

**Nobody is Lonely Amongst the Stars:
Sense of Religious Community in the Star Trek
Fandom**

By Brittany Iolanda Calvert

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Abstract

Religion in modernity has evolved, and media franchises may now form the basis for experiencing religious belonging and community in the changing nature of secular Western society. This thesis seeks to explore how Star Trek fandom, as a “cultural religion,” presents a similar sense of community as traditional religions and the impact it has on the sense of loneliness and mental health of participants. The research consisted of eighty-six completed questionnaires, four unstructured online interviews, and qualitative participant observation at conventions and in online fan forums, while also referencing scholarly works. The resulting portrait of Star Trek fandom does resemble traditional religion: the fandom supplies a unique sense of belonging; it provides comfort through the narratives in the series, a mission, and parasocial relationships. Fans often look towards the series and characters for escapism, understanding/speaking on serious issues, and guidance. Members experience increased meaning, sense of identity, confidence, self-awareness, social circles, coping ability, and ability to form relationships outside fandom, which all have a positive effect on loneliness and the fan’s mental health. This research may benefit both the study of religion and its changing landscape and provide insight into the nature of how fandom involvement can serve as a community-seeking and mental health-bolstering endeavour.

General Summary

This thesis is about how the Star Trek fandom is a new type of religion that provides a sense of community similar to traditional religions; and as a religion it has a positive effect on its member's ability to cope with loneliness and mental health. To research this topic, I interviewed four Star Trek fans, collected eighty-six questionnaires that fans filled out, attended multiple science fiction conventions, and participated in online Star Trek fan forums. The result supports the idea that Star Trek fandom is a form of religion with a unique sense of belonging and community. Also, fans find comfort in Star Trek because of the future it depicts and its characters, whom fans connect to. Overall, Star Trek fandom members were found to have increased meaning, sense of identity, confidence, self-awareness, social circles, coping ability, and ability to form relationships outside fandom: all positively affecting loneliness/mental health. This thesis may help further the study of religion and how fandom involvement can help with mental health.

Preface

This thesis is based on a simple question: Does Star Trek fandom - as a “cultural religion” (Jindra, 1994), which displays religious aspects - present a similar sense of community for fans as traditional religions do for traditional religious practitioners? What impact, or effect, does this community aspect have on participants' sense of loneliness and mental health? I picked this as my topic because I have always had a special interest in religion and popular culture, and as a Star Trek fan myself, I have often found the community and franchise as a sort of comfort.

In adolescence, I had trouble relating to other kids and spent a lot of time alone; so, to fill the time, I became interested in documentaries, sci-fi, and fantasy—specifically, media about ancient societies and their religions, whether in reality or fiction. I found myself analyzing the influences of existing religions on the fictional worlds we create and the common theme of maintaining tradition and belief. I also grew up in a heavily Roman Catholic environment; living in this environment and having the interests I had caused me to question why we do what we do, both culturally and as Catholics.

Star Trek was originally introduced to me by my mother, who had been a long-time secret fan. Star Trek helped my mom and I relate to each other and made it easier for us to talk about stuff as we could always relate it through Star Trek plots; eventually, watching shows became the main way we would spend time together. She used to tell me stories about how *Star Trek: The Original Series* helped her learn English and gave her comfort when she immigrated to Canada, and that is why she wanted to share it with me. The franchise ended up being a source of comfort for me as well: I would watch the series fully immersed in every episode, feeling as if I were in them. For a moment, whatever worries I had in the mundane world would not exist.

Later, when I was a teenager, I found others who felt the same as me and had a love for Star Trek, which helped me work on my social skills and gain the confidence to socialize more. Now, as an adult, I continue to make friends in the community, and I found that the people you find in the Star Trek fandom are the friends that you could not talk to for months and yet pick up right where you dropped off the next time you see each other.

When I was younger, I used to watch the adventures and exploration on various Star Trek series, like *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and *Star Trek: Enterprise*, fascinated with the way the characters lived their lives. I always thought it would be cool to spend your life studying different societies, cultures, and religions, but growing up in the environment I did, I never thought that could be a reality until I started my undergraduate degree. My curiosity about religious themes and motifs only grew after attending McMaster University and taking Religion and Diversity as an elective. Realizing I could pursue this, I switched my major and obtained a HBA in Religious Studies with a Minor in Anthropology. I was so passionate about the program that I also leaped at the opportunity to become the first co-president of the Society Culture and Religions Scholars (SCARS), which deepened my interest and knowledge in the field through the events and talks we would host, many of which had to do with the topic of religion and popular culture. This decision to change my career path and field of study shifted the course of my life. I am now completing a Masters of Arts in the Department of Religious Studies at Memorial University of Newfoundland under the supervision of Daniel Peretti, for which this thesis is written.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1 Introduction

1.1 Background Context

When did fans begin to organize themselves as communities in response to science fiction? Do these communities share qualities with religious communities? Science fiction fandom emerged in North America in the 1920s, arguably when Hugo Gernsback coined the term (Ritter & Ritter 2020). Being a fan is enough to make you considered part of a fandom. One does not have to be active in fandom communities to be accepted. According to several scholars (Jindra 1994, Ritter & Ritter 2020, Harris & Alexander 1998), early science fiction fans often found themselves marginalized and marked for their committed engagement with speculative fiction. Anthropologist and Star Trek scholar Michael Jindra suggests that it was this combination of fascination with science fiction coupled with a sense of “outsiderhood” in relation to mainstream interests that birthed the first organized science fiction fan movements in the United States (Jindra 1994, p.35). Since the 1920s, the scope of science fiction fandom has grown to encompass multi-generational fans (Jindra 1994, p. 35) and fans who make their science fiction fandom a central focus of their lives.

Star Trek originally aired on September 8, 1966, and its fandom’s first convention was held in 1972 in New York City. The original Star Trek television series ran from 1966 to 1969 and would go on to become a massive media franchise: twelve Star Trek television series to date (and a thirteenth in the works), fourteen major motion pictures, and countless novels, guidebooks, and scholarly works (Wikipedia). The airing of the first Star Trek episode has been described by some fans as a “conversion” experience (Jindra 1994, p. 35). The conversion experience spoken of by fans is one reason Jindra suggests fandom exhibits the characteristics of a religious movement (Jindra 1994, p. 35). Gene Roddenberry, who was the screenwriter,

producer, and creator of the original Star Trek series and some of its sequels, wanted to portray a technological utopia in the show (Jenkins & Tulloch 2005, p. 178). He initially framed the Star Trek world as one in which technological progress would create or go hand in hand with social progress (Jenkins & Tulloch 2005, p. 178). This utopian vision of social and technological progress, which we can consider the foundational Star Trek myth, has been intensely inspiring for many fans (Porter 2016). When the original Star Trek series was threatened with cancellation after its second year, fans created a letter-writing campaign that successfully kept the series going for a third season. Ironically, the fandom grew even as the original series was cancelled (Jenkins & Tulloch 2005, p. 10).

