

The changing faces of *Doctor Who* fandom: New fans, new technologies, old practices?

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Abstract:

In this paper we analyze *Doctor Who* fans' answers to in-person interview questions about changing fan practices in light of the advent of digital technology. We discover that many aspects of fan identity remain unchanged, despite the rapid diffusion of digital technology into fans' lives. In fact, with little exception, much of what was written about fans twenty-five years ago applies equally well today. At least in *Doctor Who* fandom, offline fan practices remain strong, vibrant, and understudied. From this ethnographic data we find that online and offline notions of identity and fandom continue to resonate as venues for expressing similar tropes. Digital and online technology has augmented, not shifted, fan practices. Online fandom seems to produce in fan communities a sense of self-awareness. Through this cognition, fans are finding new means of expressing traditional fan identities, both deflecting fan shame and reflecting fan pride through offline fandom. We analyze the introduction of technology into fandom as a way of deepening contemporary research in fan studies, building and updating scholarship of fans, and contributing to contemporary theories of identity and self-reflection within a twenty-first century media culture.

Keywords: Fan, Identity, Doctor Who, Interview, Convention, Digital, Media

What does it mean to be a fan of something? How is this identity owned, explored, and performed by fans themselves? For nearly two and a half decades, fan scholars and audience researchers have been debating and discussing the various identities, personas, and practices that help structure the paired arenas of fan practices and fan identity. At this quarter century mark, it seems appropriate to take a step back and examine the shifting

self-identity of fans. Media fans – defined here as audience members who feel an intense emotional connection to a particular media text – are difficult to ‘pin down’ to any specific representation.

As with any sort of cultural analysis, such boundaries of identification must necessarily be open to interpretation, tension, and negotiation – to be rigid in defining said boundaries would exclude other vital components. Thus, we wanted to open up this identity definition as it applies to and is illustrated by the people about whom it speaks: fans themselves. Given the influx of digital technology, especially the Internet, have fans shifted their own perceptions of their fandom?

What we discovered is that many aspects of fan identity have remained relatively unchanged, despite the rapid diffusion of new technology into fans’ lives. In fact, with little exception, much of what was written about fans twenty-five years ago applies just as well today. Yet, although fandom has not been revolutionized, it also does not entirely resemble the community of twenty-five years ago, nor do fans *exactly* channel fans of years past. The digital space has clearly augmented the practices and methods of interpersonal connection amongst fans, even as many fans continue to adhere to offline practices (see Phillips 2011: 493). Online fandom has made fandom as a whole more visible, and while this may have ‘mainstreamed’ fan identity, it has also increased fan awareness of their own online representations. As Zubernis and Larsen (2012) have discussed, many fans feel a sense of shame about their fandom and fan experiences. When online fans do not match ‘expected’ fan representations, they can deflect their participation to offline networks. The fans that we spoke with had experienced a type of shame in their online texts, but not in their offline interactions. It was through offline social networks that the fans we spoke with established their ‘true’ fannish identity and took pride in their fandom.

In the second decade of the twenty-first century, the notion of fan identity has become central to the ways in which fan scholars have investigated fandom. As the Internet has widened the scope of fan *practices*, so too has it allowed fan *researchers* to engage in new methods of analysis. Booth’s (2010) analysis of fans using social media, Bury’s (2005) analysis of fan Internet communities, and Baym’s (2000) discussion of online fan message boards all rely upon the openness of content fans post online. One of the most striking examples of this new research methodology is Gray and Mittell’s (2007) work in *Participations*, in which they used fans’ own voices in combination with fans’ Internet usage to discover a rationale for why fans would spoil shows like *Lost*. Still, many fans choose not to go online, and many integrate digital technology into their offline practices in ways that may not be immediately visible to online fan researchers. The omnipresence of the digital world has continued to reshape this landscape and blur the boundaries across which fans participate.

Thus, for many scholars the role that fans themselves play in this investigation is limited. Researching solely the fan *text* can hide the identity of the *fan* from scholarly view and, consequentially, vital contextual information can remain shadowed. To *rely* on the fan text itself as an unwavering beacon forces this type of study into a reductive mode of

analysis, that ultimately ignores the reception practices at the heart of fandom itself. To move fan studies into a reception-based mode of analysis, then, the focus should be on fans themselves as the site of discursive power. Doing so accounts for blurry definitive boundaries in traditional aca-fan research models. It is not possible to completely remove the text from the fan: it is, after all, what separates the fan from the regular viewer. But to see fandom as an identity that transcends the text – that is, fans of one text act similarly to fans of another text – we must strive to divorce the centrality of the text from fan identity in order to seek a greater balance of cultural forces.

