

Reconceptualizing Communication and Agency in Fan Activity: A Proposal for A Projected Interactivity Model for Fan Studies

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Current advances in the study of fan culture tend to look at the phenomena in one of two ways: either as ethnography or as textual analyses of fan fiction. This paper articulates a new methodology of fan studies: one that incorporates both previous research paradigms as well as additional scholarly fields. Using parasocial theory as an avenue for more exploration, this paper examines how fans communicate and interact with characters in a media text. A modified version of projective identity is used to examine fan studies in a new light. What this paper concludes is that a three-tiered methodology, termed "projected interactivity," would be most applicable for studies of fans using New Media. "Projected interactivity" includes versions of Burke's pentad, survey research, and projective identity to form a new type of analysis. Although further work must be done with "projected interactivity," it is a starting-off point for new fan studies.

Key Words: fan studies, interactive text, parasocial theory, methodology, projective identity

When one pictures a fan, many images may come to mind. Some of the most stereotypical might be those portrayed in documentaries like *Trekkies* (Nygard, 1997): overweight, socially-inept men and women who dress up as Vulcans and spend thousands of dollars at conventions on a towel that William Shatner once used to wipe his face. Then again, perhaps one imagines the Band-aids, rock groupies portrayed in the Cameron Crowe movie *Almost Famous* (2000). There, characters like Sapphire (Fairuza Balk), lament that others "don't even know what it is to be a fan...To truly love some silly little piece of music, or some band, so much that it hurts" (Bryce & Crowe). These common images of fans, people who have developed a relationship with an artifact of popular culture, illustrate what can be termed a fanatic, or one who expresses a fanatical devotion to that relationship or to an artifact. However, such illustrations often confuse the issue of what relationship a fan has to a text, as well as to the characters within that text. In this essay it is proposed that the conceptualizations of fans that currently exist are based on a partial understanding of fan activity.

One model that has served in the past identifies the fan as a participant in what has become to be known as a parasocial relationship. Horton and Wohl (1956) coined the term "parasocial" to define the relationship or connection between fictional characters and celebrities, and the fans that follow them. "Para," meaning close but not quite, indicates that these fans participate in a relationship that is not quite social and would not be what most people would consider authentic. In order to remedy this problem, a new methodology is proposed, based in part, on the concept of a projective identity.

"Projective identity" was coined by James Gee (2003), as a term to identify the relationship between a character in a video game and the player of that game. In his determination, the identity of the player (the real-world identity) and the identity of the character player in the game (the virtual-world character's identity) exist in a tension: this tension is realized as "the interface between – the interactions between – the real-world person and the virtual character," (Gee, p. 56). Thus, projective identity exists when a person interacts with a virtual identity. Using Gee's theory, by transplanting it from video game studies, forms a basis for a new method for studying fan activities. To clarify this new method, we first discuss current research on fans and fan activity, then point out some the problems with current methods, and finally describe the new methodology, which is termed "projected interactivity." Fans, Fanatics, and Groupies: Loving Something until It Hurts

As the introduction stated, current stereotypes of fans are based on the idea of the fan as fanatic. Noted fan scholar Jenkins (1992b) pointed out that fans are often compared to "the Manson family and the suicidal Werther cult of 19th-century Germany" (p. 13). The media portrays fans "as 'kooks' obsessed with trivia, celebrities, and collectibles; as misfits and crazies" (Jenkins, 1992b, p. 85). Writers in the media are "unable to understand how a television program could produce this extreme response, a confusion they pass onto the fans who are characterized

as inarticulate about the series popularity” (Jenkins, 1992b, p. 13). When media producers cannot understand such devotion to popular art, they become unable to communicate to fans, and in turn unable to understand or express the motivations behind fanaticism. This first section looks at how fan fiction functions on a textual level, and follows this with a review of research on parasocial interaction.

Textual poaching: How fans enter the television universe

In 1988 Jenkins coined the term “textual poaching” to refer to the act fans engage in when they take a text, rewrite it to meet their needs, and thus make it their own. He described fans as “scavengers [who]...reclaim works that others regard as worthless and trash, [and] find ... them a rewarding source of popular capital” (Jenkins, 1988, p. 86). One of the ways that fans reclaim a text is by re-mediating a text, involving themselves in the creative process, and thus creating something partially new. Beilby, Harrington, and Bielby (p. 35) explained the difference between viewers and fans, stating that to “‘view’ television is to engage in a relatively private behavior. To be a ‘fan’ however, is to participate in a range of activities that extend beyond the private act of viewing.” The authors later commented that this “reflects an enhanced emotional involvement with a television narrative” (p. 35). Through this process the fan moves from passive to active viewer, and for a fan, the significance of the transition cannot be underestimated. As passive viewers, audiences have no control over the text, so they must beg the creators to “provide desired plot developments or to protect the integrity of their favorite character” (Jenkins, 1992, p. 27). However, as active viewers, an audience members can rewrite the text and exert control in their relationship with the text (Markman, 2005). The way the text is manipulated depends largely on the individual needs of the viewer (Benshoff, 1998; Heinecken, 2004; Jenkins, 1988, 1992a).