A 1994 poll found that 53% of Americans considered themselves to be Star Trek fans; this percentage likely included many fans who were casual followers of the Star Trek television series (Harrison and Jenkins 1996 p. 260; Kozinets 2001 p. 69). The resurgence of the Star Trek television series in the 1980s and 1990s can be directly connected to the growth of Star Trek fandom (Jenkins 2005; Jindra 1994). Each new series—from the 1980s until the 2020s—has adapted the myth of the Star Trek universe to reflect changing audiences and shifting ideological frameworks (Jenkins & Tulloch 2005 p. 182). This continuity of the universe's consistent thematic and plot elements, including attention to social issues of the times, has kept the universe engaging to viewers and has drawn in new fans over the seven decades of its history. As a result, Star Trek fandom has become something unlike most popular culture phenomena before it: a religion founded on popular culture. Star Trek fandom can be understood to encompass both casual fans, those who watch the television show or movies but don't make Star Trek a central part of their lives, and the more committed fans, whose sense of self-identity is in part shaped by their fandom. Among the latter, there are fans who join organized fan groups and those who may

not join a fan club but who engage in other ways with the Star Trek fans via conventions or online forums. These fan clubs, online forums, and conventions are continuously evolving as technology progresses and new ways for fans to engage with one another emerge (Jindra 1994, p. 36-37). For the purposes of this thesis, I will use the term *traditional religion* to refer to those communities, beliefs, and practices that are associated with organized institutions such as Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and other long-standing or revived traditions; I will use *fan religion* or *popular culture religion* to refer to those communities, beliefs, and practices of individual and organized fans of popular culture universes such as Star Trek.

Several scholars have argued that part of the appeal of organized fandom is the perception that fandom itself embodies the utopian ideals of the science fiction franchise (Porter & McLaren 1999, Jindra 1994, 2014). According to Porter, “Fandom itself [is] understood to constitute a model of the egalitarian ideal portrayed within the Star Trek television series... the optimistic vision of an egalitarian future presaged by the communities of fandom” (1999, p. 254) is central in understanding the importance of both the show and the community of fandom for fans. Star Trek’s impact, through its humanist ideals and messages, has turned the fandom into a sort of movement, as found in the research of scholars such as Henry Jenkins and John Tulloch (2005) and Jacqueline Littenberg, Sondra Marshak and Joan Winston (1975). They theorize that this impact goes beyond any other fandom in its emphasis on the image of a brighter world, and it has inspired fans to independently create the imagined positive future within the context of fandom (Jenkins & Tulloch 2005, p. 12). This idea leads me to this thesis’ two central questions:

- ⇒ Is Star Trek fandom a “popular culture based religion” which provides community benefits similar to traditional religions?
- ⇒ What impact or effect does this community have on the sense of loneliness and mental

health of those who participate?

1.2 Literature Review

In this section, I focus on bodies of literature that discuss the history of science fiction fandom, fandoms functioning as a religion, the effect of religiosity on mental health and loneliness, belonging in religion and fandom, and science fiction fandom (particularly the Star Trek Fandom) helping with mental health and loneliness. Key sources for this thesis include *Star Trek Fandom as a Religious Phenomenon* by Michael Jindra (1994), *Star Trek and Sacred Ground* by Jennifer Porter and Darcee McLaren (2016), *Nine Theories of Religion* by Daniel Pals (2014), *The Effect of Religiosity on Life Satisfaction in a Secularized Context* by Josje Ten Kate, Willem de Koster, and Jeroen Van Der Wall (2017), *Effective Coping with Loneliness: A review* by Ami Rokach (2018), and *The Affective Need to Belong* by Jack Williams (2021).

The works of Michael Jindra, Jennifer Porter, and Darcee McLaren provide background on how Star Trek fandom also is a functioning religion. All three authors analyze the religious aspects of Star Trek fandom to make their argument. These religious aspects include but are not limited to mythology, symbolic themes, a unique sense of belonging, sacred beings, a mission/purpose, and ritual. They also discuss how the presence of ritual is a key part of fan religious expression. Porter and McLaren highlight the mythological and symbolic themes in Star Trek as being inspired by both Western religious traditions along with science and technology. In a way, Star Trek shifted from promoting science and giving commentary on religion to presenting religious themes and narratives in a new format (Porter & McLaren 2016). Jindra explains that fandom creates a sense of identity and community, which is somewhat hierarchical and has regularized practices that include a “canon,” while he explores the importance of, and meaning behind, fan rituals (Jindra 1994). Jindra argues that the Star Trek

fandom's moral code, mission (as it supplies a purpose and an ideal future), and myths provide individuals with the tools they need to take control of their destiny and ability to control their future (Jindra 1994, p. 33-34). This, he suggests, demonstrates that Star Trek content has become a sort of scripture for some fans that ties messages about human nature and normative statements about social life to the construction and representation of future society (Jindra 1994, p. 34). These scriptures are split into two groups: canon and offshoots of canon work. Star Trek fans take every single detail of the Star Trek universe seriously, as “for the universe to remain a reality, it must be kept authentic” (Jindra 1994, p. 44). Because of the strict idea of what is authoritative material in the Star Trek universe, fans have constructed offshoot canon, their own more flexible utopian world where science and human progress have given them the answer to all the problems that plague humanity while maintaining the core essence of the true canon works.

These ideas suggest a science magic consisting of technology that creates an idealistic control over problems of the world, but is fictional despite its roots in real-world science and therefore is closer to magic (Jindra 2017, p. 235). Science magic is used to control that which is out of control (Jindra 1994, p. 46). This in itself is also an example of the creation of mythology progressing over some time. Fans have taken the Star Trek culture of utopian science fiction and expanded on it by creating explanations for contradictions in the television/film narratives using the tools and materials available to them (Jindra 1994, p. 46). Porter and McLaren suggest that every single detail of what is understood as canon must first be examined through the Star Trek fandom itself. Some television episodes are not even considered true canon by some fans as they do not fit the standard of the universe according to fans who devote hours of their lives assessing the validity of Star Trek content (Porter & McLaren 2016, p. 53). Porter and McLaren also argue

that Star Trek fans have elevated the figure of Eugene Wesley Roddenberry, the screenwriter, producer, and creator of multiple Star Trek series (including the original series and animation) to the level of visionary or sacred figure. Many fans use his words to verify whether something is true canon and see his vision of the Star Trek universe as the true one (Porter & McLaren 2016, p. 225). Drawing on Roddenberry as a sacred figure helps fans develop a coherent mythology and folk philosophy, which in turn helps shape their shared culture and their shared values/moral codes (Jindra, 1999, p. 219). Although fans engage with Star Trek in part for entertainment, they also often take it very seriously and maintain an awareness that it is both “only” a TV show and also a fundamental expression of deeply meaningful archetypal truths about human nature and potential.

French sociologist Émile Durkheim’s theory of religion has been central to how I have conceptualized religious communities. Durkheim explores ritual not as natural or supernatural but as sacred, something that is set apart from the normal and given more respect (Pals 2014, p. 95). Sacred objects are important to Durkheim’s definition of religion and his concept of religious community, as he defines religion as a “unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden unite into one moral community called a church, all those who adhere to them” (Durkheim 2008, p. 47). In this discussion, he is describing a community that coheres not for the one or the few but the community as a whole (Pals 2014, p. 95). This concept of religious community aligns with the way that the Star Trek fandom functions as a community as well, in regard to aspects such as a unique sense of belonging and identity building/reinforcement as both an individual and a member of a community. The Star Trek fandom considers many things sacred, but nothing as much as the Star

Trek narrative; and it is the humanistic concept within the narrative that binds them together in an equal community where they bond over a shared sacred image.

