

HERE WE GO AGAIN: CYCLICAL FANDOM, PERSONA AND IDENTITY

KATE NGAI GLASGOW CALEDONIAN UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

In 2005, Matt Hills wrote an article where he asks the question “what does it mean to be a fan?” (p. 801). Hills then developed the concept of the cyclical fan, which he defines as “...mastering something new...where you would just completely immerse yourself in this new thing and master it, and then you’d move on to something else” (Hills & Greco, 2015 p. 155). Despite the challenge from Hills to expand fan identities, there is still limited scholarship on individuals whose behaviours are outside those of active fandom, including those who fall into the cyclical fan and moderate category. This article addresses a gap in fan studies literature by exploring the persona of cyclical fans who watch scripted television programs. This research expands on existing persona studies, arguing for the inclusion of ‘fan persona’ as a recognized type of persona in connection with the presentation of self, drawing on the work of Marshall, Moore, and Barbour, to argue for the inclusion of “fan persona” as a recognised type of persona. It examines how the shifts and transformations in fan behaviour are demonstrated in private and public displays of self, and how an individual’s identity can be influenced by their fan object. This article provides added scholarship to the ever growing ‘types’ of fans and fan behaviours found in fan studies.

KEY WORDS

Cyclical Fan; Fan Persona; Moderate Fan; Television; Fan Behaviour

INTRODUCTION

In the 2005 article ‘Patterns of Surprise: The “Aleatory Object” in Psychoanalytic Ethnography and Cyclical Fandom’, Matt Hills posits the question “...‘what does it mean to be a fan?’ Work in media/cultural studies tends to offer curiously restricted answers to this question” (p. 801). Despite identifying different types of fans, he continues “...there is still much to be explored within the definitions of fandom due to various experiences of media fans” (p. 802). Hills thus develops the concept of the cyclical fan, which he defines as “...about mastering something new...where you would just completely immerse yourself in this new thing and master it, and then you’d move on to something else” (Hills & Greco 2015, p. 155). Hills’ characterisation of the cyclical fan emphasises the length of the time spent with the fan object, while exhibiting the same level of intensity as a long-term fan.

In fan studies, almost every mention of the cyclical fan refers back to Hills’ 2005 article, highlighting a gap in published scholarship. The research presented in this article was conceived as a response to this gap and implemented to provide more data and greater insight toward the under-researched persona of the cyclical fan, using behaviours exhibited by individuals who watch scripted television programmes as a case study. While previous research has explored cyclical fandom to an extent, this article will focus on how the concept of ‘fan persona’ is connected to these behaviours and how a fan persona is either presented or hidden.

The concept of persona, as explored in persona studies, offers a valuable lens for understanding fan identity. This article will also discuss how cyclical fan behaviours connect and correlate to determine a persona, based on their fan object and how their persona adapts with each new change in behaviour.

Persona studies, as an emerging field, provides fan studies with a set of theoretical and methodological tools for analysing the public presentation of the self. As Christopher Moore (2020) argues, persona-inflected fan studies “involves attention to the shift from representational media to a presentational media paradigm and invites questions about the contemporary experience of the public presentation of the online self as a fan” (para 1.3). This is particularly relevant to understanding cyclical fan behaviour, where the presentation of a fan persona can shift along with the fan’s interest in different fan objects. This article also draws on Marshall et al’s theory which considers that individuals craft and present a specific public-facing version of the self (Marshall et al 2020). It will also explore the performative aspects of fan identity by combining the object and persona lens, and as Moore proposes, take into account the agency of the individual in its negotiation with various collectives, as well as human and nonhuman actors in the networks of online identity performances (2020, para 1.6). Finally, this article will build upon Hills’ conceptualisation of cyclical fandom using research from surveys and focus groups to examine how these new technologies have altered the television landscape and viewing habits, and therefore cyclical fan behaviours. By exploring the persona of the cyclical fan, this research continues the conversation between fan studies and persona studies, responding to Marshall et al’s (2020) call for more scholarship on everyday personas. Ultimately, this research aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of fan identity, by examining the intersection of cyclical fan behaviour, and the dynamic nature of the fan persona.

PERSONA STUDIES

Persona studies provides a rich context to understanding fan identity. The first major book in the field of Persona studies was written by David Marshall, Christopher Moore and Kim Barbour (2020) and defines persona studies as “...an investigation of the presentation of the self” (Marshall 2015, p. 166), a distinction, I will argue, that is critical to contemporary fan studies, especially the concept of the cyclical fan. Though Marshall et al.’s work has distinguished Persona studies as a unique field, it stems from several fields of discipline. Both Jung (1966) and Goffman (1959) touch on the idea of individuals crafting and presenting a specific public facing version of the self. Goffman does not refer to it specifically as ‘persona’, as Jung does, but the characteristics overlap.