Most often the change or manipulation of the text relates back to the “emotional involvement” described by Beilby, Harrington, and Bielby (1999, p. 35). It is this active “emotional involvement” that has led to the image of the “crazed fan.” Researchers have tried for quite some time to understand this emotional involvement: both the motivators behind it and the activities that result from it. Fan groups such as the Order of the Blessed Saint Scully the Enigmatic (OBSSE) have created a religion which focuses on Scully, a character from *The X-Files* (Wakefield, 2001). Wakefield argued that, most interestingly, these fans created a community to pledge devotion to a non-existent deity. As of the 2001/2002, the final season of *The X-Files*, OBSSE boasted more than 2,000 registered members from around the globe (Wakefield).

These different forms of textual interaction empower the fan to move past the limitations of one-way communication into the potentiality of a fully social interaction. Jenkins (1992b, p. 45) argued that fan fiction becomes a tactic that fans can use to gain power over the text; and, indeed, this can be extended to encompass individual characters as well. Some researchers commented that in interviews they found that fans attempted, through writing, “to communicate with the protagonist in the story” (Lee, Woong Yun, & Park, 2005, p. 3). Additionally, fan writers make the relationship more intimate by attempting to turn the characters into “real people with personalities, faults, needs, illogical desires, and weaknesses” (Kustritz, 2003, p. 375). Once the characters are manifested as “real people” it becomes easier to interact with them, identify with them, and develop a relationship with them. Fan fiction writers view television shows as “not simply something that can be reread; it is something that can and must be rewritten in order to make it more responsive to their needs, in order to make it a better producer of personal meanings and pleasures” (Jenkins, 1988, p. 87). The rewriting process works to meet the needs of the fans, and according to some academics, fans may use the final product to meet the needs of the characters about which they write (Jenkins, 1988; Bacon-Smith, 1992; Kustritz; Heinecken, 2004; Lee, Woong Yun, & Park).

Some fans coalesce around a point in the show when the character experience personal trauma; Heinecken (2004) described the rewriting as an attempt by fans to protect characters and repair damage done to them in the original text. In some respects, fans can even use the text of a show to overcome personal trauma: for example, Geraghty (2006) analyzed fan letters in *Star Trek* magazine and found that “*Star Trek* fan culture is a collective network ... which offer[s] support on many personal levels” through the televisual text itself (p. 1003). Through his research, he found that, for instance, Vietnam War veterans were better able to cope with the trauma of the war through an identification with the themes and characters of *Star Trek* that transcended real-world relationships (Geraghty, p. 1004-1007). These fans transplanted an artifact of popular culture out of its original context and used it to meet their own personal needs.

However, because of the common “fanatic” stereotypes – often popularized in the media itself – the producers of media have for many years neglected to do much research about fans. Fans, although “ideal active viewers” who “consume but also question what they see,” often represent a minority in demographics of audience viewership (Consalvo, 2003, p. 68). True fanatics have been seen as such a small part of the market that most TV producers choose to focus their attention instead on a much larger viewership: the passive viewer. For media producers, “viewers matter more than fans” (Beilby, Harrington, & Bielby, 1999, p. 35). For fans, however, the

television show matters a great deal. The object of affection for the fan becomes all-consuming and an integral part of the fan's daily life.

Parasocial interaction and the fan

The relationship to media developed by fans in groups like OBSSE is not all that uncommon. Fans often incorporate the media they watch into their everyday life. As Michel de Certeau (1984/2002, p.72) stated, "reading" a media text "introduces an 'art' which is anything but passive." De Certeau indicated that users of media are continually perceived as passive, but in reality actively contribute to a working knowledge of media texts as well as a practicality in their own lives. Today, fans of media incorporate texts into their everyday lives in a variety of ways.