So, too, in *The Effect of Religiosity on Life Satisfaction in a Secularized Context*, Josje Ten Kate, Willem de Koster, and Jeroen Van Der Waal explore how religion provides us with this sense of deeper communal belonging. They examine the effect that religious belief has on people's sense of belonging and argue that it provides meaning and structure to people's lives through the sense of community people experience within religious contexts, which in turn increases life satisfaction. They also suggest that religious individuals feel less alone when they interpret their struggles through the stories of religious figures, such as characters in the Bible. Additionally, the authors demonstrate that the moral code provided by traditional religions makes it easier for believers to solve the problems they face while also avoiding risky behaviours and situations. Consuming the sacred narratives of their religion helps people enhance their sense of control over their own lives, as their faith provides the appropriate tools for coping with life's difficulties. Furthermore, sacred figures, like gods or revered beings, serve as a source of support and companionship for believers. When participants of religion are stressed and lonely, these figures provide individuals with feelings of safety or love. Believers often look to these figures for guidance, which gives them a sense of hope and control (Ten Kate, Koster, & Van Der Waal 2017). Furthermore, being a part of a community of like-minded people fosters a sense of intimacy and creates an invisible safety net for emotional security (Ten Kate, Koster, & Van Der Waal 2017). The authors also argue that religion, through prayer and other divine interactions, helps individuals enhance their perceptions of control over life by providing the tools they need to cope while also making them feel "valued and helped by a divine force" (Ten Kate, Koster, & Van Der Waal 2017, p. 139).

Related to the second component of this thesis, which is how the Star Trek fandom as a religious community impacts or affects the sense of loneliness and mental health of the Star Trek fandom participants, Ami Rokach's (2018) work analyzes different ways of coping with loneliness. She groups methods for managing loneliness into six dimensions: (1) acceptance and reflection, (2) solitude, (3) self-development and understanding, (4) social support network, (5) distancing and denial, and finally (6) religion and faith. The author was surprised to find religion and faith as one of the dimensions; however, her discovery will also shed light on the appeal of Star Trek Fandom for many fans. Rokach states that through religion and faith, individuals gain strength, inner peace, and a sense of community/belonging.

Ritual is also an important part of how religion can help one cope with loneliness. Certain types of rituals can evoke the experience of transcendence. This state has been shown to provide solace for humans as it gives us a connection to both the past and the future (Rokach 2018). Star Trek and associated conventions make many fans feel like they exist outside of time, and re-enactment rituals, cosplay (costuming as a character) and larping (costuming and acting as a character, often including a game scenario, for example, a quest) allow fans to perform their mythology in the convention setting, a liminal space. Additionally, such ritual traditions and shared beliefs of members of a religion increase their social circle and make individuals feel protected through their connection to the supreme being, which I will discuss more in Chapter 3 (Rokach 2018; Porter & McLaren 2016; Jindra 1994). This may well be the case in fandom contexts also, where fans feel a connectedness to the almost-mythic characters of Jean Luc Picard, Worf, and other Star Trek characters. As a religion, Star Trek gives fans a shared ideology and mission and may well allow them to grow emotionally stronger by providing them with the tools and coping mechanisms that Rokach suggests traditional religions provide to

members for coping with traumatic situations and loneliness (Rokach 2018).

In *The Affective Need to Belong*, Jack Williams states that humans have been shown to have an innate need to belong to communities. This source recognizes both the need to belong for humans more generally and at what point belonging to a community becomes a religious experience. Williams references Esther McIntosh's analysis of John MacMurray's work (2018), claiming that religion is primarily communal. He delineates two kinds of social groups. One kind of group exists for a particular goal, and the other kind of group exists for the sake of relationships, i.e., friendship groups. Religion would primarily exist within the latter group as religion is the end and not a means to an end. These two groups exist on two ends of a spectrum which religion navigates differently than other groups. He also argues that humans are inherently relational, and religion serves the purpose of fostering relationships by giving meaning to people's lives. This is because the shared community belonging gained by being a part of a religion helps shape your identity and view of the social landscape while in-turn strengthening your belief. Jack Williams takes the human need to belong in its various forms and expands it further to explore the point at which belonging changes how people perceive, believe, and experience human practices. Belonging to a religious community is particularly effective for people who are otherwise socially isolated. Williams acknowledges that belonging can be experienced in non-religious groups, but argues that religious groups provide a deeper feeling of inclusion (Williams 2021).

1.3 Methodology

I began conducting qualitative research for this thesis on August 26, 2022,¹ employing a

¹ Memorial University's Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) approved my thesis research under the project title Nobody is Lonely Amongst the Stars: Sense of Religious Community in Star Trek Fandom on August 26, 2022.

mixed-methods approach that references studies conducted by other scholars while relying on qualitative participant observation, interviews, and questionnaires at conventions such as Fan-Expo and in online fan forums. *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion* states that using a mixed-method research approach is beneficial for this type of sociological research (Engler & Stausberg 2013). So, too, Star Trek scholar Michael Jindra states that such a mixed method of study “is one of the best ways to understand any group phenomenon, especially with a rather diverse one like Star Trek” (Jindra 1994, p. 29).

I created online and paper versions of a survey consisting of questions regarding my participants’ experiences as a Star Trek fan, their level of involvement in the Star Trek community and activities, and their sense of identity and belonging before and after joining the community (see Appendix A). A successful questionnaire can be made evident by its length, clarity, and variety. I attempted to keep questions short to maintain the participant’s attention, I made the concepts in the questionnaire easy to understand, and I randomized my questions to help maintain accurate answers from the participants (Engler & Stausberg 2013). I used the same unstructured interview questions for both my in-person and my online engagement with fans. My in-person questionnaires included twenty-two questions (see Appendix B) which were distributed at the following science fiction conventions: the Toronto Fan Expo (August 26-28, 2022, and August 24-27, 2023), Hamilton Retro-Con (November 26, 2022), Toronto Comicon (March 17-19, 2023, and March 15-17, 2024), and the Niagara Falls Comic Con (June 9-11, 2023). I selected these conventions based on their location and the level of Star Trek content advertised (such as panels that featured Star Trek actors). I posted online questionnaires on online Star Trek forums on Reddit, Discord, Twitter, and Tumblr. Eighty-six people responded from April 6, 2023, to December 19, 2023.

I also undertook participant observation both at conventions and on online forums from August 26, 2022, to March 31, 2024: r/startrek,² Star Trek Facebook group,³ Star Trek Discord,⁴ the Tik-Tok Star Trek Community⁵; the forums listed were the most active at the time of my research and therefore contributed the most to my work; however, to be thorough, I did observe others as well. Despite the common knowledge that posts on online platforms will most likely be seen by thousands of strangers, online posts are surprisingly intimate. Such posts can give insight into the thought processes of participants (Jindra 1994, p. 30). This web-observation was particularly helpful for my study on the impact of fandom on fans' mental health and the alleviation of loneliness. Websites such as Reddit's r/startrek, with 531,000 users, made remaining neutral and anonymous much easier, as the researcher is a largely invisible presence in observing fan behaviour online (Jindra 1994, p. 29). In addition, I performed four online, unstructured Zoom interviews with people recruited on these platforms. Online research also has its disadvantages in that I may be unaware of social factors that affect the way the participants act and think (such as their gender or social position) unless the fan chooses to share that information, which they all ended up opting to share (Jindra, 1994, p.29).