Moore (2020) describes persona as a ‘mask’ or a ‘material interface between the person and others’ (para 1.4). This mask is not necessarily a deception, but rather a way of negotiating one’s self in various contexts and collectives (Moore 2020, para 1.6). Marshall et al. (2020) agree, stating “Persona is a projection and a performance of individuality” (p. 3), noting that persona is also not a collective, but that “...in its appeal to a collective formation, [persona] embeds in its fibre the indexical signs of the collective self. Persona then is essentially a way to negotiate one’s self into various collectives” (2020, p. 3). Giles (2020) states

this alternative concept envisages persona more as a kind of generic social role, or template, that individuals could use in order to fashion their own specific personas...such as “the artist persona”, “the academic persona”, and so on. (p. 16)

It is not unreasonable to add the ‘fan persona’ to the list, as the act of projecting certain characteristics to negotiate one’s self into various collectives (or, as I will illustrate, actively

avoiding projecting such characteristics) is an unavoidable aspect of fan identity and culture. This correlates to Moore's (2020) concept of 'intercommunication' which refers to the movement of mediated digital objects between instances of interpersonal communication by both human and nonhuman actors. Moore's intercommunication highlights the hybridity of presentational media practices enabled by the convergence of digital technologies within 'micropublics', which Moore (2020) defines as the way that online communities form around individuals, and the way these communities create their own public spheres, particularly in the context of social media and fandom (para 2.8). These micropublics describe the way that collectives intercommunicate between multiple media platforms and social networks (paras 1.9, 2.1). Through the negotiation with various collectives as well as human and nonhuman actors in the networks of online identity performances, a persona-inflected fan studies upholds an individual's agency, which is fundamentally concerned with how individuals strategically construct and present themselves in public, both online and offline. By emphasising agency, this approach acknowledges that fans are not passive recipients, but active participants in shaping their own identities and engaging with fan objects. (Moore 2020, para .1; Marshall et al 2015). Finally Moore states that fans are not passively absorbing media but are actively curating their presentations of self in relation to various collectives and actors (both human and non-human) within online networks. Although there has been little recognition in persona studies of the work done in the scholarship of fandom, Moore argues that the two fields can be mutually beneficial, with particular implications for how we understand the performance of the fan/self in public (2020, para 1.1).

'TRADITIONAL' FANDOM

Regarding fan behaviour, John Fiske (1992) states that there are boundaries between the walls of fandom and outside of it and that:

the boundaries between the community of fans and the rest of the world are just as strongly marked and patrolled....Both sides of the boundary invest in the difference; mundane viewers often wish to avoid what they see as the taint of fandom-'I'm not a really a fan, of course, but...'On the other side of the line, fans may argue about what characteristics allow someone to cross it and become a true fan. (pp. 34-35)

A large majority of scholarship in fan studies concerns the most active fans (Jenkins 1992; Hills 2002; Duffett 2013; Williams 2015; Bury 2017). If fan behaviours were viewed as a scale, with individuals who fully accept and embrace their fan behaviours on one end (super or avid fans) and individuals who participate in the most basic fan behaviours (the casual fan), most of the scholarship in fan studies trend more toward the 'avid' end of that scale. There has been scholarship on ageing fans (Harrington & Bielby 2010), anti-fans (Gray 2003; Click 2019) and individualised fan objects, whether it be music (Cavicchi 2014; Anderson 2012), race (Pande 2020; Chin & Morimoto 2013; Johnson 2020), or gender (Jones 2015; Busse 2009; Scott 2019). However, each of those areas of scholarship primarily focus on the active, participating long-term fan.

LONG-TERM FAN VS CYCLICAL FAN

The expression 'long-term' is used in this article to describe a person's relationship with the same fan object over a long period of time, in contrast to cyclical fandom, or 'short-term' fandom (which also has its own issues, certainly not all short-term fans are cyclical, but most cyclical fans are short-term). This does not necessarily mean being a productive fan, as Jenkins (1992)

has defined, but active involvement with the fan object. If an individual has consistently watched a television programme, even after it has stopped producing new episodes, or has maintained activity (i.e. writing fan fiction, going to conventions or participating in any action that can be considered fan-centric), they would fit under the definition of a 'long-term' fan. The moderate fan concept builds on the 2014, model of 'ordinary fandom' developed by Sandvoss and Kerns. Both deal with individuals who are enthusiastic about a fan object, but do not fit under the traditionally expected behaviours of fandom. While there are many similarities, I thought it necessary to take the concept of 'ordinary fandom' a step further, as the previous term focuses primarily on individuals who are 'lurkers', who do not contribute to textual productivity, yet still take advantage of it, such as information posted online or fan made videos. My moderate fan concept allows for the individuals to be outside the realm of fandom, takes into stronger consideration their self-identity as a fan, and allows for individuals who do not 'lurk' online, but participate in other ways, such as purchasing merchandise. This corresponds to Moore's theory of public and private personas, stating "A persona-inflected fan studies must then distinguish between unpublic fans (whose fan objects are known only to themselves), semipublic fandom, and fully public fan personas, which are considered to be a volunteered presentation of the self" (2020, para 5.2). Moderate fans can be long-term or cyclical as this merely takes into consideration duration, not intensity of behaviour. By examining both the differences and the overlaps between long-term and cyclical fandom, we begin to see the complex ways that fan personas are constructed and enacted, a topic that article will explore further.