To discover aspects of fandom from fan texts is valid only so far; it necessarily leaves out the voice of the fan. In this article, then, we focus on fans' own voices as they articulate contemporary fan identities, both in offline and online contexts. The fans we spoke to were energized and excited to be interviewed. They spoke about the power of the convention to foster memories and to share friendships with each other. The fans we interviewed were intensely proud of their own fandom yet also noted some shame about sharing in online environments. The results provide a detailed picture of fan participation. Sharing continues to emerge as an integral part of fannish production for many fans, a desire that was repeatedly echoed in our interviews.

Fan Convention and Methodology for Study

Echoing Tom Phillips (2011) ethnographic study of Kevin Smith fans, which saw Phillips entering the fan community as a scholar-fan in order to research in-person fandom, we sought to use our own fandom of *Doctor Who* to engage the *Doctor Who* fan community. In November 2011, just after Thanksgiving, four researchers attended Chicago Tardis, a *Doctor Who* convention near Chicago, IL. We chose this convention for a few reasons. First, it was local to where the researchers lived and required less travel. Second, it is one of the largest all-*Doctor-Who* conventions in the nation (the largest, *Gallifrey One*, is held three months later in Los Angeles) and is completely fan-run, operated, and organized: In contrast to corporation-run conventions (like those of Creation Entertainment), fan-run conventions seem to encourage more fannish sharing. Third, the lead researcher on this project had attended Chicago Tardis before as a fan and was familiar with the layout, atmosphere, and composition of the convention.

Over the past few years, Chicago Tardis has averaged 1,000 fans in attendance over the three-day convention. At the 2011 convention, just over 1,100 fans attended. Chicago Tardis fans provide a global sample – while the majority of attendees originated from the United States Midwest, we spoke with fans from all across North America and Europe. This is important to note because *Doctor Who* fandom is culturally situated: UK fans of the show often express their fandom differently than their American counterparts (see Hills 2010; Booy 2012).

Of the 1,100 attendees at the convention, we interviewed 115. Over half of the interviews were recorded 'on the fly' by the researchers wandering the hallways and stopping people at random. The rest of the interviews were recorded by self-selected fans

who stopped by the researchers' booth in the dealer's gallery. Five of the interviews were either lost due to recording malfunction or the dialogue could not be discerned over the background noise. This left 110 interviews conducted by the four researchers present, a full ten percent of the convention sample. Interviews lasted between ten minutes and three quarters of an hour, though they were designed to take approximately half an hour. The researchers were encouraged to follow the conversation 'off-topic' should the interviewee lead the discussion in a new direction in order to ascertain a full range of fan responses (see Murchison 2010). We had a list of ten questions, three of which were multi-part. For a full list of questions, please see the appendix. In order to generate interviews, we advertised our research project in the conference program, had the Programming and Publicity Chair introduce the study at the opening ceremony of the convention, and set up a table in the main Dealers' room. Furthermore, each researcher roamed the hallways of the convention equipped with a microphone and a recorder and found fans who had not stopped by our table in the Dealers' room.

Questions ranged from introductory topics such as, 'Is this your first Chicago Tardis?' to more introspective questions like, 'What does 'being a fan' mean to you?' and 'What changes have you observed in fandom due to new technologies?' Our questions were intended to approach two issues:

- First, how have online practices of fans affected offline practices, if at all? Specifically, we were interested in exploring how offline practices today compared to offline practices described in classic fan studies research dealing with conventions (Bacon-Smith 1992; Jenkins 1992)
- Second, how has more mainstream knowledge of fandom affected fan practices, if at all? Specifically, we were interested in exploring the notion of 'fan shame' and how online or offline practices affect that sense of shame. (We should note the idea of 'fan shame' plays an important role in Zubernis and Larson's [2012] discussion of *Supernatural* fandom, but as that book had not been published at the time of our study, we used different terminology in our questions and answers than they did).

We recorded the fan answers digitally, without demographic or personal information. The fans were made aware that their answers would be anonymous, and indeed many fans had fun choosing the name by which we could identify them (as fans of *Doctor Who* will observe, all pseudonyms given to each of the audio files come from characters, actors, or producers of the show). We transferred each interview onto a hard drive and deleted it from the recorder. After the convention, a transcriber was hired to transcribe the 110 listenable interviews; the final transcript was over 300 single-spaced pages and twenty-four hours long.