The conventions I have attended have varying amounts of participants and durations; for example, Toronto Fan Expo was four days long, three of which I attended, and had approximately 140,000 attendees, whereas Hamilton Retro-Con was one day long and, though an official number was never released, from my observation there could not have been more than a couple of hundred people there. Conventions are a good place to undertake participant-

² 894000 members Link: <https://www.reddit.com/r/startrek/>

³ 199,700 members Link: <https://www.facebook.com/share/PhdsJynggpDM8eUL/>

⁴ 15,173 members Link: <https://discord.com/invite/startrek>

⁵ Example Links: https://www.tiktok.com/@newbiestartrek?_t=8ZIwVIZPJ7V&_r=1
https://www.tiktok.com/@startrekguy?_t=8ZIwTqB0cre&_r=1&fbclid=IwAR11YRgeQm17fUjWXTFPUQIIjq99E7k-iFNHjgfQw46kogGkPOdE5v69lg

observation as they are the most publicly visible aspects of fandom. This research allowed me to examine fandom's relationships with the broader public (Jindra 1994, p. 39). The individuals and communities that are a part of Star Trek Fandom tend to be isolated from each other geographically, but get opportunities to meet through conventions, tourist sites, and online forums, which is why doing both online and in-person research is necessary to get the full scope of their experiences (Jindra 1994, p. 38).

Purpose of Methods

I hypothesize that the Star Trek fandom is a religion with its own canon, mission, and sacred figures that, in North America, presents the same strong sense of belonging, shared identity, and community as traditional religions. This group helps individuals cope with and combat loneliness at a time when people are turning away from traditional religiosity (Fatutoveanu & Pintilescu 2012; Cornelissen 2021). Durkheim or Victor Turner's ideas on the impact of communities, particularly where participants experience themselves as equals due to their humanistic ideals in the fandom, pushed by Star Trek's narratives, are significant (Turner 2017). There has already been research done that theorized that religion can help people cope with loneliness and that the feeling of belonging that is obtained through religion causes increased life satisfaction (Rokach, 2018; Kate, Koster & Waal, 2017; Williams, 2021). My methods are designed to support these theories with concrete data.

Previous research also shows that Star Trek is a religion, meaning there is already an established basis for the existence of the phenomenon I am studying and which my research will build on. If the Star Trek fandom does have the same communal aspects as traditional religion and helps combat loneliness, it may apply to other fandoms as well and would be beneficial for

two reasons. First, pointing out this phenomenon may open the door to more research on the topic of helping people struggling with mental health due to isolation, both social and physical, which is particularly relevant due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Secondly, it would help us look at the decrease in religiosity from a different angle; perhaps religiosity in North America is not decreasing but rather evolving to exist in the secular age. If we keep collecting data on phenomena like this, moving forward, it could change the way that we conduct research and study within parts of religious studies in modernity.

Recruitment Processes:

I undertook multi-pronged recruitment for this study. First, for the online questionnaires, I posted a recruitment document along with a poster on forum websites such as Reddit's r/startrek, the official Star Trek Discord, and others, as deemed relevant. I also approached active forum participants via direct message on the platforms. Second, for the four online interviews, I asked individuals who chose to take the online questionnaire if they would like to take part in an online Zoom-based interview. If they said yes, a new window unassociated with the questionnaire would collect their email address. For in-person interviews, I attended conventions and approached individuals randomly throughout these events who were likely Star Trek fans (e.g., are at a Star Trek panel, are wearing Star Trek cosplay) and verbally solicited their participation in the study. For online participant observation, I looked at online Star Trek fandom activity locales such as Reddit, Discord, Tumblr, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok and observed the posts on these websites, with occasional interactions in the form of comments, likes, and other forms of interaction as necessary. For in-person participant observation, I attended fan conventions and observed fan interactions with Star Trek culture in these settings. Participation

came in the form of panel participation, celebrity meet-and-greets, and other activities as deemed relevant and necessary.

Consent Processes:

If participants chose to open the online questionnaire, they were met with an opening screen that gave an informed consent overview (see Appendix C). Participants had the option to check a box acknowledging their informed agreement to the study based on the consent letter provided. The survey could only be completed if the box indicating acknowledgement and consent was checked. While conducting in-person questionnaires, a hard copy of the questionnaire consent form was provided as a cover to the survey (see Appendix D). A signature at the bottom of the consent form indicating acknowledgment and consent to the study informed consent to participate in the study. For online interviews (unstructured), a digital copy of the online interview consent form was distributed to the participant before the interview via email (see Appendix E). A mark in the digital signature acknowledging and providing consent on the digital form is considered consent to participate in the study. Consent was also solicited verbally after the investigator verbally reiterated the contents of the letter at the beginning of the interview. While conducting in-person interviews, a hard copy of the in-person interview consent form was given to the participant before the in-person interview; this consent form was the same as the in-person questionnaire form (see Appendix D). A signature on the form indicating acknowledgment of the study and agreement to participate was considered informed consent.

For online participant observation, consent was implied in a participant observation setting because all participant observation took place in public, unregulated forum spaces. Additionally, during in-person participant observation, consent is also implied as all participant

observation took place in unregulated forum spaces that are accessible to the general public. Furthermore, regarding in-person photographs, verbally interested participants were provided with a hard copy of the consent form with different boxes and signatures representing different levels of consent (see Appendix D). An affirmative signature on the consent form indicated informed consent to have a photograph taken for the study. Consent for Online photographs was obtained through a digital informed consent form (see Appendix F) that was provided to individuals whose photographs and video stills were sought for study use through direct messages on the online platforms being used, and an affirmative digital signature on the form indicates informed consent. The purpose of the photographs was for them to be used as a tool to better illustrate the atmosphere of the conventions and the practices of rituals such as cosplay.

1.4 Relevance

Part of this research took place amidst the height of the global COVID-19 pandemic, when health issues related to loneliness became significant social issues. A study done in 2020 that took data from 564 young adults 22 to 29 years of age, collected in January 2020 before the pandemic and from April and May 2020 mid-pandemic, found a significant increase in loneliness. In addition, they discovered that the pandemic also led to an increase in mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety. Also, they discovered that those with lower social support had a higher level of loneliness (Lee, Cadigan, & Rhew). For this reason, a study of the phenomenon of religiosity in the Star Trek fandom helping with loneliness is relevant. Furthermore, it shows that those with larger social networks are still being affected by the pandemic mentally, but not to the same degree as those without one, which is a piece of the puzzle for why this phenomenon exists (Lee, Cadigan, & Rhew).

1.5 Thesis Outline

This thesis consists of six chapters. This first introductory chapter discusses the background context, the prevalent literature used in this thesis, the research methodology, and the relevance of this thesis. In Chapter 2: Star Trek as a Religion, I explain why Star Trek fandom may be considered a type of religion in our modern-day secularized society. I do so by discussing the development of the Star Trek fandom, its rituals, its mythology and canon, and its mission. Chapter 3: The Impact of Ritual will focus on the kinds of ritual behaviours engaged in by Star Trek fans, analyzing them through psychological and functionalist lens focusing on their prosocial components. Chapter 4: Religious Belonging and Moral Compass will apply the insights of Jack Williams and other scholars to argue that Star Trek fandom demonstrates the benefits of a religious community. This chapter will show that fandom provides a framework for fostering a sense of community and the sense of belonging that comes from that framework. There are religious narratives (e.g., the series episodes), rites (watching your first premier), and rituals (pilgrimage to conventions) that all contribute to making the members feel and maintain a sense of togetherness. Religious belonging is stronger than other types of community belonging (Williams 2021), and this chapter argues that Star Trek fandom shares this enhanced sense of community (Williams 2021). Chapter 5: Purpose will show that Star Trek provides its followers with access to transcendence and allows people to experience life outside of normative time and the mundane world. Furthermore, the chapter will demonstrate that Star Trek drives its followers to a greater purpose by influencing them to pursue a mission and to have control over their destiny as a collective, thus strengthening their bonds/relationships even more. In Chapter 6: Conclusion, I tie the previous chapters and their insights together to demonstrate that

participation in Star Trek fandom does indeed have the same pro-social impact on fans that traditional religious belonging has for church members. Through belief, ritual, purpose, and community, participation in Star Trek fandom strengthens identity, alleviates loneliness, and contributes to the experience of transcendence that marks Star Trek fandom as religious.