This is done by watching the show, engaging in conversations about the show, seeking out information about characters and actors on the show, and in some cases, even writing about the show. This incorporation might be viewed in light of Horton and Wohl's (1956) theory of parasocial relationships. The term "parasocial relationship" describes the relationship that exists between television viewers and the characters and/or actors they view (Horton & Wohl). In their article, they stressed that viewers of media form innate social bonds to both characters and real individuals on television. Horton and Wohl determined that "para-social interaction ... is analogous to and in many ways resembles social interaction in ordinary primary groups" (229). In other words, viewers often form bonds with the personas they witness onscreen, and these bonds have a place in their life that resembles the place of bonds between real-world people. The characters on television are perceived as real and not fictionalized to these viewers, because their lives are so closely followed that they become as intimately known as non-mediated people. More recent research on parasocial theory showed, in fact, that this type of relationship, or "intimacy at a distance, ... broaden[s] the scope of interpersonal relations a person has, rather than compensate[s] for a lack of relationships" (Ballantine & Martin, 2005, p.198). Both teams of researchers found that, for audiences, parasocial interaction creates an appearance of intimacy that extends far beyond mere recognition of characters.

Indeed, Horton and Wohl (1956) argued that the creators of the media realize the importance of this incorporation to developing a fan base. Creators may use methods such as having actors address the audience or staging elaborate events where the audience sees the actor outside of a mediated environment: in the proverbial "real world." Studies have found that when characters break the fourth wall and engage the audience directly, a stronger parasocial relationship is developed (Auter, 1992). Speaking to the audience directly encourages the viewer to respond and engage an active relationship (Horton & Wohl). Of course, this relationship often encourages the fan to participate in commercialism based around the show, and media producers may start to see "fans as consumers" that want to participate in a form of the show by buying artifacts (Stenger, 2006, p. 31, emphasis in original). In one case fans of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) purchased over \$563,000 (Stenger, p. 40) worth of artifacts from the show when auctioned on eBay by the Fox Corporation. Such financial gain explains why many producers engage in activity to promote the parasocial relationship.

Sometimes parasocial relationships have unintended impacts on the fans. The activities and commercialism based around the show can cause the fan to become attached to the character, and can spur strong reactions from the fans when characters die or actors leave the show. On the television show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, for example, the decision to kill off one of the main characters led to many fans becoming violently upset. On the show, Willow Rosenberg (Alyson Hannigan) engages in a lesbian relationship with Tara Maclay (Amber Benson). When Benson left the show after her character was killed, it was only a short time before fans started to threaten her. She even had to cancel at least one convention appearance because of fans on the Internet plotting to kidnap her and convince her to go back to the show (Murphy, 2003). The actress refused to make guest appearances in later episodes out of a fear of fans' reactions (Murphy). Fans who develop such strong emotional attachments to characters are sometimes viewed as unreasonable and even dangerous: the fanatics in Jenkins' (1992b) distinction. What made the dissolution of Willow and Tara's relationship uniquely distressing to fans was the lack of other lesbian relationships on mainstream TV at the time (Murphy, 2003). For the lesbian population there were not many other characters to fill the gap left when Tara died (Horton & Wohl; Murphy; Rubin & McHugh, 1987).

These incidents show that even though the character may break the fourth wall, the connection between the character and the viewer is one-sided. When the network makes a decision the viewers do not like there are limited options for the viewer to exercise agency in the relationship. They can do nothing but hope the producers of a show will not take away the characters to whom they have become attached. In the parasocial relationship the viewer lacks control. They may send presents or letters to a character, but there are definite limits to their ability to engage the character. A letter sent to a character on a show will likely go ignored, or may even be mocked, because the viewer sent a letter to someone who does not physically exist in a non-mediated setting. For the fan, however, there are other options for engaging the text, including a participation in fan fiction or role playing games, both of which allow the fan to enter the universe of a show and engage the characters. With these options - and many others - the

relationship does not have to be unilaterally severed by the producers. Unfortunately, researchers of parasocial relationships do not currently study of this possibility, mainly because no current methodology allows one to see this act of communication.

Conceptualizing “Communication” and “Control” in the Fan Universe

In the studies discussed above, one can see how fans develop a relationship to the characters about which they write. This activity is an articulation of both the desires of the fan and the fan's perception of the characters' desires. Unfortunately, current scholarship does not provide a coherent method of analyzing this relationship. Most research focuses on fan groups that form around the text, or relies instead exclusively on analyses of the texts that are produced. The first type of research is more interested in group interaction and communication. The second type of research is primarily interested in the way fans change the text of the television show. Many of these studies have documented fans' comments about how they attempt to act towards characters in a show. What none of the studies have done, however, is try to conceptualize the attempted communication between the fan and the object of fandom. Fan activity may be a way for the passive viewer to stop yelling at a television screen and start communicating with the character. Unfortunately current research methods do not allow the researcher to see that communication. In the following section the current research methods, ethnography and textual analysis, will be explored.