It's important to note that the sample affects the results. First, the interview subjects are a relatively self-selected group of individuals. Not only did they volunteer for the

interviews, but they also spent the time and money to attend a convention. Consequentially, we assume that the interview sample is slightly skewed towards the more intense or emotionally-invested fans, and fans of a particular socio-economic class. Second, the interview subjects are *Doctor Who* fans, which means they may act or present their fandom differently than fans of other texts might (e.g., Zubernis and Larsen 2012). For example, while *Doctor Who* and *Star Trek* tend to have more active and engaged fandoms that meet on regular bases (Tulloch and Jenkins 1995), fans of other texts (like soap operas, for example) may not have as many large-scale conventions, or may not behave similarly, either alone or in aggregate. Fandom, like any subculture, exists as a group of individuals, each different from the other. That being said, given the nature of the convention and the cross-section of participants, we feel as though these interviews represent a meaningful snapshot of fan culture. The detailed interviews allow us to hear fans speaking about their self-conceptions and working through complex cultural machinations.

Further, the role that the subject of an ethnographic study plays within that same study can affect the outcome. Including individuals' voices within a research study is, as Murchison shows, necessarily 'complex or "messy"' and can lead to contradictory information not based on logic, order, or structure (2010: 181). Yet, encouraging fans to speak about their own experiences as fans, and reflect upon their own participation in fan practices, can also provide 'a window into different perspectives' – itself 'the source of important information and insight' (2010: 181). Participant ethnography is an inherently fan-like methodology. Earlier research on fan identity, including Sandvoss's *Fans: The Mirror of Consumption*, sees fans' identity as tied directly to their fannish text. As he shows, a media object 'is part of the fan's (sense of) self' (2005: 101). This type of parasocial engagement (see Horton and Wohl 1956) harnesses fans' interpersonal and collective identities as components of the media environment.

Fans themselves participate within a bottom-up structure of interactive dialogue. Although hierarchies do exist within fandom (Booy 2012; Hadas 2009; Hills 2002), the very existence of active and productive fans within the media landscape offers a voice to the traditionally voiceless, autonomy to those typically lectured-to. Being a fan thus hinges on the identification fans have with the media text itself.

We should note that some aca-fan organizations (like the Organization for Transformative Works and its complementary *The Journal of Transformative Works*) do provide such bottom-up dialogue with fans. Our argument contends that more fan research needs to follow suit by taking into account offline ethnographic methodologies. This is already starting to happen. In the Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington edited collection *Fandom* (2007), a number of contributors describe localized, physical places of fandom, including at cinemas (Longhurst, Bagnall, and Savage 2007), on corporate tours (Couldry 2007), and at sporting events (McBride and Bird 2007; Gosling 2007). Further, Lynn Zubernis and Katherine Larsen's (2012) *Fandom at the Crossroads* examines offline communities of *Supernatural* fans at conventions across the country. And, similar to our discussion of *Doctor Who* fans, researcher Nicolle Lamerichs (2012) uses personal interviews

to explore the way Dutch fans of the BBC show *Sherlock* use their own experiences to ‘naturalize’ their fannish discourse. We believe that more fan research into these offline, physical locations needs to take place, to account for all available outlets of fan expression, across all media and levels of connectivity, in order to better grapple with the complex fabric of fan participation.

Fan Conventions, Costumes, and Fan Identities

One crucial aspect of investigating fan identity at a fan convention is parsing the mixture of self-identity and communalization that occurs when fans meet in groups. A majority of fans saw their fandom just as Ian¹ did: ‘it’s just a really big part of me and who I am’. Each fan’s individuality becomes part of the cultural fabric in the convention community – the space itself both fosters and is fostered by a network of unique and shared fan perspectives (Coppa 2006).

Doctor Who presents a relatively unique text from which to analyze fan identity. Any one text will generate a particular fan community; in the case of *Doctor Who*, a multitude of splintered-yet-connected communities have formed around varying thematic topics. The Classic series of *Doctor Who* ran for twenty-six years, from 1963 until 1989. In 1996, a TV movie was made as a pilot episode of a never-to-be-realized new series, and in 2005 *Doctor Who* was ‘rebooted’ and is currently running in its seventh season. During the period between series, referred to by many fans as the ‘Wilderness Years’, fan interest and experience kept the show going through audio adventures (made by fans-cum-producers), novels (published first by Virgin Books and then later by BBC itself), and comics (see Britton 2012).