CHAPTER 2

STAR TREK AS A RELIGION

2 Star Trek as a religion

2.1 Evolution of Religion

Before I can further discuss the topic of Star Trek as a religion, I first must discuss how we view and define religion and how that may have changed in a modern context. Many view traditional religion as a result of the Western process of societal differentiation, where institutional religion was given a particular function; this birthed the idea that religion must be institutionalized (Porter & McLaren 2016, p. 220). Due to this idea of religion as an institution, we often fail to recognize religious expression in our society and miscategorise it as purely cultural or political.

In “Utopian Enterprise: Articulating the Meanings of Star Trek’s Culture of Consumption,” Robert V. Kozinets discusses how the word *devotion* turns many Star Trek fans away from describing Star Trek as a religion, though they can recognize the sacred attitudes of the fandom. They reject the label because it is a term connected to the idea of institutionalized activity. Because the Star Trek community exists outside of those institutionalized bonds, you don’t have to be part of the fan clubs and go to conventions to be a true Star Trek fan (Kozinets 2001, p. 76). Michael Jindra wrote about how popular culture and “learned religion” were not always separate. Jindra states that popular culture “split from ‘learned,’ formal religious culture” and continued to complement formal religion after this split in the form of events within church culture, such as patron saint festivals and pre-Lenten Carnivals in early Europe; this close connection to traditional religion prevented popular culture from becoming a distinct alternative to religious culture for some time. He claims that this split occurred after the Protestant and Catholic Reformations (Jindra 2017, p.223), at which time popular culture started to become its own distinct category of practice and eventually its own religion with its

own myth, through which followers find meaning and identity. The separation of religion from other aspects of culture is a relatively new development, formed by modern society. In many cultures, the line is still not so clear; many people view religion as an ongoing experience taken for granted, a component of every aspect of life. However, in the West, many people ignore similar dimensions and forms of practicing religion because we are stuck on institutional ideas (Jindra 2017, p. 227).

Furthermore, if we acknowledge that religion can exist outside institutions, we can recognize that there are new forms of religion that perhaps evolved out of our increasingly secular society. Andrada Fatu-Tutoveanu and Corneliu Pintilescu discuss this possibility when talking about implicit religion in their work “Religious ‘Avatars’ and Implicit Religion: Recycling Myths and Religious Patterns Within Contemporary U.S. Popular Culture.” When explaining the origins of implicit religion, they state that “religiosity is innate to human society although not always present in overt forms” (Fatu-Tutoveanu & Pintilescu 2012, p. 13).

According to Statistics Canada, fewer Canadians than ever before now claim religious affiliation (Cornelissen 2021). What fans, statisticians, and scholars may share, however, is a too-narrow definition of religion that does not adequately encompass the newly emerging media-related religions of pop culture. As Spock himself once said, “Change is the essential process of all existence” (King 2003). The nature of religion has changed in our modern, technologically-mediated culture, and media franchises may well form the basis for experiencing religion as Western society evolves. Michael Jindra also found that many fans reject traditional religions because, in their opinion, these religions are too concerned with the present to provide meaning for the future. This is why some turned away from institutions and towards fan communities (Crawford 1969). At conventions, I talked with many fans who also felt that traditional religion

espouses regressive views that no longer, or never, aligned with their personal values. I saw many examples of this same sentiment when observing Star Trek fan activity in online forums. Many fans also expressed how the mission and values taught through Star Trek helped them leave their religious community, and that they found a like-minded community within Star Trek.

One fan on Reddit stated:

Star Trek was how I kind of imagined God and everything being—like during the endowment ceremony [a two-part ordinance ceremony for the participant's afterlife in Mormonism (Buerger, 2001)], in order to get through all of the strange stuff, I just kept telling myself that God and Heaven are probably like Star Trek, and not... what the temple is haha.

But honestly, wanting life to be like Star Trek helped me get out of the church as well--critical thinking, logic, and empathy really just show up a lot in those series (R-Elmer123456, 2022).

Similar outcomes have been found in other large fandoms focused on franchises with extensive story building, like the Superman fandom. In *Superman in Myth and Folklore*, Daniel Peretti discusses how Superman has transitioned from popular to folk culture and in the process has become a myth dealing with morals, identity, and politics. He touches on how the removal of myth from an individual's life creates a void that needs to be filled by something else (Peretti, 2017 p.131), which aligns with the thinking of Williams, who wrote about how humans have an innate need to belong which religion fulfills. Peretti gives an example of how one of his subjects, Josh, replaced Christianity with Superman, using Superman as a line that stands between religion and atheism. His father would bring him Superman comics, which facilitated a connection between the two as his father was often absent for work. Josh embedded this connection with his father into the idea of Superman, much like a sacred object. As he became more familiar with the Superman narratives, he was able to use them to better understand his father and apply it to his own life, much like the Star Trek fans in my research do with the Star Trek franchise narratives

and Christians do with the Bible. Additionally, Josh's love of the comics fueled his interest in science, history, and mythology, which led him to question his family's religion. He began to see the problems with the church and realized he was only a Christian because that's what he saw his family believe in, and it worked for them, but it didn't work for him. In reference to why he fixated on Superman, Josh stated the following, which I feel resonates with what is happening in the Star Trek fandom as well: "Instead of something they told me, I chose something I liked. If it's all fiction, then we should be able to choose our own sacred stories" (Peretti 2017, p. 132). He further elaborates by explaining that for him, the things that Superman says align more with what he believes is right, and in a way, Superman replaced religion for him when he needed it. Josh believed the function of religion was to comfort by providing answers to questions formed out of anxiety and to convey a sense of morality. Superman performed these functions through his heroic actions and worldview: he sees everyone as special, and everyone is worth saving. But for Josh, Superman was able to fulfill these functions without depictions of deep suffering and violence that the Bible had with no intervention, which made Josh uncomfortable; instead, Superman intervened and changed the world through good acts, not always violence, which inspires others to do good and supplies hope. The Superman narrative spreads a message of a better world and peace (Peretti 2017, p. 133-137). This is the same as the mission the Star Trek fans follow, to work towards a better world, giving their lives purpose where traditional religion no longer or never did for them. This shows that the Star Trek fandom becoming a new form or placeholder for the spot traditional religion used to fill in people's lives in our secular age is not an isolated incident or phenomenon and should be something we keep a closer eye on and worth studying.