MEASURING FAN IDENTITY

Television is cyclical in nature, and every series ends eventually, but the fans do not always end their fandom with it. By exploring television, this research aims to draw out cyclical fans and their habits. Scripted television programmes are the template for the case study for this article. Focusing on television programmes provides access to viewing habits of a wide variety of individuals who exhibit long-term, cyclical fan behaviours. There are individuals who have been life-long *Star Trek* fans, and there are fans who have participated actively in television shows, for example, *Community*, and then moved their interest to another programme when it ended (Ngai 2021). The sheer number of television programmes available provides a large pool of individuals whose viewing habits and fan behaviours can be compared.

When Hills conceptualised cyclical fandom, he wrote about an individual actively searching Amazon to find a new fan object, exploring everything he could about the subject, and then moving on to a different one. In Rebecca Williams' (2015) book on post-object fandom, she writes that, in many cases, active fan behaviour continues after the cancellation of a favourite television series through rewatching old episodes, collecting merchandise, talking with fellow fans, reading fanfiction and collecting merchandise. Williams states that often it entails "...eventually reducing fandom and moving on to other, newer interests" (p. 127). This fails to include those who maintain their 'fandom', even when many others have moved on to 'newer interests'. Nor does it consider those who do not go through the process of 'eventually reducing' their fandom, but, like Hills' 2005 case study, search out and find their new interests much more quickly. Becoming involved in a fan object for a period of time and moving on to a different object (whether there is no new content or the individual simply decided to move on) is indicative of cyclical behaviour and is one of the key areas explored in this article.

Sandvoss and Kearns (2014) state that the scholarly definition of fan should be widened, and that the availability of digital media has created a "...ever wider diversification of fan objects and practices" (p. 92). Also, they note that "...the umbrella term 'fan' maintains its

significance in identifying fundamental and shared motivations, attachments and bonds between fans and their different fan objects..." (Sandvoss & Kearns 2014, p. 92). This correlates to persona as a concept as an individual's "...shifts and transformations of the relation between public and private as it is articulated through public displays of the self" (Marshall et. al 2020, p. 5). Fan behaviours, cyclical and long-term, are somewhat unique in that often the shifts and transformations are demonstrated in both private and public displays of the self, depending on how much of an individual's identity is influenced by their fan object.

METHODOLOGY

This work builds upon Hills' conceptualisation of cyclical fandom and cyclical fan behaviours. While my research shifts focus from the individual fan to individual fan behaviours, it does not negate or lessen the impact of using either Hills' 2005 article as a springboard for this research. However, rather than focusing entirely on how cyclical fan behaviours have changed since 2005, this article will examine how new technologies such as on-demand streaming and platform-exclusive productions have impacted television viewing habits over the last 20 years. This article will highlight in part, how these changes in technology have altered the television landscape and viewing habits affect cyclical fan behaviours. The primary forms of data collection was from research for my doctoral thesis, a survey resulting in 1,355 respondents and nine focus groups, featuring 33 participants (Ngai 2021). The data was analysed using grounded theory and thematic analysis. These methods were chosen to explore cyclical fan behaviours, and can be applied using the framework of persona studies as demonstrated in this article.

Whilst Hills introduced the idea of cyclical fandom, his 2005 article does not address the notion that fans can be both cyclical and long-term if they are attached to more than one fan object, or a part of simultaneous fandoms. This is not to imply that Hills does not believe that fans can have more than one fan object, indeed there has been much more scholarship on this concept (Booth 2016; Hills 2016; Pearson 2018). In his 1992 book *Textual Poachers*, Jenkins mentions that fans can have multiple fandoms, but mostly focuses on the theory that they are sequential, rather than simultaneous and one fandom would be predominately larger than the other. In his more recent work, Jenkins (2006) has re-evaluated his earlier claims and has concluded that fans indeed can embrace multiple and simultaneous fandoms. This research demonstrates that the notion of the 'cyclical fan' has limitations, and is merely one small component in the vast array of fan studies. Ultimately this research uncovered a hidden depth to the cyclical fan which encourages further interdisciplinary analysis.

The data was analysed using grounded theory and thematic analysis. Early on in the analysis of the data, it became evident that the term 'cyclical fan' is not the most accurate, as it assumes that all fans have a concentrated commitment and are active in their fan communities, whether cyclical or not. This also raised the point of conflict which was also an emerging theme from the data. What about the individuals who consider themselves fans, but are not actively engaging in fan communities or activities? These types of fans will be referred to as 'moderate' fans. This is why this article will refer to cyclical fan behaviours, rather than just 'cyclical fans', as to better encompass the reality of both the fan experience and how the fan persona is manufactured and either presented or hidden depending on what persona the individual is trying to present.