Ethnography: Studying the community around the fan activity

For many researchers, the most interesting thing about fans is the groups that form around a specific show or a certain activity. Early studies of this area of interest focused primarily on the ethnographic method. Jenkins (1988) and Bacon-Smith (1992) both conducted long-term ethnographic research of *Star Trek* fan fiction groups. This research was based on offline or “real” life fan fiction groups. More recently, Jenkins, with Green and Jenkins (1998), saw how slash (fan fiction which portrays homo-erotic relationships) functions through direct interactions with members of the group. Further ethnographies by Scondari (2003), and Scondari and Felder (2000) looked at the activities of online fan groups based on *The X-Files*. In all of these major studies, the focus was on the way the text of the show facilitated interaction among the individuals in the fan group.

Thus, ethnography has offered a lot of insight into the motivations of fan groups. Bacon-Smith (1992) discovered that the artifacts created by fan culture are not meant for mass consumption; rather, fans use these new texts to demonstrate a high-level of textual literacy within the fan group. Bacon-Smith (p. 45), additionally, commented that fans, “do not write with the intention of selling their wares for profit. Rather, they write to comment upon or add to the canon of materials they already know.” Jenkins (1988) made an interesting observation about the importance of acceptance in fan groups: because fan culture is a subculture, most of the people coming to the fan group have been ostracized by the mass culture (Jenkins, 1988). Therefore, a major reason fans produce texts in fan culture is because they seek acceptance of those texts and of themselves from the fan group in which they participate (Jenkins, 1988). Scondari (2003), and Scondari and Felder (2000) built on these ideas through studies of *X-Files* fan fiction groups, and argue that once groups form and coalesce around an idea, fans work together to produce mutual meaning towards the original text. They argued that fan texts function as an argument for a change in the original text (Scondari & Felder, 2000; Scondari, 2000).

What is interesting about these studies is that all of them document the fans' articulation of a desire to act towards the characters in the original texts: Jenkins (1988; 1998) talked about fan desires to save the hero, and how fans want to involve characters in relationships; Bacon-Smith (1992) addressed fan attempts to find true companions for the characters; and in both the studies of *The X-Files* groups, fans articulated a desire to alter the text so the characters would have a relationship (Scondari, 2003; Scondari & Felder, 2000). In these ethnographic studies the fans were as much articulating a desire to interact with the character as they were creating a space to interact with each other. Unfortunately, an ethnographic methodology does not offer a coherent way to observe this attempt. One can observe the dynamics of the group members, look at the artifacts created by the group, observe the object of fandom, and document how all this is reflected in group communication; however, all this is focused on group or interpersonal communication, and does not really offer the researcher the ability to study this combination of media and intrapersonal communication.

Textual analysis: Focusing on the relationship between the activity and the show

Another method for studying fan activity is to study the artifacts produced by fans. A few examples of this are Wakefield (2001) who studied OBSSE, Gourgey and Smith (1996) who studied the relationship between text and community identity, Heineken (2004) who studied *Buffy* shipper fan fiction (fan fiction based on a relationship between two characters on the show), and Davisson (2006) who studied narrative construction in *One Tree Hill* fan fiction. In all four studies the researchers looked at online artifacts produced by the fan community in relation to the

original text of the television show. None of these projects involved researcher textual interaction with the fans producing the artifacts.

These types of studies do provide some interesting insights into the ways fans engage in identity play and the motives behind fan writing. As previously described, Wakefield (2001) focused primarily on the way fans re-constructed the identity of Scully from *The X-Files*. She wrote that the fan's online community "creates . . . Scully as saint. Scully as everywoman, and Scully as sexpot" (p. 131). This construction of Scully identity expands drastically on her identity from the show, but never necessarily conflicts with the original character (Wakefield). This type of identity play focused on character identity, while other studies looked at how this relates to community identity (Booth, 2006). Yet, through this construction of the character, the members of the community also construct the community itself.

Fan communities are shaped and structured by a tension between communal expectations and individual desires, manifested in an individual's socialization. For Burke (1950, p. 39), being part of a community creates a process of "socialization, considered . . . moralizing," and as such, is a process in which one uses societal expectations to negotiate one's own identity. As pointed out by Booth (2006), this is demonstrated in online forums, as social identity forms from the networks within digital communities that foster a deliberate growth of cultural norms. Within each community a specific presentation of what is accepted as proper and normal functions to define the boundaries of that community. As Miller (1994, p. 74, our emphasis added) states, reciprocity in interaction "enhances our *common* actions." Communities structure social mores and unique communal expectations for everyone participating in that community. It is for this reason that Gourgey and Smith (1996) argued that it is not that the text changes the community; it is the community that changes the text.