Fans of *Doctor Who* often mark the reboot series (or, *New Who*) as a defining moment when fandom – and fan identity – shifted (see Hills 2010). This moment coincides with a similar shift in technology, as the popularity of online texts emerged in the decade between series. Fans of Classic *Who* sometimes clash with fans of *New Who* (Hadas 2009), but we found far more connectedness between the two groups than dissidence. Although Sarah notes that there is ‘absolutely a generational thing... The younger folks are definitely more of an online fandom. It’s the old fogies who still have to show up’, we discovered more fans who saw similarities instead of differences. For example, Carole agrees that ‘It’s nice to have fresh people coming in every year’. A younger fan, Zoe, believes that newer fans ‘learn to appreciate the older generation because they got started before the new series, before we even knew *Doctor Who* existed... It’s good to learn from their experiences and grow from there’. Jacqueline sees a positive effect on the show itself. In her opinion, *New Who* ‘has brought a lot more people into fandom and I think it’s made people more aware of what *Doctor Who* is’. Davy believes that the introduction of younger fans ‘brings a bit of vitality’ to the show. All these quotations indicate a growing awareness of new fans – many of whom have been brought into fandom through online technologies – who experience fandom in offline contexts.

This same younger/older dynamic plays out in online fan communities as well. Although Hadas (2009) has shown that younger fans often embrace 'Web 2.0' aesthetics and standards in contrast to older fans who may want to remain tethered to more hierarchal fannish cultural dynamics, the online world is often welcoming to new voices, new experiences, and new perspectives. Even those traditional fans that might feel resentment at the intrusion of younger fans still find positives to their presence. Chris first focuses on a feeling of resentment towards newer fans:

Those of us who are the old guard who were going to conventions in the '90s and 2000's when there was no series and if the convention broke 400 that was a really good year for the convention. And so, we're the hardcore fans. Then, of course, with the new series, now there's thousands of people coming to the conventions. You feel sort of crotchety, who are these kids? They don't even know who Jon Pertwee [the actor portraying the Third Doctor] is.

But then he immediately changes his opinion, noting the similarity to his start as a fan:

It's all good because a lot of them are coming to you. Well you were into the old series, which DVD should I buy. So it's really kind of, it's coming full circle so you feel like you're the mentor figures.

Similarly, the importance of online fans as a growing demographic of fandom has not gone unnoticed by older fans. Many shared similar sentiments as those expressed by Alex:

I think it's important not to see fans as geeky people who memorize a ton of statistics about the show. It's important to look at the [online] community, what people are doing. Seeing it in a positive light when you look at kids who are online reading fan fic, writing fan fic, contributing to Livejournal. Contributing, doing things on Facebook or Twitter or whatever they're using. That needs to be seen in a positive light and it shouldn't be something that's made fun of.

Of course, *Doctor Who* fandom is culturally specific and performed in different ways. For those in the UK, watching *Doctor Who* may have been less cultish than we might now assume. As Booy notes, 'For the British, watching *Doctor Who* was a mainstream cultural activity' (2012: 75). Indeed, while fans had been meeting in small groups to watch and discuss *Doctor Who* since the 1970s, it wasn't until the 1980s that '*Who* fandom became so large it was starting to leave behind the science fiction fandom with which it was still affiliated' (2012: 73). In the 1980s, *Doctor Who* fandom emerged intensely in the US. As Booy (2012) argues, in 1983 – the twentieth anniversary of the show – *Doctor Who* fan

conventions became more common and more immense – and the show itself became more ‘cultish’. Especially for a show so tied to British national identity, the conventions and the influence of American-style active fandom *created*, rather than reflected, the idea that watching *Doctor Who* ‘denoted not a mainstream activity but a distinct identity’ (Booy 2012: 75). In this way, the specific performance of ‘cult’ fandom augments the fannish understanding of the self. As the show becomes more ‘cultish’, it reflects on fan identities. The more cultish the show is (in cultural context), the more shame the fan might feel about his/her fandom. This aspect of fan shame is both augmented and dispelled at conventions, where fans can feel the freedom to ‘be themselves’, but also note the uniqueness of their own identity within others’.

Fan conventions have long been influential in fans’ identity development, sense of community with other fans, and the ways in which they enact their fannishness. For *Doctor Who* fans at these conventions, it started to be impossible to separate fans’ own discrete identities as fans from their participations within *fandoms*. This combination of *self* and *group* illustrate what Sandvoss describes as ‘a distinct set of belonging [that] illustrates the ambiguity of identity construction between self and community in fandom’ (2005: 64). This modality of ‘belonging’ is also represented in the way conventions can be seen as pilgrimages, where fans congregate as in a religious journey. The ‘negotiated, constructed, and heterogeneous process’ of the pilgrimage allows fans to see themselves as both individuals and as one-of-many (Porter 2004: 161).