Furthermore, Star Trek as a franchise does have connections to institutions such as the production company that produces its movies and shows or the numerous corporations that hold Star Trek related conventions. However, this connection to institutions has nothing to do with whether or not you are a part of the fandom; the only thing required is being a fan of some sort of Star Trek content. Fans can be a part of these institutions or subscribe to them without being involved in these corporations; all that matters is your love for Trek.

2.2 Characterizing Star Trek Fandom

Religion has historically provided a sense of community for believers (O'Donovan 2016, Ten Kate, De Kostner & Van der Waal 2017). Community is the basis of human existence, which can present itself as religion, as human beings, and individuals, we have a need to belong, which is rooted in our biology and evolutionary history (Williams, 2021). Religion meets this need through shared ideology and social/spiritual contexts, providing a distinct setting for individuals to explore their identity outside of the self and commitment. This can present itself as a concern for the social good (King, 2010).

In my interviews, I asked participants to discuss how the Star Trek fandom is a unique fan community specifically due to its welcoming and openness. I interviewed an individual who will be referred to as Moe. She told me that a key element of Star Trek fandom is that its members never make her feel stupid, unlike other fandoms, and that they have formed a community that wants to help you learn if you don't know much about Star Trek instead of accusing you of not being a true fan. One example Moe gave was that in the Marvel fandom, which she participated in for years, when speaking to another fan about Spider-Man's powers, she accidentally misnamed the "spidey sense" (an ability to sense imminent danger), and

someone criticized her for it, which made her feel uncomfortable. This atmosphere caused her to leave the Marvel fandom, and it is something she doesn't see in the Star Trek Fandom. Moe also admitted that she acts differently in the Star Trek fandom because of the community it fosters compared to fandoms she has been a part of in the past, stating:

But yeah, like, I've never felt the need to be upset with someone [in the Star Trek fandom] because they didn't know something, which is something I kind of like, I guess, internalized when I was in other fandoms like if someone didn't know something, I was like, Oh, well, they're stupid, they haven't watched the whole thing. But not here, which is super nice.

I heard the same comments from other participants regarding anime and Star Wars fandoms, describing Star Trek as more of a second family who is here to help you. This is why the Star Trek fandom is unique and why I describe it as having the same distinct sense of belonging as traditional religion. When studying religion as a sort of family, it was found that often individuals who have few family ties, such as those who never married, are widowed, divorced, and childless, are attracted to religions as a sort of "surrogate" family (Christiano 1986, p.339) I have observed that this finding also applies to those who had a rough home environment as a child, along with those who had difficulty connecting with their family. Michael Jindra found a similar theme, and he states that "No other popular culture phenomenon has shown the depth and breadth of fan activity of Star Trek" (Jindra 2017, p. 225). He compares it to how Star Wars has sold billions of dollars in merchandise but has far fewer clubs and far less fan-driven world-building content than Star Trek; the Star Trek fandom is uniquely community-driven (Jindra 2017, p. 225).

According to Porter, "Fan communities are, or at least can be, places that embody a person's and/or a community's expression of what it means to be human, to be in community, to be in space and time, to be moral or immoral, to be finite or eternal, to simply be" (Porter, 2009).

Within the framework of fandom, Star Trek fans build visions of a better tomorrow, shared mythology, bonds of community, and personally meaningful worldviews that mirror the impact of traditionally defined religions (Crawford 1969, Jenkin & Tulloch 2005). Furthermore, Jindra proposes that, in our modern society, there are new forms of religion in which, instead of idealizing gods, we idolize men who have become like gods and see science as providing our destiny (Jindra 2017). We can see Star Trek fans idolizing the actors and characters of Star Trek like gods through their parasocial relationships with them. In Sarah Johnston's book *The Story of Myth*, she explains that "we engage parasocially with fictional characters because their creators have made them so convincing that they prompt the same emotional and cognitive reactions in us as real people do" (Johnston 2018, p.88). Parasocial relationships are a type of parasocial interaction that is described as the following in *A Dictionary of Media and Communication*:

A term coined by Horton and Wohl in 1956 to refer to a kind of psychological relationship experienced by members of an audience in their mediated encounters with certain performers in the mass media, particularly on television. Regular viewers come to feel that they know familiar television personalities almost as friends. **Parasocial relationships** psychologically resemble those of face-to-face interaction, but they are, of course, mediated and one-sided. Horton and Wohl stress that parasocial interaction is not like a process of identification. One-off viewers may choose to be detached, analytical, and even cynical, but regular viewers are more likely to adopt the proffered role (Chandler & Munday, 2020).

In simpler terms, parasocial relationships are one-sided relationships with one person investing emotion, energy, interest, and time while the other side is unaware of that individual's existence. An example of the new type of religion Jindra describes is the Star Trek fandom (Jindra 1994, p. 31). Jindra also claims that popular culture has taken its place alongside mainstream traditional religions as it runs counter to the religious traditions that dominate Western culture that guide individuals' lives (Jindra 2017, p. 224)

Mass media saturates Western culture to such a cast extent that some might assume that religion has died out, but as I hope to demonstrate and others have shown, religious patterns, symbols, characters, and behaviours persist—with a different cultural model. They have just been reinterpreted and hidden under secularist ideas and industrial art like cinema, giving popular culture its own religious patterns and replacing traditional religions as the sacred in individuals’ lives (Fatu-Tutoveanu & Pintilescu 2012). This leads to the theory that perhaps fandoms, by operating like religions, are an outcome of secularized societies needing a replacement for the roles that religious institutions take in social and psychological aspects of individuals’ lives (Bickerdike 2015). In my survey research, most participants indicated that they do not identify as a religious person, as seen in Figure 1:

Q16 - I am a religious person.

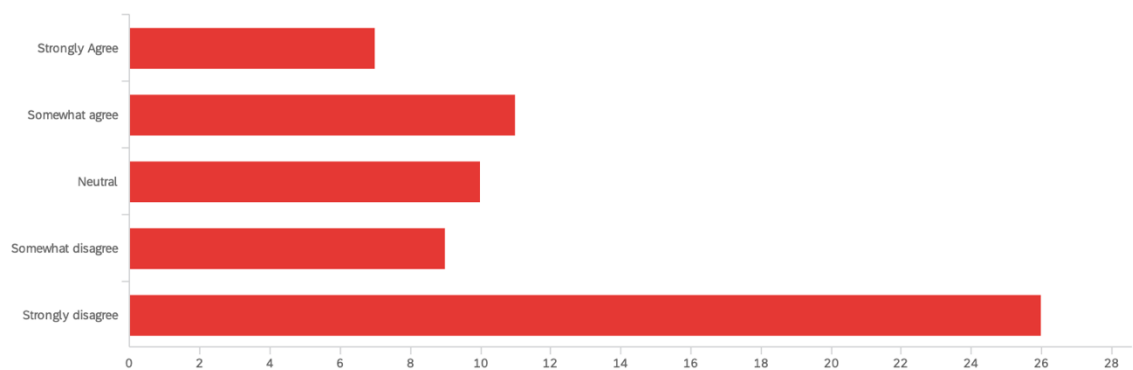


Figure 1

Perhaps the Star Trek fandom has become a new placeholder for religion through the process of sacralization in resistance to the secularization of a community that experiences social transcendence, exists outside of the mundane, and forms a type of symbolic community through which individuals then seek an identity and a purpose distinct from the outside world. This is important, as communities like this often emerge in response to the breakdown of traditional

structural communities based more on in-person interaction, such as traditional religious institutions (Jindra 1994, p. 34-38).