Besides identity play, textual analysis looks at the motivations of writers. In the Heinecken (2004) and the Davisson (2006) studies, the researchers looked at the differences in character's choices from the original text to the fan fiction. They found that the place where the choices differ tells the researcher something about the motivations of the fan writers. In all four of these studies, and indicative in fan studies in general, one key problem with the research on identity and motivational assessment is the lack of study of the interaction between the text and the fans. Studies conceived of the interaction between the media producers and the show, but not the interaction between the fan and the text produced. Just as in the ethnographic work, something is missing.

Towards a New Conceptualization: Finding the Projected Interactivity

In order to conceptualize a fan/text communication model of fan activity, a new methodology is necessary. The methodology created for this paper was inspired by the projective identity theory proposed by Gee (2003), but reconceptualizes that theory in few salient ways. We term our methodology "projected interactivity" both to linguistically link it to Gee's "projective identity," and also to create an awareness of space and spatiality that his theory lacks. Gee's projective identity resides within one mediated environment: namely, video games. Because our concept of projected interactivity occurs across media and through different interpretative spaces, we use a more focused spatial word. While "projective" connotes the creation of an identity, "projected" connotes the transmission of that identity. Additionally, to denote the appearance of a relationship between the text and the fan, we use the term "interactivity." In the following section, we look at Gee's projective identity, and then define a methodology that takes Gee's work and builds upon it to produce our projected interactivity of fan studies.

Projective identity and fan studies

Projective identity was a concept created to understand the identities at stake when someone plays a video game. Gee (2003) claimed that in a video game there are three identities in play: the player, the character being played, and the projective identity. The player outside the game has her own motivations: things such as leisure, or a desire to win. Alternatively, the character exists inside the game, and while the player may "create" that character – especially in a massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) – the character exists separate from the player. The avatar created inside the universe of the game has motivations specific to that universe (i.e. slay the dragon, kill the ninja, collect the golden fleece, etc.), which are all linked to parts of the game's story, and separate the character from the player (Gee). Finally, the third identity, the projective identity, is deeply tied to the choices an individual makes when they are playing a character. Gee claimed that one does not play the game in a way that resembles a player, but a way that resembles some mixture of the character and the player's belief about who their character is. This projective identity is what he called the "interface between – and the interactions between" the two other identities (p. 56). This is the space where individuals develop a relationship with the character that they are playing. In this new methodology the term is changed from projective identity to projected interaction to reflect what Gee describes taking place in the meeting place of the players identity and characters identity.

In the process of writing fan fiction, a similar set of identities exist that stretch between creator and created.

These identities encompass the fan writers, the characters on the television show about which the fan writes, and those same characters as they exist in the story the fan writes. One or more of these identities, it must be pointed out, can be more prominent in the projected interactivity: we term this identity the "ruling force" in identity construction. It is this third identity that we argue bears a close resemblance to Gee's (2003) concept of the projective identity. Fan fiction groups, and most often fan writers, see the characters they write about as separate realized entities, and as has been noted in previous fan fiction studies, fans invest a lot into the characteristics of the original character (Jenkins, 1988; Bacon-Smith, 1992). Gee (p. 56) offered many examples of how he invested in his character Bead Bead and spent time thinking about what "kind of person I want Bead Bead to be, the kind of history I want her to have." Fans often put similar thought and work into writing the television show characters in their stories.

For example, Thomas (2006, p. 231) showed that, using the social capabilities the web, fan writers often use "synchronous chat" to "push...the limits and blur...the boundaries ... about narrative." According to the article, the two writers interviewed synchronously wrote back and forth on the Internet, each providing additional input into the final draft of the piece. Additionally, each writer identified with the characters through the writing and interaction with the text. According to one of the writers (Tianna), "When I transcribe over, I sort of become two people – Tianna and a narrator ... [I] see the characters as I see my own world" (quoted in Thomas, 2006, p. 232). Here, Tianna uses the capabilities of the web to become closer to the characters in the media text: she describes her existence as *becoming* part of them. She does not just write them, but rather the process of describing them with a socialization and in dialogue with another writer helped her identify with the characters.

Additionally, fans may rewrite events from a show that, to the viewer, seem out of character or harmful to the character's accepted attributes. Sometimes, they even rewrite character's histories to present new options for their current status in the show. In the rewrite process fans create characters both different from themselves and different from the original characters on the television show. Some scholarly writers hypothesize that fans are in some ways writing themselves into the original story (Jenkins, 1988; 1992b; Stengel, 2004). Still, the character has characteristics of both creator and created.