One way fans at Chicago Tardis manifest this performative sense of belonging is through cosplay, the dressing up in costumes based on characters and personas from the media fans’ object of fandom. Not only do merchants sell costumes and accessories to aid in costuming, but the organization also holds both a masquerade party and an in-costume karaoke evening. Both cos- and cross-play occur (crossplay is dressing as a character of the opposite sex) and many people dress like the characters portrayed by the actors at the convention. Lamerichs (2011) argues that cosplay, as representative of this bifurcation of identity/community in fandom, is an actualized metaphor that positions and tethers the fan’s individual identity alongside his/her identity as subsumed within a larger community. She writes that ‘costuming is a form of fan appropriation that transforms, performs, and actualizes an existing story in close connection to the fan’s own identity’ (2011: 1.2). Although not all fans engage in cosplay (see Booy 2012: 76), it remains an appropriate metaphor for understanding fan engagement.

If fan engagement is evidenced at conventions through congregation, cosplay and shared pilgrimage, are there analogous modalities in play online? Lamerichs’s (2011) notion of cosplay mirrors, in many respects, the notion of ‘persona creation’ described by Booth (2010) in reference to how fans use social network sites like MySpace to play with identities online. Fans create profiles of characters on these friendship-building sites and, through persistent dialogue, create collaborative fan fiction. In fans’ enumeration of specific personality characteristics, they rewrite the characters as an extension of their own experience, informed by textual content as well as first-hand knowledge. In this respect,

fans' identities are constructed not just through the lens of the intimate fan community that gathers at conventions, but also through the complex interactions with which they engage online.

Offline interaction both parallels and changes (and is changed by) online interaction. But the boundary between the two is disappearing in fandom: There are additional parallels between online and offline fandom, illustrating the deep interaction that the two modes of communication share. For example, cosplay engenders communal characteristics – every cosplayer needs an audience. But online, fans also often dialogue for an audience as well: communicating with others to engender a performance. And while conventions feature communal meeting areas (the perennial 'lobby-con' meet-ups, for example), online spaces encourage also encourage less formal interactions, like sharing photographs or simply 'liking' someone else's status update.

Duchesne (2010) illustrates how conventions become special places for performances, where fans can act out and embrace the identity of another as part of their own – not as a substitution, but as an augmentation. He cites the many fan tributes to Heath Ledger's portrayal of 'The Joker' in *The Dark Knight*; fans reproduced his persona and costume at numerous conventions in 2009 after the actor's recent passing. These moments of costuming are not just in celebration of the actor, but are also a way for the fan to critique, evaluate, and reflect, or to discuss aspects of his/her own mediated identity. For Duchesne, the convention becomes a space where 'the fan and celebrity momentarily merge for mutual advantage', and where identity play helps define not just the subject of fannish occupation, but also the person beneath the makeup and costume (2010: 2). Similarly, in online interactions, fans can roleplay (Booth 2010) or participate in online RPGs (Stein and Busse 2009) to enact a similar form of digital cosplay.

The space between individual and community and the dialogue between character and fan places the fans' identity in a 'third space' of identification. It is always 'between and betwixt the real and the unreal', as Turkle describes (1995: 188). Crucially, as well, each of these conceptions of the 'in-between' identity formation hinges on a form of technological mediation to help spur fan identity; whether it is costuming or computers, fashion or friendships, individual fans use augmented notions of the 'self' to address and publicly explore personal identity at a deep level. In the remainder of this paper, we use fans' own words to help elucidate the key tenets that characterize an offline fan identity in the 21st century.

Being a Fan Today: Augmentation or Change?

Rather than exercising entirely new fan practices using digital technology, fans today use technology to augment old practices. Fans continue to write fan fiction, they continue to make fan videos, and they continue to interact with each other. Much fan studies material over the past decade has focused on the technology that fans have embraced, including online digital technology, to construct new and novel texts (Booth 2010). What these online discourses often do not address, however, is that fans continue to do much work offline. In

fact, for many fans, much of their contemporary practices remain staunchly analog. However, even though many of the fans we interviewed worked offline much more than they worked online, their offline practices are still facilitated through and influenced by their online interactions. That is, fans are still meeting in person to screen episodes, to game, to chat, and to participate in conventions (among other things), but they are organizing, structuring, and facilitating these interactions via online and digital technology. Of consequence for this realization, then, is that, to stay current with fan practices, the field of fan studies needs to view fannish offline interaction in conjunction with web technology and digital communication to complement contemporary research.

