protective order or otherwise prevent such disclosure.

6. Ownership of Confidential Information

All Confidential Information and Confidential Materials are and shall remain the property of Disclosing Party. By disclosing information to Receiving Party, Disclosing Party does not grant any express or implied right to Receiving Party to or under Disclosing Party patents, copyrights, trademarks, or trade secret information.

7. Miscellaneous

The terms of confidentiality under this Agreement shall not be construed to limit either party's right to independently develop or acquire products without use of the other party's Confidential Information. Further, either party shall be free to use for any purpose the residuals resulting from access to or work with such Confidential Information, provided that such party shall maintain the confidentiality of the Confidential Information as provided herein. The term "residuals" means information in non-tangible form, which may be retained by persons who have had access to the Confidential Information, including ideas, concepts, know-how or techniques contained therein.

Neither party shall have any obligation to limit or restrict the assignment of such persons or to pay royalties for any work resulting from the use of residuals. However, the foregoing shall not be deemed to grant to either party a license under the other party's copyrights or patents.

Receiving party cannot benefit from use of Confidential Information directly or indirectly in any form, without explicit written permission of Disclosing Party.

8. Entire Agreement

This Agreement constitutes the entire agreement between the parties with respect to the subject matter hereof. It shall not be modified except by a written agreement dated subsequent to the date of this Agreement and signed by both parties. None of the provisions of this Agreement shall be deemed to have been waived by any act or acquiescence on the part of Disclosing Party, its agents, or employees, but only by an instrument in writing signed by an authorized officer of Disclosing Party. No waiver of any provision of this Agreement shall constitute a waiver of any other provision(s) or of the same provision on another occasion.

9. Attorney Fees

If either party employs attorneys to enforce any rights arising out of or relating to this Agreement, the prevailing party shall be entitled to recover reasonable attorneys' fees.

10. Choice of Law

This Agreement shall be construed and controlled by the laws of State of California. Process may be served on either party by mail, postage prepaid, certified or registered, return receipt requested, or by such other traceable method as authorized by law. Subject to the limitations set forth in this Agreement, this Agreement will inure to the benefit of and be binding upon the parties, their successors and assigns.

11. Severability and Survival of Rights & Obligations

If any provision of this Agreement shall be held by a court of competent jurisdiction to be illegal, invalid or unenforceable, the remaining provisions shall remain in full force and effect.

All obligations created by this Agreement shall survive change or termination of the parties' business relationship.

12. Rights and Remedies

Receiving Party shall notify Disclosing Party immediately upon discovery of any unauthorized use or disclosure of Confidential Information and/or Confidential Materials, or any other breach of this Agreement by Receiving Party, and will cooperate with Disclosing Party in every reasonable way to help Disclosing Party regain possession of the Confidential Information and/or Confidential Materials and prevent its further unauthorized use.

Disclosing Party may visit Receiving Party's premises, with reasonable prior notice and during normal business hours, to review Receiving Party's compliance with the terms of this Agreement.

This agreement shall be binding for signing parties and successors in interest, and shall inure to the benefit of the Disclosing Party, its successors and assigns.

The unenforceability of any provision to this agreement shall not impair or affect any other provision.

In the event of any breach of this agreement, the Disclosing Party shall have full rights to injunctive relief, in addition to any other existing rights, without requirement of posting bond.

13. Suggestions and Feedback

Either party may from time to time provide suggestions, comments or other feedback to the other party with respect to Confidential Information provided originally by the other party (hereinafter "Feedback"). Both parties agree that all Feedback is and shall be entirely voluntary and shall not, absent separate agreement, create any confidentiality obligation for the Receiving Party.

However, the Receiving Party shall not disclose the source of any feedback without the providing party's consent. Feedback shall be clearly designated as such and, except as otherwise provided herein, each party shall be free to disclose and use such Feedback as it sees fit, entirely without obligation of any kind to the other party. The foregoing shall not, however, affect either party's obligations hereunder with respect to Confidential Information of the other party.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the parties hereto have executed this Agreement.