One dimension which was not present in Gee's (2003) analysis, but which is important for an analysis of fan activity, is the community in which the activity takes place. Many fans engage in activity that would be considered outside the norms of common social behavior (Jenkins, 1988; Bacon-Smith, 1992; Lee, 2002), and this may make them self-conscious about their activities. Lee (p. 73), a scholar and a writer of slash, comments, "It's one thing for your co-workers, domestic partners, or children to know you're a 'Trekkie,' it's another to know you're a producer of pornography with gay overtones." Slash fan fiction writers are a subculture within a subculture, which may explain why members form such strong bonds with other members of their community. Lee commented on her anxiety when her community, Entslash, shut down their website. She stated, "when the Entslash list went down...I spent two days furiously helping create the new list...In just a few months, the slash community had become very important to me, and I hadn't quite been aware of it until that community was threatened" (Lee, p. 72). The strong attachment fan writers have to their community makes any acceptance by that community important.

Fans do not write for public circulation, but rather write for themselves and for the fan community (Bacon-Smith, 1992). Because of this it is very important to the fan writer that the community accepts their portrayal of events (Jenkins, 1988; Bacon-Smith). A third element, beyond the character and the writer, in creating the projected interactivity is the audience for which the fan writes. Even within groups that violate traditional cultural norms, there are guidelines for acceptable behavior (see Lowney, 1995; Pravettoni & Migliorette, 2004). Fan communities, like any community, generate their own norms within which the writers work (Jenkins, 1988). The writers all stray from the traditional text, but each community sets limits for the straying and codes for an allowance readers accept for how far the limits can be pushed (Jenkins, 1988). Members understand these codes since "fan writers create their fiction entirely for an insider audience trained to share in the conventions of the literature" (Bacon-Smith, p. 48). Because fans produce texts almost exclusively for the consumption of other fans, the group norms allow fans to "share with each other their own interpretations of the object of fandom, interpretations that sometimes veer sharply from the meanings of the original" (Markman, 2005, p. 4). With all this in mind, it is important to understand this third element in the creation of projected interactivity, what we call the "community character identity."

Projective identity as methodology

Researching this third identity is difficult because current methodologies do not lend themselves to this kind of study. Ethnographies of fan groups do not typically involve a textual analysis of the character from the original television show. Close textual analysis does not typically spend a lot of time conceptualizing the identity of the writer. Thus, a new methodology is proposed in this essay. This method begins by conceptualizing the two identities that exist outside of the fan fiction text, the writer and the character, and exploring the characteristics of

and potential motives for each identity. To do this, the researcher performs a close textual analysis, both to understand how the two identities show themselves in the projected interactivity as well as to understand the characteristics of the new identity that is created in the interaction between the two outside identities.

In order to conceptualize the three elements that go into creating the projected interactivity model, and understand how that projected interactivity functions, we propose a hybrid of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to create a scholarly amalgam. To perform a textual analysis of the show we suggest using Burke's pentad, which provides a solid rhetorical grounding in dramatism. Further, to analyze the fan writer, a research paradigm incorporating surveys and interviews might be used to supply the necessary social science background. Finally, the conceptualization of the group should involve a form of ethnographic analysis. Each part of the method will be explained in more detail below. Once the three types of analysis are done, a textual analysis is performed on the fan fiction to see how the three identities are acted out in the fan fiction text.

Textual analysis of the show. The first step in the determination of the projected interactivity methodology is an analysis of the text of the show to discover the motives of the characters. To do this, we propose the use of Burke's pentad. The pentad is part of Burke's theory of dramatism, which proposed that it was possible to understand the motivations of individuals if one looks at all of life as a drama (Burke, 1945). In this statement of perspective, Burke set out to establish a method of analyzing human actions, as opposed to measuring human thought. It is through the pentad that he described human motivation and action in a dramatic form. He articulated this "to make clear the ways in which dialectical and metaphysical issues *necessarily* figure in the subject of motivation" (p. xxiii). For Burke, everything humans do could be understood in dramatic forms, each of which details the complex motivations held by humans. These motivations describe the myriad of ways humans can, and do, act (Booth, 2006). To explore this human drama and understand the motivations of the actors, Burke said one must ask or question five elements of the scene. As he wrote, "any complete statement about motives will offer *some kind of* answers to these five questions: what was done (*act*), when or where it was done (*scene*), who did it (*agent*), how he did it (*agency*), and why (*purpose*)" (p. xv, italics added for emphasis).