Although many fans have embraced online digital technology, most of the fans we spoke with only use the Internet to create texts or to communicate with other people. Such technology is perceived as purely communicative and fans use it in a limited fashion; like a telephone to communicate with others, but not to share their work. Some of the fans we spoke to were hesitant to put their work online in a public space, perhaps fearful of judgment or dubious of sharing their creative practices with others.

For example, when asked about publishing her fan fiction and fan poetry to the web, Anne emphatically exclaims, 'No!' because, as she explains, it's a private activity. She does not share it with others, nor does she print it out for herself; she claims it is solely for her own consumption. Arthur reads discussion boards, but doesn't post to them. He nonetheless continues to create fan texts by LARPing [Live Action Role Playing] with friends, acting out scenes not depicted in text itself. Barry has created his own American version of *Doctor Who*, even acting as producer by casting the parts and writing stories.² Although he discusses his American program with his friends, he does not film it or distribute it. He is also working with a friend to create 'a *Doctor Who* Monopoly with all the Doctors' in it, a ludic activity that is part of our culture's 'philosophy of playfulness' (Booth 2010) but is not digitally minded. Barry's works, while impressive creative endeavors, are not public and cannot be found online. It appears as though, at least with the fans we interviewed at Chicago Tardis, much fan activity still takes place in person, partly out of a fear, it seems, of being exposed to ridicule or mockery online. When fan researchers use the web for research, therefore, it artificially limits the work they are exposed to, and ignores a major segment of fannish production.

As Jenkins (2007) remarks, fandom has become more well-known and culturally accepted, partly because of online practices which make fandom more visible. Sara notes that this renown has a lot to do with mainstream media representations: 'Acceptance of fan practice has happened a lot with *The Big Bang Theory*, 'cause most people know what's going on [with] geeks...a lot of mainstream culture is now going back [to look up fandom]'. Although most of the fans we spoke with did not reference Jenkins by name, many felt similarly. The fans at Chicago Tardis are not only heavily invested in their fandom, but are also keenly aware of the marketing potential of this growing and engaged segment. For example, Turlough notes that it's 'like a general thing with nerdhood I guess. It's such an inflated term that people like to identify as like geeks or nerds or something... it's a way to

get cache. You can sell things on the word geek or nerd a lot'. Wilfred agrees: 'When the show was running there was a core of diehard fans. [During the hiatus] it started expanding a little bit.... And eventually the BBC just said, "this is going to make a lot of money"'. And Sydney was particularly adamant about how acceptable fandom has become as an identity, nothing how this mainstreaming has increased the sexual attractiveness of 'nerdy' identities:

Let me put it this way, twenty years ago you could not get laid at a convention, now it is remarkably easy to get laid at a convention. That's not a statement about women; but really, go to an anime convention. You'll have to put an effort into it to *not* have intercourse with someone. So that might be some indication of where fan culture in general – legitimate fan nerd culture – has gone in the past twenty years.

Sydney's comments evoke a tension at the heart of contemporary fandom, exemplified through the offline/online binary. On the one hand, online media coverage has made fandom into a more explicit identity, typifying fans and placing individuals into categories. On the other hand, this overt depiction has had a disciplining effect on fans, forcing fans to perform in particular styles, and deepening their sense of shame when they don't 'fit in' (see Hills 2012). This disciplinary effect seems to have shaped offline fan discourse: conventions have become again (or rather, maintained) their appeal as 'safe-spaces'.

An evolved fan identity has become an important component of New *Who* in particular. As Booy (2012) has pointed out, many *Doctor Who* fans from the past have emerged to become some of the most involved producers of the New series by using the skills garnered from their time explicating, collecting, and writing fan-created dialogue with the program in the past. These traditional fan practices have transitioned into contemporary professional practices. For example, *Doctor Who* fans used to tape record the show as it aired. These 'off-air recordings' were later used as soundtracks for constructing missing episodes then released on DVD, or for creating audio soundtracks of missing episodes (Booth 2010: 27–29). Gareth, a fan and presenter at Chicago Tardis, started audio recording *Doctor Who* as a child:

I started it because I was just going to record the *Doctor Who* theme so I'd have that in my head... We forget *Doctor Who* in those days was this magical thing that you could only catch one day a week and then it would be gone... So there was that feeling of 'I need to hear that special thing again. I need to experience it again'.