Additionally, this article has applied Cavicchi's definition that a fan or fandom is "...an extraordinary form of audiencing that includes everything from emotional attachment to performers to obsessive collecting" (2014, p. 52). Because there is such a range of definitions of fan and fan behaviours, it stands to reason that the individuals who participate in those activities will vary in their identities and behaviours as well. In the initial search for cyclical

fans, it was important to be aware of participants in the focus groups and survey who might be identified as a fan, but not self-identify as such. Many of the respondents did not identify as a fan at all. In fact, it quickly became evident early on in the data analysis, that rather than focusing on specific respondents who can be identified as 'cyclical fans', the focus needed to be instead on cyclical fan behaviours. Cyclical fan behaviour is far more common and can be identified in individuals of all levels of fan participation, from casual to moderate to active. This is especially applicable now, due to the emergence of wider accessibility of digital media that provides individuals with a large assortment of selections of television programmes to choose from. This wide variety of choice leads to many individuals exhibiting fan behaviour with multiple fan objects, and much of it both cyclical and moderate.

FINDINGS

Everyone is a fan of something. It's just how we define and how we rank being fans of things. I mean there are people who are fans of guns. There are people who are fans of America, you know...everyone has something they're passionate about. Some people are fans of Jesus. You know, or religion, there's something, everyone has something they're passionate about. (F9-B)

As one of the focus group participants, F9-B from my research points out in the above quote, everyone is a fan of something (Ngai 2021). Whether they identify as such, the behaviours are often present. One common theme throughout the focus groups, when the subject of fans and fan behaviours was raised, is that individuals were often quick to point out that they were not 'those kinds' of fans. Even participants who, by others' definitions could qualify as an 'active' or 'super' fan, declined to identify as such. This matches Sandvoss and Kerns' (2014) definition of ordinary fandom and how their interviewees "thus not only do not feel part of a group, but they outright reject the suggestion that they may have built any forms of social contacts through their fandom" (p. 95). The reasons for this stem largely from a stigma that is still associated with individuals who actively participate in fandom activities. While it is true that fans and fan culture have become more accepted and mainstream of late (see Hills 2002; Booth 2018; Duffett 2013; Harrington 2018), there remains a divide between what individuals deem as 'acceptable' fan behaviours and 'obsessive' behaviours. Individuals are defined by their boundaries. These fan personas, or their fan identities, are something kept hidden and private from the world. Their private persona embraced fan behaviours, but did not shift to their public persona.

From the very beginning of the data analysis, it emerged that the majority of participants would fall toward that middle or more moderate section of the scale, as many of the respondents participate in fan behaviours, even if they do not identify as an avid or super fan. Additionally, every focus group independently brought up the idea of either 'super fans' or 'avid/active fans', as a distinguishing feature from 'normal fans', or as has been labelled here 'moderate fans', and 'those' types of fans, who fall more toward the extreme end of the fan behaviour scale. This distinction was independent of anything introduced in the discussion questions, aside from asking the general question about what they think a 'fan' is. For the purposes of this article, the term 'super' or 'active' will be used as it was presented by the groups for consistency and clarification.

F1-D: Yeah, because I know people that are like super fans and they'll be a super fan of one thing, and then maybe they'll stop being a fan of that and then move on to something else. I mean, maybe I'm one of those people, but I don't see myself as being that.

F1-B: I do wonder if it's part of a certain type of personality?

In the first focus group, there was an individual, F1-C, who is a self-professed *Doctor Who* fan. As she described her fan activities and fan behaviours, it became clear that she not only downplayed her fan behaviours, but made excuses for them. Several members of the focus group were dismissive of fan behaviours (though it must be emphasised, the entire group was respectful and there was no belittling of any individual). This ostensible shameful self-awareness expressed by downplaying fan activities inspired the formation of three focus groups wherein individuals displayed varying levels of commitment to and a willingness to embrace the fandom aspect of their identity. If F1-C had been in one of the later fan-centric focus groups, would she have exhibited the same defensive behaviour? However, F1-C's interaction with the other members of her focus group is almost certainly a more accurate reflection of mainstream society and attitudes toward fan behaviours than the more insular fan-centric groups. Note this interaction between F1-C and the other members of the group. This demonstrates self-identification and introduces the 'othering' mentality.

F1-C: I wouldn't describe myself as a fan of any other show, I'm definitely a fan of that because...it's not just a TV programme. I also read comic books of Doctor Who, you know, I've watched the movie of Doctor Who, you know I get into that...I have a Trivial Pursuit Doctor Who version and things, so which I think makes someone a fan, probably a weird fan...

F1-B: Well it's short for 'fanatic' isn't it? That's where it comes from originally. So, it has that almost, known...

F1-A: Obsessive...

F1-E: Obsessive.

F1-B: Slight craziness to it...no...

F1-C: I'm not too crazy...

F1-A: It's a passion.

F1-C: I've been on forums and stuff for Doctor Who fans that are really, really Doctor Who fans. I mean my favourite cup is a mug that when you pour the hot water in it, the Tardis disappears from one side and reappears on the other side. And it's my favourite cup and I use it all the time. So yeah, I would describe myself as a true fan of Doctor Who. I know all the trivia and I like to tell people 'I know this' yeah, so that's how I would describe it.

F1-A: So, I would say you were a super fan, but you don't think you are?

F1-C: No, I would definitely not say I'm a super fan. I have met some super fans and I am not a super fan.