Furthermore, Robert V. Kozinets found that types of consumption, including entertainment, influence the development of one's identity and life goal themes by providing both a conceptual environment in contemporary society to explore what matters in life and a safe space to construct a personal identity. He presents this idea as a reason why "the entertainment industry has been found ideologically implicated in the central identity myth of consumption subcultures" (Kozinets 2001, p. 78). He further argues that fans use the images from the entertainment subculture they take part in as a source of social differentiation and "create practices that reflect their social situation" so that they can relate the ideals and narratives of the media consumed to appropriate behaviours in general society (Kozinets 2001, p. 78). This is important, as you will see in my work; identity building and a sense of belonging form a significant part of participation in a religious community as it is part of what makes religion effective, which is why Kozinets pointed it out as well, and, as he alludes to, its importance is based on providing a kind of "higher experience." He also gives an example of a fan club leader who described Star Trek as "a philosophy that almost approaches a religion. That's what it is. It's replacing religion, for a lot of people." She also describes it as "something higher than themselves," which shows that there is a sacred "greater-than-self" quality that is prevalent in Star Trek, supplying a religious feeling that many no longer find in traditional religions (Kozinets 2001, p. 76).

This brings me to a definition of religion. Jennifer Porter's and Darcee McLaren's definition in *Star Trek and Sacred Ground* seems fitting for my work; "a 'symbol system' concerned with 'ultimate' questions about the world, human destiny and 'transcendent

meaning” (Porter & McLaren 2016. p. 220). Under this definition, the Star Trek fandom would be a religion as the fans employ the system of symbols provided by the franchise in and through their rituals, which are shaped by the shows’ mythology, and canon; and the fans share and ideology concerned with their destiny, as dictated by said mythology and canon. The Star Trek fandom has become so prominent that there are museum exhibits on Star Trek in places like the Oregon Museum of Science. Perhaps the *secularization theory* may not be correct; religiosity may not be dying but rather evolving by being present in media that would otherwise be considered secular at first glance. Not only is religiosity present, but, in some instances, it is an expression of civil religions, folk religions, residual religions, implicate religions, etc. (Fatu-Tutoveanu & Pintilescu 2012).

2.3 Ritual

There has already been research done displaying that the Star Trek fandom is a religion. Here, I will particularly reference Michael Jindra, Jennifer Porter, and Darcee McLaren as a prelude to a more developed treatment of ritual in Chapter 3. One thing that is relevant to discuss, and in part displays that the Star Trek fandom is a religion, is its salvific aspects, which include conversion, canon scripture, rituals, pilgrimages, mythology, and sacred beings. The first religious aspect I will be discussing is the presence of ritual as a practice “relative to sacred things” (Durkheim 2008, p. 47). First, we must look at what ritual is and how it functions; for this, I looked at the work of Dr. Barry Stephenson in *Ritual: A Very Short Introduction*. In this book, he stated that ritual is used in three different ways, which helps conceptualize what ritual is through its function:

First, ritual is conceived as a kind or variety of action. When people act in a specified way, they are said to be engaging in ritual. Here, ritual theory proceeds by stipulating the

ritual's unique, formal features. Second, ritual appears in scholarship as a cultural domain, arena, stage, or field, in and out of which people act and are acted upon. Third, ritual is sometimes conceived as an actor in its own right (Stephenson 2015, p. 71).

These three aspects of ritual present themselves in the rituals I will describe existing in the Star Trek Fandom and can be used as a guideline for identifying a ritual. Furthermore, Emile Durkheim found that the thing that characterized religious belief and religious ritual was not the element of the supernatural but rather the concept of the sacred, as when looking at religious individuals, he saw that they divided their world into two areas: the sacred and the profane. Sacred things are set apart, superior, powerful, outside of normal contact, and deserving of respect; the profane is the normal, uneventful part of everyday life (Pals 2014). In addition, I found Victor Turners concept of ritual to be helpful as well. Thury and Devinney characterize his view of religion as follows:

a kind of symbolic language for participants that helps define any event in terms of the broader range of symbols found in that society. It is the mythology, the stories told in the society, that as a rule provides the script for the rituals in which the members participate (Thury & Devinney, 2005).

In its very beginning, the Star Trek fandom began to incorporate ritualized aspects, such as when the original television series had its premiere at a convention in New York. Organizers continued to include airings and panels at conventions all over the world in an attempt to introduce people to this vast universe and its message. In a way, these premiers were a type of conversion method (Porter & McLaren 2016). In *Its's About Faith in Our Future: Star Trek Fandom as Cultural Religion*, Jindra writes of the first pilot preview event of the original *Star Trek* series as a mythical story that is the genesis of Star Trek fandom and the fan's conversion. He quotes an attendee named Allan Asherman, who described an overall sense of happiness in the audience after the pilot preview. He spoke of an unspoken, universal understanding that what was just shown was great. A thought was communicated through nothing more than a smile and

nod between the audience and creator, making the audience so enthused they wanted to carry Roddenberry on their shoulders. Asherman then exclaimed that the convention was split into two groups after this event through a symbolic change of the self: the “‘enlightened’ who had seen the preview and the ‘unenlightened’ who had not.” They were then fully converted into the fandom of Star Trek (Jindra 2017, p. 230).

Fans who come to the franchise later in life experience a conversion when they sit down and fully watch a Star Trek episode for the first time. This becomes an important, memorable moment in their life, a moment that forever opened their eyes to a community that would always be there and characters they could look towards, even if they did not know it at that moment. Though this rarely happens through conventions anymore—up until recently, around 2017, there wasn’t much new Star Trek content being released—it is still powerful. We no longer need convention premiers to introduce individuals to Star Trek content because it is easily accessible online through forums and streaming networks. Due to this process, fan experience can now be more individualistic but still contain that transcendent quality that makes it unique from other fandoms. Many of my participants first started watching Star Trek on streaming services, thinking a certain series would be a good quick watch, only to get sucked into all the content later, going on forums to discuss episodes, and finding they have other things in common with the fandom.

In a way, this conversion is a type of ritual: the first step towards becoming a dedicated member of the Star Trek fandom, similar to a baptism. Jindra speaks of a member of the Star Trek fandom performing a parody of a baptism as a joke, baptizing their child into the Star Trek fandom. A witness of the baptism described it as follows:

At a convention I went to a while back, they had this thing about the "Temple of Trek." I stayed and watched -- even participated in the chanting. They had some woman who was

there with her baby -- fairly newborn. And they "baptized" the kid into this pseudo-church. Pretty bizarre -- even though it was all just a joke. But I must admit I was kind of wondering at the time if everyone there was really taking it all as a joke (Jindra, 1994 p. 39).

Though the baptism came with a humorous intent, it still had a lot of meaning behind it. This experience was presented to Jindra by one of his online subjects, who witnessed an event called the Temple of Trek. The child was just a baby, and the subject explained that they questioned if everyone there really took it as a joke (Jindra 2017, p. 231). In my research, fans expressed their yearning to spread the love of Star Trek to others as well, often making jokes like the one seen above. Moe stated the following:

So, I guess I got into it just because my family has always been really into Star Trek. And now that I'm into it, I kind of I kind of I joke with my sister. I say I got to indoctrinate more people when they've never seen it. And I'm like, oh, let me let me show you it. Because that's how that's how I met. My girlfriend is she was like, I've never seen Star Trek.