But it was recording the show that spurred Gareth to become involved with, first, amateur productions and then later working on the professional reboot of the series 'My mum now says, it's okay, paid off, all those strange noises coming from your bedroom paid off in the

end'. Indeed, other major players of the New *Who* were fans originally, according to Booy (2012), including reboot creator Russell T. Davies and actor David Tennant.

Just as cult media texts engender passionate production teams, so too do they create tight-knit groups of friends at conventions. At Chicago Tardis we noted the way fans spoke about each other as a *family*. Although authors like Turkle (2011) have discussed the way that digital technology often hampers inter-personal relationships, we found here that the opposite occurred: rather than driving a wedge between individuals, fans used digital technology to keep in touch, to share stories, and to keep up-to-date with fannish friends, many of whom they knew initially only from the convention circuit. This behavior recalls the way families with members in distant parts of the world might use digital technology – Skype to chat face-to-face, email for sending files, Facebook for socializing, Twitter for gossip and chatting. Indeed, as discussed earlier, while the influx of new fans has sometimes created a breach between New *Who* and Classic *Who*, it also signifies the multi-generational character of the fandom. Due to the age of *Doctor Who* as well as its target audience, it spans generations as more fans bring their families into the fannish fold.

Fans use their selected media text as a means of getting closer to friends, family members, or colleagues. Bacon-Smith's discussion of fan conventions makes this connection even more strongly: she writes that, of the women that have families, 'the tightly knit community of women [at conventions] enriches their lives and strengthens their work in conjunction with marriage and family', but for those that do not, they 'find in the community of enterprising women their only source of social relationships and communal support' (1992: 285, and see also Bury 2005). Just as digital technology was only used to augment and strengthen fan *identities*, so too was it only used to contribute to fan *communities*. Fans spoke of the in-person connections, the fan-convention attendance, and the physical presence of these other fans in their lives in much greater excess than of more tangible digital collaborations.

The topic of families came up frequently, as fans either attended the convention with family members, commented on how the show was part of their family life, or discussed how they started watching the show because of a family member. This could be because of the show itself: *Doctor Who* has always been conceived of as a family show, airing originally (and famously) at tea time on Saturdays in the UK, so the whole family could watch together. The American experience may be slightly different, but equally important; as it often aired late at night on public television stations, *Doctor Who* created a more cultish appeal, one that generated the familial bounds between fans who shared this secret passion. Perhaps most relevantly, River mentioned the way *Doctor Who* has found a place in her family life:

[If I] go as far as calling myself a fan it has to mean something to me. *Doctor Who*, that's something that was in my family. It has strong ties and when I think of *Doctor Who* I think about my dad who's no longer here. I think about the relationship I have with my mom and the relationship I have with my son.

We spend quality time – that’s our time. *Doctor Who* on Saturday nights – that’s our time.

Many fans felt similarly; that it was *Doctor Who* that helped solidify familial relations and catalyze memory-making processes. If shamed online, fans found pride offline.

Many fans speak of the convention, their friends, and even the show itself as a family mirroring the research of Jenkins, who quotes Meg, a fan from his early study: ‘if you “get” the joke, punchline, or reference and laugh when the rest of the fan audience laughs, it reinforces the sense of belonging, of “family”, of shared culture’ (1992: 266). In addition, in his study of the Kevin Smith community, Phillips noted a similar sense of family, when the ‘conceptualisation of the fan family becomes a significant appeal of the Kevin Smith fan culture’ (2011: 491). Although Phillips notes that this familiar identity problematizes notions of online/offline community duality in a ‘on- and offline sociality cycle’, we found that the *Doctor Who* fan family strengthens both online and offline bonds. For example, Chris notes how he’s changed the way he attends Chicago Tardis because of his familiarity with the show and the convention attendance:

I think now it’s interesting. I’m missing a panel going on right now with Peter Davison and Janet Fielding and I’m not even that bothered I’m missing that because I’ve seen them; I’ve heard all the anecdotes. I’d say in the last five or ten years I’ve made enough friends coming here that this is our family reunion. This and Gallifrey One... I can see the friends that I made that are kind of like my extended family. I was an only child, my mother’s an only child. I have a very small extended biological family, but these are people you know that get me. We get each other’s quirks and fannish qualities. It’s nice that two or three times a year we can all kind of congregate and catch up with each other and have a reunion.