Note F1-C's dismissal of super fans, she was adamant that she should not be categorised with them, despite her fan behaviours suggesting otherwise to other members of the group. This dismissal or insistence that the respondents were not on the extreme end of the fan behaviour scale was a recurring theme throughout all the focus groups. It appeared important for the respondents in each group to be able to separate 'normal' (i.e., 'acceptable' fan behaviours) and 'obsessive' behaviours that are outside what they considered normal behaviour. Even the focus group participants who were self-proclaimed 'super' fans, did not consider themselves to be the most dedicated fans, always deflecting that there are individuals with more intense behaviours. The more intense fans have been labelled as 'stans' (a reference to the Eminem song of the same name in which an obsessive fan named 'Stan' swings between harassing Eminem and obsessing

over him in a series of letters), which essentially are individuals who take their intensity toward a fan object to more toxic behaviours (Bermudez et al. 2020).

During the focus group sessions, the avid *Doctor Who* fan F1-C uses the language 'we' when describing her participation in the fan community, which indicates that despite her language earlier where she distinguished herself from the 'super fans', she does in fact identify with the community. She exhibits fan behaviours that might place her closer toward the more extreme end of the fan scale, even though she considers herself more moderate. The acceptance of the name 'Whovian' demonstrates an acceptance as a member of the fan community, but also explores the complicated aspects of her persona and as Jung contends, as explained by Giles, "one must fit one's persona to the role expected by society" (Giles 2020, p. 17-18). F1-C's desire to play down her fan behaviours and present herself to the group as a fan, but not one of 'those' fans, demonstrates the complexity of a fan identity, concealing it to save face or due to societal pressures. Again, this corresponds to Moore's (2020) concept of public and private persona, as in private F1-C is comfortable with her fan engagement, but downplays it in public.

In another focus group, F3-C shares this story about a colleague who she feels exhibits super fan behaviour and would be on the more extreme end of the fan scale.

F3-C: You know there's a girl at work. Well, I used to work with her, but she is crazy about *Doctor Who*. Like, she talks about *Doctor Who* a lot, she's got coffee mugs...*Doctor Who*. She's got a hoodie...*Doctor Who*. (laughs). I think at one point, I've seen her with a *Doctor Who* pen. I think that would make her a super fan. (group laughs). I don't know, I like, the TV shows that I've liked over these years, I probably wouldn't go that far. I don't know if I would be embarrassed to be seen as a super fan, or maybe I'm just not as into it as others.

The individual telling this story later describes a time when she exhibited super fan behaviours, but did not recognise it, until it was pointed out to her, which further highlights the transformation of public persona and perhaps the difficulties Jung (1966) mentions in keeping them separate in the long term.

One of the key elements of cyclical fan behaviour is moving from fan object to fan object, in this instance, television programmes. It is essential that how the respondents find, view, and move on from their chosen TV programmes should be researched. Both the survey and focus groups explored the way the respondents found new television shows. Some of the comments on the survey indicated that some individuals were actively seeking a community they could become involved with, as an active fan. "I'm on the lookout for the next show with a fandom" (F/33-40).

Both Hills (2014) and Duffett (2013) comment on the notion of "fan without a fandom", which Hills describes as "whereby someone who has already developed fan-cultural competencies might then look to perform this fan identity (or predisposition) by casting around for a new object" (p. 18). This was discussed in the ninth focus group, as the participants discuss trying to find a new 'fandom' to participate in, after their involvement with their current one finished.

F9-B: There are exceptions, but for most people, while the thing is being produced is while you're going to be a big fan and active fan. And I won't say that I'm not a fan of those things any more, but I'm certainly not active in the same sense of like when I was in the *Harry Potter* fandom...I am still a big *Harry Potter* fan, I dress up for Halloween, I go to cons and I buy *Harry Potter* merchandise and stuff like that. But am I a fan like I was then? No. Not

anymore....I think, once the things that you used to occupy your time start petering out, you have to find something else.

F9-C: You look for a replacement.

F9-B: You have to find a replacement.

The participants who were in focus group nine were discussing finding another fan object of which they could be long-term fans. They discussed several areas of interest they had pursued and even became actively involved with in the fandoms, but all agreed it took some effort to find the new fan object.

Even when the individual is not actively searching for a fandom to become involved with, 63.2% of the respondents stated they were always on the lookout for a new television programme in general. One participant stated “Honestly, I don’t nearly keep up with my TV as it is! That said, I’m always thrilled when I find new, high-quality TV. Even when I don’t have time to watch it” (F/33-40) (Ngai, 2021). With the wide variety of programmes available, many of the surveyed individuals tend to stop watching the programme if their attention is not caught early on. In the survey, 46.3% stated that if they felt bored with a television programme, they had no problem finding a new one right away. Conversely, 51.7% of the respondents stated they would watch a few episodes that caught their attention before deciding whether to continue and 31.8% reported they would watch a few episodes based solely on positive ratings or feedback (Ngai, 2021). Of course, in researching cyclical fan behaviours, just as much emphasis must be placed on how individuals find their new programmes to watch, in addition to what makes them stop watching. The entire concept of cycling through fan objects is key in identifying the behaviours associated with cyclical fans.