An analysis of each of these questions in relation to the show helps determine the motives of the show's characters. Each element of the pentad helps, as Henderson (1988, p. 130) wrote, "cross-fertilize" human reality into a series of dense relations. Henderson (p. 130) showed how the five separate aspects of the pentad can combine "in order to show forth the combinatory possibilities of various philosophical systems" and embodies "substance." To be more specific, Henderson demonstrated that any analysis of the pentad moves beyond examining motivation, but instead looks deeper into the essence of human action. Burke's pentad, in defining the aspects that compel human drama, also defines the aspects of that drama (Booth, 2006).

Although it is important to answer all five of Burke's initial questions, most relevant for the projected interactivity methodology are the answers to the last question. One can use the answers to the question about purpose to compare the motives of the character on the show to the motives attributed to the character by the fan writer. This comparison will reveal the differences between the two, which establishes the first part of the projected interactivity model.

Analysis of the fan. When analyzing fans it is best to approach their motivation in two parts. The first indicates the choices made in the identifiable aspects of the fans own life, while the second shows the choices the fan makes for the lives of the characters in the fan fiction. A comparison of the two will tell the scholars how much the fans differentiate their own personality from the characters on the show, and if there are characters with whom they identify more strongly.

In order to determine the two sets of motivations, one can use a quantitative analysis, like a survey. To determine the two sets of motivations through a survey, a number of important comparisons should be made. To summarize these, we illustrate one possible set of questions to ask fans to find out how the values in the survey should be questioned and analyzed. One should look at the conflicts the character faces on the show during the time period of the show in which the fan writes. On the survey the fan should write four things: a list of the values that are in conflict during that time period; the importance of those values for making decisions in their own life; a description of what they think the importance of those values are in the life of the character; and finally which should be most important in the fan's life and in the life of the character. The information gleaned from an open survey of this sort will provide the researcher with qualitative information that can then be analyzed in comparison with other data to consolidate a more informed interpretation of a fan's experiences.

Community interaction with the writer, text, and character. In order to understand the collective character identity, one needs to look at two elements: community member response to fan fiction, and fan fiction by multiple community members. The majority of communities setup an option for community members to respond to each other's writing. Thomas (2006, p. 237) showed how fan communities help members to be "able to explore many facets of their character's identity" and to give "feedback, reviews and support." She explained, experienced writers

in the community “help emerging writers” by offering “supportive critique ... [and] a safe framework for learning how to contribute meaningfully and in character” (p. 237).

The positive and negative reactions of stories offer an immediate answer as to whether the writer’s portrayals of events are accepted by the community. Additionally, the specifics of the response may offer insight into how the writer has violated the group norms. If events from the show are related incorrectly, that may say the writer is not literate about the show. However, if the comments complain of the writer being inconsistent with the character on the show, that can tell the researcher that the writer may have brought too much of herself into the character.

Trends in comments for multiple stories can also tell the researcher who the community believes the character on the show is or should be. A trend in negative comments tells the researcher this community believes some aspect of the character is critical. Positive comments can show that the community accepts that some specific change in the character is a positive thing. This lets the researcher know how the community polices the amount of “self” the writer puts into the story. This also helps to identify which characteristics of the original character are integral for fans, and which are necessary to recognize the substance of the character’s identity.

To use the comments of fans directed towards fans presents interesting textual challenges about which the researcher should be aware. Using others’ comments as a basis for our own methodology creates what could be called a “meta-text” of comments. This, in turn, presents a second-level of analysis: when reading comments about a piece of fan fiction written about a show, the researcher is automatically separated from the text of analysis. Additionally, because the researcher may not be from the subculture or the fan community being analyzed, the researcher may not be aware of grudges or animosity within the cultural circle. Flaming, insulting the writing someone posts to the internet, may not be common in fan fiction communities, but it does exist, and the researcher should take this into account during analysis.

Analyzing the character in the fan fiction as a projected identity. Once the characteristics of the character on the show, the characteristics of the fan, and the characteristics of the community character identity have all been established, the next step is to look at the narrative progression of the character in the fan fiction to see how these elements come together. The character’s narrative is key because, “narrative is crucial in the production of virtual identity; the stories we tell about ourselves and others on the Internet make up our virtual identity” (Kelemen & Smith, 2001, p. 377).