Signature: 

Vincent Brown
Production Head
Transcriptionlive

Date: 21st February , 2011

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix F

RQ1 Codes

Category	Code	Example
Alternatives to “Authenticity”	True Fan	<i>...if you were a true fan you would only do one thing[object] and you'd do only that.</i>
	Big fan	<i>I love the TV show “Castle,” so I will watch it on Friday night; and I will make sure my night is free so I can watch it. That’s a pretty big fan.</i>
	Casual	<i>You can tell by talking to someone if they’re a casual fan or a big-time fan by how much they actually know about that particular show.</i>

Appendix G

RQ2 Codes

Category	Code	Sub-codes	Example	
Markers of fandom	Cost		<i>...someone who was on the fence about whether it was worth it to go, they're not going to be able to give it a shot because they aren't going to want to spend extra money.</i>	
	Effort		<i>It requires more effort to go to another city and book a hotel in a city that has no hotel rooms at that time of year due to Comic-Con.</i>	
	Socializing and sharing		<i>We always hang out while we go. That's mainly why – half of it is to go hang out with friends.</i>	
	Knowledge	Knowledge of content outside the text		<i>And if I love a movie, I want to go on the special features and see what else they're going to give me.</i>
		Knowledge of obscure information		<i>I know the name of every single character with a name and the actor who played them.</i>
	Quoting		<i>I've read them all several times, I could practically tell you what the quotes, what stories are from.</i>	
Within Fan Communities	Official authority		<i>Since obviously not everyone is clear on this: Mars is the boss here.</i>	
	Investment	Collectibles	<i>[If] somebody owns all the figurines of something that's a pretty good indicator of cred.</i>	
		Effort	<i>It requires more effort to</i>	

		<i>go to another city and book a hotel in a city that has no hotel rooms at that time of year due to Comic-Con.</i>
	Time	<i>Anybody in the masquerade line in probably a fairly true fan because that thing takes six hours to get through, and you to have some devotion.</i>
Cultural Capital	Creativity	<i>I don't just love this piece of music. I'm going to make a music video to it because I love it so much.</i>
	Quantity of knowledge	<i>The bigger fans know a lot about their character or their obsession, and they know about history; they understand how things connect.</i>
	Exclusive knowledge	<i>I think there are people who go because they like the sense of knowing something that other people don't know.</i>
	Quoting of text	<i>You know you're obsessed with Mad Men when you try and work the phrase, "No. It's just my people are Nordic," into every conversation.</i>
Social Capital	Proximity	<i>Being able to say – we went to the signing, and I sat on the sidelines of Joss Whedon and Marissa, his wife, for signing "Dollhouse" posters with the new comic book coming out...that was great.</i>
	Sharing	<i>We have "Firefly" parties, where we dress up and have Chinese food. No one else gets it, but</i>

			<i>that's not the point. We get to revel in the face that we love this story, and there was something about it that brought us together.</i>
Between Fan Communities	Status based on object		<i>So that's just human nature, you know, always want to make fun of somebody and feel superior—Twilight crazies. I'm crazy, but I'm not that crazy.</i>
	Status based on fan behavior		<i>The quality of the discussion on TV is basically higher than other places on the internet.</i>
	Status based on medium		<i>Any cred that you acquired online does not lap over into the Comic-Con experience.</i>
Across Communities	Demographic characteristics		<i>But I think when I say fannish I mean – it's almost like the teenage girls that are just all over Justin Bieber or whatever his name is.</i>

Appendix H

RQ3 Codes

Theme	Sub-themes	Example
Positive attributes of multiplatform media content	Passion motivates multiplatform engagement	<i>But I think that if it were a show that I was totally into than I think I would follow it into all mediums that I could.</i>
	Multiplatform elements provide enjoyable experiences	<i>It was actually kind of something I would look forward to, particularly in the summer.</i>
Critiques of multiplatform media	It requires too much time	<i>I kind of like it when shows don't do that because I don't have a lot of time to do all that stuff these days.</i>
	It requires too much effort	<i>You shouldn't have to go on a scavenger hunt to get a story. The story should just be where it is. You should be able to just get it.</i>
	Commercial elements make it less enjoyable	<i>If I'm coming from a series that doesn't originally have a comic book and it jumps into a comic book format for a special publicity stunt... my genre is just being tapped on as "These are nerdy people. They like nerdy things. Let's make a comic book." On that level, I do have a negative reaction.</i>

It is unnecessary

*I think it's probably
just filler. A lot of
times it's not
necessary.*