One individual in the focus groups provides a perfect example of cyclical, multi-fandom: F8-A, whose identity as a *Star Trek* fan is a large part of his life. However, the difference for him from the participants in focus group nine, is that he still considers himself active in the *Star Trek* fandom. Being a *Star Trek* fan is something he strongly identifies with and a fandom he is proud to be associated with. *Star Trek* is such a part of his life, that he even gave his only child a second name, after one of the characters from the original series. In one of the discussions, he brought up the television programme *Community*. It was never a ratings powerhouse but had a loyal following and has been cancelled since 2015.

F8-A: Did you guys watch *Community*?

F8-B: I’ve seen *Community*, yeah.

F8-C: I loved that.

KN: Would you consider yourself just as into it as you were *Star Trek*?

F8-A: Oh yeah, we actually went online and found an Inspector Spacetime poster that was made up. So, we actually have that up in our dining room, because we just loved *Community*. It had the sci-fi jokes, and just comedy and it would be great for it to be back on the air.

KN: So, if your son had been born during your *Community* phase...?

F8-A: Yeah, he could’ve been possibly called Abed or Troy. (laughs)

KN: But would you...?

F8-A: I wouldn’t have gone that far.

KN: That's what I'm asking, would your behaviour have been that uh...

F8-A: Not as intense.

KN: As intense as your *Star Trek*. No?

F8-A: No, with *Star Trek*, I started watching *Star Trek*, probably when I was five or six years old.

F8-A would be classified as a cyclical fan of the television show *Community*. He, along with his partner, enjoyed watching it so much that they still have merchandise from the series displayed in their home today nearly ten years after the show went off air. But that is where their involvement ends. They do not regularly rewatch episodes, nor do they participate in other long-term fan activities like they do with *Star Trek*. Correlating with Hills' (2005) definition, there is no regret for participating or identifying as a fan. However, despite his insistence that he and his wife were just as involved in the *Community* fandom, as they are in the *Star Trek* fandom, when it came down to it, their identity of being *Star Trek* fans was more intense and more meaningful. While they may have enjoyed both programmes equally on an entertainment level, only the one he had been a fan of since his early years would be a consideration to name their son after. This also relates to Moore's (2020) theory that fans are not just passively absorbing media, but are actively curating their presentations of self in relation to various collectives.

These focus groups established that the respondents were indeed fans of multiple fan objects, but their behaviours and intensity varied. However, as one participant pointed out, most individuals who engage with television programmes will generally have some series that stand out and are thought back on more fondly than others, whether the individual is still participating in fan behaviours or not (Ngai, 2021). This means that individuals who could be considered super fans of one television show, can simultaneously demonstrate either moderate or cyclical behaviours, or both, with different series. While their fandom of the cyclical programme is passionate, the consensus is that typically the long-term behaviours inspire a greater intensity than the behaviours for the moderate or the cyclical programme.

Research also demonstrates that exposure to a television programme from a young age, or the ability of being able to view the programme directly contributes to whether an individual becomes a long-term, moderate or cyclical fan (Bielby and Harrington, 2010, Friedman and Rapoport, 2020). For example, the Doctor Who fan, F1-C, became a fan of *Doctor Who* as a child. In contrast, she discovered *The Good Place*, a programme she stated she was a big fan of, later in life and exhibited more cyclical and moderate behaviour toward that programme. The avid *Star Trek* fan F8-A also exhibited active and ultimately cyclical fan behaviour toward the television show *Community*, but admitted he would never be as big of a fan of *Community* as of *Star Trek*, because he didn't have the history or the struggle associated with it.

F8-A: Yeah, I do sort of joke, because some people will say to me 'Oh, I just started watching *Discovery*, *Star Trek* is quite interesting.' and then I kind of go 'you weren't the one who people called Sir Trekkie and Spock at school' I got that as a wee badge of honour now. But...I started watching *Star Trek*, probably when I was five or six years old. And now I'm 37 years old.

Additionally, how much an individual was happy being perceived as a 'fan' influenced whether that behaviour transferred over to cyclical fan objects. However, due to a perceived negative stigma toward super fans and their behaviour, some fans excuse or hide their own behaviour despite the desire to identify with that fan object. This was true for both cyclical and long-term fan objects. Marshall et al. posit that a formation of persona can be shared across a group of

people, stating that “this new constitution of public identity is often linked to celebrity” (2020, p. 3). However, ‘celebrity’ very well could be replaced by fan-object, i.e., in the case of this article, TV programmes. They continue to emphasise that an essential aspect of persona is that it “implies an interplay between the understanding of public and private” (p. 5). The struggle that many of the participants in both the survey and focus groups identified was how they felt they needed to downplay their private personas, even if that persona was also part of their public fan persona.

In focus group seven, F7-B also considered factors that contribute to long-term fan behaviour, over more cyclical or short-term fandom.

F7-B: I think it very much depends on your age, when you encounter something...You’ve got shows that, maybe like *Doctor Who*, you remember, like you know get your tea in early and get comfy and get the covers on and all the rest of it, getting ready and it’s filled with so many like wonderful experiences that, it makes you more likely to be a long term fan than if you picked it up in your 30’s and it was just something that was going around at the time. It’s depending on when you experience something, it can make a big impact in your life.