Indeed, when a virtual identity forms on social software, like MySpace or Facebook, it supposedly represents the person that posts it. Yet, there exists a difference between the persona in the post and the person who posts which exists within a narrow framework of carefully constructed constraints. The interaction between people staring at their computer screens and the personas at which they look not only mirrors the relationship between the viewers of television and the emotional parasocial attachment those viewers feel towards the characters in some interesting ways, but also extends and develops fan studies interaction theory in a number of useful ways.

The story that is told about the character tells the researcher what the virtual or projected identity of that character is. To analyze the narrative, again one can go back to Burke’s (1945) pentad. When charting each of the five parts the researcher should look to see which ruling force (the original character, the writer, or the community) dictates that the character in the story makes the choice that they end up making. At times the three different identities all appear balanced, and at times the different identities may be in conflict. The choice the writer makes when the identities are in conflict show how fans exercise their agency in the artifact.

In interpreting the projected identity the researcher can see the struggle between the different identities co-existence in the text. At times the fan may decide to override the desires of the fan community to achieve her own desires. At other times, fans may give up their own desires to maintain the original character, or may respond to the community that will receive the story. The choices that are made tell the researcher about the give and take of the character and the fan. Unlike in previous research, which stops short of the place where the fan actually engages the character, we maintain that specific engagement as the hallmark of our fan studies. In doing so, the researcher can observe the activity in which fans attempt to engage.

Future Implications for This Conceptualization

One of the most interesting things about this methodology is that it offers researchers a way to conceive of an interaction that is more complicated than previous research on parasocial theory would allow. Parasocial theory primarily describes situations where the agency of the viewer is limited. For example, Horton and Wohl’s (1956) use of the theory, which works because the television actor “uses the mode of direct address, [and] talks as if he were conversing personally and privately” with the audience, focuses more on the individual watching and interpreting the program, mainly because of the “lack of effective reciprocity” the media text has with the viewer (p. 215). Parasocial interaction is therefore a misnomer, for it is not technically a form of interaction. The media text and the characters within the text are definitely affective towards the viewer, but the viewer has little recourse in affecting the text – and virtually none in affecting the character. When Horton and Wohl write about viewers of soap operas

sending thousands of dollars worth of wedding presents to soap opera characters who have gotten married on the show, they do not interpret this as a meaningful act on the part of the *character*, but instead on the part of the viewer. Instead, what appears to happen to the viewers is an attachment, an emotional and mental connection with something outside of themselves. Contrastingly, projected interactivity model looks at the ways fans attempt to claim agency in their relationship with media texts. Understanding how individuals play with identity in fan activity creates a possibility of a communication theory that is a hybrid of current intrapersonal and media theory.

This methodology could help researchers understand some of the new activities that are taking place as a result of New Media. Online fan episode guides, videos, character personality profiles on MySpace and Facebook and the like, are all burgeoning areas of fan activity that invite reflection by researchers. Pure textual analysis and ethnographic research may have a difficult time conceiving how fans take part in a text when they simply post the profile of a character they like or relate the details of an episode they enjoyed. To understand the more complicated identity play taking place in these New Mediated spaces, one needs to conceive of the three identities that are present in the activity – the fan, the character, the community – as well as the projected interactivity model which is a hybrid of all of these creations.

Limitations

There are some differences we see between the identity play in fan fiction and the play in role-playing games described by Gee (2003); mainly in the issue of the amount of control the player or writer has in relation to the text. In a game, the players create the character and make decision about how that character will act, but there are several things they are unable to control. First, they are limited by the game to certain character features involving intelligence, strength, etc. Second, they are unable to control various aspects of the character's environment, including actual terrain, and cut-scene interactions with other characters in the game. The inability to control certain factors may lend the illusion of a projective identity that is separate from the player's identity. In fan fiction, conversely, the writer has the ability to control all these factors, making the projected identity far less separate from the writer's identity. We think the projected interactivity model is more apparent in fan fiction when the fan complies to the rules in the universe they are entering, such as: sticking to the characteristics of the original character, maintaining the character's history in line with previous episodes, and not changing the story in ways uncharacteristic with the rest of the plotline. We feel that if viewers explore activities that follow these rules, they look at something similar to the game world described by Gee.

Conclusion

A thorough review of the previous research on fans indicates that there is something interesting going on in fan activity. While current methodologies may point the way to that something, they are insufficiently equipped for a full understanding of what takes place. Looking at how projective identity functions in video games and comparing that to other texts offers researchers a chance to develop a deeper understanding of what fans attempt to do, but this is not a last word on fan studies. As technology changes and new forms of mediation and interactivity are found, the key for continued research will be continued adaptation. In particular with New Media, it is important to consider interdisciplinary options for understanding the way that scholars engage text and audience, and attempt to control text and influence audience.

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