As Chris indicates, for many fans, the fan convention was the only time they saw some of the people that they communicated with online, and thus the convention represented a space for renewed friendship and heightened sociability. In sharing a common bond before a conversation even takes place, these fans share in a familial sense of recognition – that which binds people together over great distances and lapses of time. What’s important here is actually how *little* has changed since the analysis of fandom conducted in the early 1990s. Despite the widespread adoption of the Internet into fan practices, it’s the *in person* community that seems to matter much more. Like a family meeting for holidays or birthdays, being online helps organize but does not replace the sense of belonging. This is not to say that all fans participate in their fandom offline: for many, circumstance, limited mobility, and/or finances prevent attendance at conventions. For these fans, the computer and social media specifically are ways of deepening the ties between fan communities and have become influential on their fan practices. But for fans that have the financial and social

capital, traveling to conventions remains an important fannish event, augmented by online messages but reliant on in-person dialogue.

Conclusion: Contemporary Offline Fan Practices

If anything, our study at Chicago Tardis indicated that, perhaps surprisingly, fandom hasn't changed as much as researchers implicitly indicate with their emphasis on new technologies. We found that digital practices influence but do not monopolize fan practices. But it's not that fans are luddites, actively eschewing digital technology – Iris makes a convincing case for the way fans have embraced digital technology:

There's a lot more connectedness now. It used to be you would like look forward for months to this one place, one time where you could go and find other people like yourselves. Now you know they're out there all the time and all you have to do is post a message on a message board or send an email and everybody sees it. Everybody's connected now and that was so not the case when I started.

What Iris indicates is not that digital technology has superseded other activities, but rather that fans use this technology for communication with other fans even as an enormous amount of fan work and fan activity continues to take place offline. For many fans – as, indeed, for many members of the public at large – being online, or using web technology to embrace fannishness, is not considered an 'end result' of fandom, but merely one medium among many with which to engage. While some fans have to use online technology almost exclusively, whether for financial reasons or travel reasons, fans that have the financial and social capital to travel to conventions continue to prefer and thrive in offline environments. In addition, online practices have implicitly affected offline fandom as well: online fandom has made fandom itself more visible, and this 'mainstreaming' of fan identities makes fandom *more visible* and thus *more acceptable* a cultural identity. In this respect, we think Tom best sums up the experience of being a fan today – it's not just about online *or* offline, but about *merging the two*:

I think there's definitely been more and more involvement. I know there's been [offline] conventions and cosplay for quite some time, but I think that [online] aspect of it is growing more ... more connection on the Internet ... It's evolving into this 'more and more' aspect that people can come together [in person] and people can participate [online] to be fans.

Fandom as an identity necessarily entails duality: one is oneself, but also one is part of a larger group. That group today may be augmented by digital technology, but it has not been supplanted by it. Far from limiting relationships, technology today seems to help strengthen and build them – as fans have always done.

Biographical Information

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Peter Kelly is a Content Strategist at Critical Mass, a Master's candidate at DePaul University, and an avid gamer, writer, and media consumer. His research examines the cultural, systematic, and procedural effects of videogames and the digital space and seeks to juxtapose videogames against other media to determine its ontological uniqueness and overlap. He is also an avid aca-fan of many contemporary ludic, televisual, and filmic texts. In his space time, he writes music reviews for Lost in Concert. His forthcoming publication, "Approaching the Digital Courting Process in Dragon Age 2" will appear in *The Game Love Anthology* (MIT Press). Contact: peterkelly82@gmail.com.

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Appendix:

Fan Interview Questions

1. Is this your first Chicago Tardis? (Warm Up Question)
 - a. How often have you been to Chicago Tardis?
 - b. Are you here with anyone?
 - c. What made you come to Chicago Tardis?
2. What does being a fan mean to you?
3. Tell me about your level of involvement in Doctor Who fandom?
 - a. You can feel free to describe types of fan activities, etc.
4. Tell me about your first or most memorable experience with Doctor Who?
5. Can you tell me a little bit about when you first considered yourself a fan and not just a viewer?
(You can discuss fan hierarchies here if you'd like)
6. How do you express your fandom (what do you do to be a 'fan')?
7. Have you changed the way you participate in your fandom over the years?
8. What changes have you observed in fandom since you started considering yourself a fan?
9. Were you aware of the academic study of fans?
10. Knowing that people study fans, does/would that change the way you participate in your fandom?

Notes:

¹ We have edited quotations from spoken to written English.

² Barry's work parallels *Inspector Spacetime*, the parody of *Doctor Who* seen on NBC's sitcom *Community*.