These examples, and the others discussed earlier, firmly indicate that the main difference between cyclical fan behaviour, moderate, and long-term behaviour is primarily two-fold: time and commitment. This is not a sweeping statement to say that all long-term fans discovered their fan object as children, nor does it mean that individuals who demonstrate cyclical or moderate fan behaviours are not as committed. But as the data was analysed, a very strong theme emerged that correlates the age of discovery of the television show and the commitment to view the programme, whether current or after the series finished, was a key distinguishing factor between cyclical, moderate, and long-term fan behaviour. Williams (2015) describes how fans react when a favourite television programme no longer produces new content. She posits that the reaction is typically one of three kinds stating:

Some react in terms of grief and sadness, and respond by reiterating their attachment to their fandom...vowing to continue their involvement. Others concede that while programmes...had an important place in their lives, this will necessarily change... Finally, many fans reject favourite shows, expressing relief at their demise and critically evaluating their final episodes (p. 197).

As illustrated from the interviews above, differentiating the varying degrees of ‘fan identity’ is much more nuanced than assigning certain behaviours to the ‘casual or moderate’ fan and ‘super fan’. Williams’ description of fans’ reactions to TV shows ending correlates with the research from this project and the behaviour the respondents engaged in when their programmes ended. Some behaviour consisted of seeking out fanfiction or fan communities. Other behaviours were to re-watch the programme and even others were to move on completely. Moore’s concept of performativity could be applied here, to argue that cyclical fan behaviour itself could be considered a ‘performance’ of the self, and that the constant shifting of fan objects demonstrates a particular fan persona. Fan objects for cyclical fans could be used as a way to express themselves and communicate their identity to others. Moore states “a persona-inflected fan studies attends to the industrialized public self, which involves individuals’ means to curate a persona and manage their micropublics” (2020, para 5.1).

There is a correlation between the intensity of the fan behaviour and the cyclical nature of the individual, but the research demonstrates that this is not always the case. Individuals who are long-term fans of other programmes are more likely to engage in more intense cyclical

behaviour for another television programme. However, cyclical fan behaviour is not entirely limited to individuals who are long-term fans of another fan object or television programme. Results show that individuals can exhibit active and concentrated fan behaviour and still be cyclical, even if they are not long-term fans of another programme or fan object. This was determined by the respondents' behaviour in purchasing merchandise, posting on social media and seeking out online communities. The participants' behaviour in whether they re-watch the television show after it had finished or whether they moved on entirely to a new programme was also examined. My research demonstrates that participants can demonstrate active fan activity and behaviours, and still move on when a fan object ends. This shows that cyclical fan behaviour can be just as active and strong as individuals who are long-term fans. It also demonstrates that individuals can participate in cyclical fan behaviour that are just as focused as long-term behaviour whether the individual is a long-term fan of anything else or not.

Cyclical Fans and New Technologies

Perhaps the greatest change from 2005 to present day, is the rise of binge-watching. With the rise in SVOD technology and mobile viewing devices, binge-watching allows individuals to have more control over their televisual time (Tyron, 2015). The reasons for binge-watching vary from cultural inclusion, to eagerness to continue the story (Steiner & Xu, 2020). Binge-watching is a large factor in contributing toward cyclical fan behaviour. The act of watching a programme in a short period of time demonstrates commitment to the series, for however long, before moving on to the next one. Binge-watching alone does not indicate cyclical fan behaviour, however. As explored in this article, cyclical fan behaviour demands more than simply viewing a television programme, it requires a level of participation or focus on the series. Nonetheless, to not acknowledge binge-watching's impact on cyclical fan behaviour would also be omitting a large factor that can contribute to it. Steiner and Xu (2020) discovered that the respondents to their research prefer Netflix's system of releasing an entire season of episodes all at once. The data from my research corroborates their findings. However, despite the preference of binge-watching, respondents did express a longing for the anticipation of weekly released episodes. One survey respondent stated that they preferred to parcel out the episodes, rather than binge, saying "I pace all shows out to one episode per week, even if it's available all at once (like Netflix). If I miss a week, that's OK. I prefer to savour the series versus the binge." This sentiment is in the minority of the responses, with the majority of respondents stating they preferred binge-watching.

Some responses to the survey illustrate this point:

"I binge-watch an entire series as quickly as possible from start to finish."

"I tend not to watch programmes during their seasons and instead binge watch them later on."

"I watch TV pretty much non-stop! I used to only watch live tv until we got DVR and then I exclusively watched shows I had recorded but now I mostly only watch via Netflix and binge one series at a time."

"I usually wait until the whole season is out and then I binge watch it."

The idea of savouring and the anticipation is a concept shared by many in theory but practised very little in reality. The data shows that individuals overwhelmingly prefer to binge-watch a series as it is released and only watch weekly episodes if there is no other option.

This research also highlighted the role of the insatiable or voracious consumer, an individual who seemingly has an endless desire for modern day cultural consumption. Cutts and

Widdop's (2017) definition of this 'voracious' cultural consumer defined as "...someone who switches from one activity to another for brief periods thus avoiding immersion in one specific activity" (p. 484). Vander Stichele and Laermans (2006) call these consumers 'cultural hoppers' and state they are the type of consumers who "take a little bit here, a little bit there, but never a lot of the same" (p. 59). The similarities between the cyclical fan behaviour studied in this project and the concept of 'voracious consumer' or 'cultural hopper' are strong, but not interchangeable. However, Cutts and Widdop (2017) argue that the reason for cultural hoppers or voracious consumers is due to life accelerating at a faster pace and individuals no longer have time for activities that they once had, thus an "intensification" of activities occurs, and as that intensity increases, "...more activities are done simultaneously, that inevitably spirals in to individuals increasingly compressing their time, resulting in ever shorter spells spent on each activity" (p. 484).

This argument is supported by the data from this research as well, with many participants indicating that both the wide variety of television programmes and the pace of life can contribute toward cyclical fan behaviour. The wide variety of programmes available, as well as a faster paced lifestyle, coupled with the faster pace of life must factor into any analysis when examining cyclical fan behaviour. Annette Hill (2018) states "Indeed, the instability of viewers' daily lives is perhaps even more pronounced now...precarious working conditions, the pressure to manage time productively at work, home, on the train and waiting in line is a feature of...late modern life." (p. 35). Therefore, the sheer amount of programming available to consumers, as well as the increased pace of contemporary lifestyles, must factor into this or any analysis of cyclical fan behaviours.

Nostalgic television provides another layer into cyclical fan behaviour, different from any examined thus far. With beloved television programmes coming back and new episodes being produced, it offers individuals a way to rediscover or literally cycle back to previous programmes. This nostalgia adds a richness to the intensity and types of fan behaviour. This literal cycling back to a revived or rebooted television show should be explored further. Further study into this concept would be beneficial to research on both cyclical fan behaviour, television, and fan studies as a whole. The behaviours of moderate and long-term fans have many differences and similarities. The data shows that while there are the obvious differences in behaviour, there are stronger similarities than might initially be realised. Individuals who exhibited both cyclical and long-term fan behaviours expressed a preference for binge-watching. Both groups professed a reluctance to post on social media about their favourite television shows. In addition, both groups indicated they would eagerly watch a reboot or revival of a television series of which they had exhibited fan behaviour for in the past.

Despite audiences being drawn to nostalgia television, it is not without complications. Traditional television is facing a decline as viewers are cancelling cable subscriptions in favour of streaming sites. It is estimated that "by the end of 2024 fewer than half of US households will subscribe to a pay TV service" (emarketer 2020, par. 4). Traditional network television strategy to revive or reboot television series is a way of combating the shift toward streaming sites, but is proving largely ineffective. With so many revivals and reboots, viewers' fear of textual death has become deluded. However, streaming sites that offer reruns do not always prevent viewers from being wary, as those sites can pull the series at any time (Williams 2015). Nostalgic television provides a deeper insight into cyclical fan behaviour in particular, in that it offers a way for individuals to rediscover or 'cycle back' to previous television programmes they were once fans of. This adds a depth and richness as well as a different facet to both cyclical and general fan behaviour, that has previously been unexplored in this study as well as in Hills' original 2005 article.

Conclusion

This article addressed key areas of changes in how television is consumed, viewed and discussed. It explores the most significant changes to television viewing habits through examination of digital media advancements, which have encouraged behaviours such as binge-watching and nostalgia television. The act of watching the programmes intensely and in such a short period of time demonstrates commitment to the series, before moving on to the next one. In fact, the simplest explanation of cyclical fan behaviour could be boiled down to that definition alone. The level of intensity may vary as will the other fan behaviours, but there is a strong correlation between binge-watching and cyclical fan behaviour. Another aim of this article is to highlight and address the sometimes conflicting dichotomy of fan identification, whether it be by self or others and fan behaviours. Fan behaviour can be a complex concept to pin down and define exclusively. The participants in the focus groups generally reinforced the concepts that align with current research that state there are as many definitions of fans and fan behaviour as there are individuals. The concept of fan persona was also incorporated into the behaviours of cyclical, long-term and moderate fans. Exploring the fan persona answers Marshall et al.'s (2020) call for more scholarship on everyday personas. There are several other areas of persona studies that could be explored within fan studies, such as micro-public, performative persona, and even micro-celebrity persona (Marshall et al. 2020).

Also throughout this article, behaviour of cyclical, moderate, and long-term fans were compared. It demonstrates that while there are obvious differences in behaviour, the similarities are more apparent. It has also shown that the changes to the mode and consumption of television has had a profound effect and change on fan behaviour since 2005. The rise of streaming platforms, and popularity of binge-watching have provided the most changes toward fan behaviour, but as with all the areas explored in this article, there are a myriad of aspects to consider when attempting to isolate and narrow down what contributes to cyclical behaviour. This article provides good insight and a good starting point and certainly demonstrates that these areas are ripe for more research.

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