Much like many traditional religions, Star Trek has become a generational belief; many parents and grandparents pass down their love of the show and the lessons they learned from it to those who come after them and treat/perceive other Star Trek fans as their second family as well. This is a point that helped make it clear to Michael Jindra that Star Trek was a religious community: "Fan activities that seek to promote a family atmosphere are in a sense 'symbolic communities' that resist the secularization and rationalization of modern life" (Jindra 2017, p. 231).

Ritual is important when analyzing the religious aspects of the Star Trek fandom and its operation as a religion, rituals like cosplay. "The term 'cosplay' comes from a combination of the terms 'costume' and 'play,' and is usually used in reference to individuals who recreate characters from popular media using costumes and makeup" (Wolff, 2023, p. 216). For example, Jindra found that when fandom members perform a ritual such as cosplay, "the masked figure

personifies the ambiguity of the person underneath the mask and the spirit that is the mask” (Jindra 1994, p.47). This demonstrates the deeper connection with the sacred being they are inhabiting through performance. He compares it to play and ritual in African religions, a union that is no longer obvious in Western religious institutions. The Star Trek fandoms even perform the ritual of pilgrimage to sites such as the Oregon Museum exhibit and Star Trek film set (which will be explored next chapter). Fans have been recorded describing these places as their “Mecca” and have called it “a dream come true” (Jindra 1994, p. 39-40).

2.4 Mythology and Canon

One of the most consistent aspects of humanity across time and space is our tendency to tell stories, and to view some of those stories as sacred. In *Deep Space and Sacred Time: Star Trek in the American Mythos*, Jon Wagner and Jan Lundeen describe myth as follows:

Myths are people's deep stories--the narratives that structure their worldview and that give form and meaning to the disconnected data of everyday life. There is not always a clear line separating myth in this broad sense from trivial fiction or from “factual” accounts (Wagner & Lundeen 1998, p. 3).

When we look at ancient forms of this storytelling, it's easy for us to recognize mythic narratives, such as the oral retellings of Greco-Roman mythological stories like the *Iliad* or the South Asian retellings of the *Ramayana*. However, in the changing Western society, perhaps they look different. As Wagner and Lundeen have said, there is not a clear line between myth, in the broad sense, and fiction or fact. This blurred line means that movies, TV shows, and books meant for entertainment could be considered myths of some sort if they have a foundational effect on one's worldview and meaning in life (Herrick 2008). According to several academic sources (Wagner & Lundeen 1998; Porter & McLaren 2016; Jindra 1994), Star Trek fandom has a progressive mythology, which developed into a utopian religion. Fan

ideology seeks to produce a progressive world where people from all races work together to expand knowledge and thus point us towards a better world, as many other religions do (Jindra 1994, p. 33). Wagner and Lundeen, building on the ideas of Claude Lévi-Strauss, highlight that myth partially works by exploring irresolvable and contradictory conditions of humanity; the phenomenon of myth attempts to reconcile these conditions in another world through narrative as they seem unbridgeable in this world; it creates a space for human creative potential to explore the spectrum of possibilities within human existence, which indirectly encourages the consumer to act towards the resolution depicted without drawing too much attention to the pessimistic state of reality as to not extinguish hope (Wagner & Lundeen 1998, p. 5)

Star Trek present a hopeful image of the future for fans, a post-war future of united people and planets joined together in peace and under a Federation that will defend this peace in pursuit of exploration (Jindra 1994, p. 32). Humans need order; myth defines and reflects on the universe, giving meaning and order to it as a whole; some do this by making the story into a “sacred space,” which is a symbolic liminal area with transcendent properties. Making sense of the universe in this way creates a fixed point to understand the universe and yourself within it. Wagner and Lundeen say that even the most secular society still needs and has this sense of a sacred narrative, like the way one sees “time and space as having a sacred center to which we return for spiritual renewal” (Wagner & Lundeen 1998, p. 5).

The mythic view of life in Star Trek can be related to this sense of a sacred narrative as it draws fans in and links the past and present to the future, embodying the symbols, ideas, and feelings about the positive meaning of destiny shared by the fans. This creates a faith system in the fandom based on their mythology (Jindra 1994, p. 32). This relates to Alan Dundes’ definition of mythology: “a sacred narrative that explains how the world and humanity came to

be in their present form” (Dundes 1984). The fans of Star Trek then want to spread this idea of a better world to others, creating a shared mission, much like evangelical Christians spread the gospel by public speaking and personal witness (Jindra 1994, 33). Through its moral code, mission, and myths, Star Trek provides individuals with the tools that they need to take control of their own destiny (Jindra 1994, p. 33-34). Thus, Star Trek content has become a sort of scripture that ties messages about human nature and normative statements about social life to an image of future society (Jindra 1994, p. 34). These scriptures are split into two groups, which are the canon and its offshoots, the latter of which work much like apocrypha. Star Trek fans take every detail of the Star Trek universe seriously, because “for the universe to remain a reality, it must be kept authentic” (Jindra 1994, p. 44). Every single detail of what is to be canon must first be examined by the fandom. After deliberation, what they consider to be true canon is the television series and the movies (Porter & McLaren 2016, p. 53). Due to this strict idea of what is authoritative material in the Star Trek universe, the fans have constructed their own utopian worldview where science has given them the answers to all the problems that plague humanity. These ideas suggest a “science magic” that is used to control that which is out of our control (Jindra 1994, p. 46). The canon in itself is also a creation of a mythology developing over some time. Fans have expanded Star Trek culture, creating explanations for contradictions in the narratives using the tools and materials available to them. (Jindra 1994, p. 46). There has been more world-building content for Star Trek than most big franchises, including *Lord of the Rings* and *Dungeons and Dragons*, making the Star Trek fandom different. Star Wars is comparable to Star Trek in this matter, but it lacks the “relative realism and science found in Star Trek.” This is why the preservation of the Star Trek canon is so important. If it were to become inconsistent, it would lose the unique qualities that make it feel

different and special to the fans (Jindra 2017, p. 234).

Some Star Trek fans elevate its creators to the level of sacred figures who have a prophetic quality. An example is Eugene Roddenberry, a screenwriter, producer, and creator of multiple Star Trek series, including the original series and animation. Many fans use his words to prove whether something is absolute canon and see his vision of the Star Trek universe as the true one (Porter 2016, p. 225). The Star Trek sacred figures—such as the writers, producers, and actors—therefore, help develop their mythology and folk philosophy, and their mythology helps form the fan culture and their shared values/moral codes (Porter & McLaren 2016, p. 219). Though this originates as entertainment, the fans take it very seriously.

2.5 A Mission

Star Trek resembles a religious movement with its own myth, set of beliefs, and organization (Jindra 1994, p. 30). However, arguably, the biggest evidence that Star Trek is a religion is how the fans have taken a seemingly normal television production and turned it into a phenomenon that they consider “a way of life.” Fans take the moral philosophies taught through the series and apply them to their own lives (Porter & McLaren 2016, p. 217). There are even examples of fans combining their existing traditional faiths with that of Star Trek to find more satisfying meaning. Kozinets gives an example of a Star Trek fan who is active at conventions and in online forums and who also integrates their traditional Christian beliefs with beliefs informed by the Star Trek fandom. Identifying as both a Trekkie and a Christian, he reads and watches Star Trek content to relate it to the content of his original belief system, goals, and life themes, allowing him to find “satisfying meaning” through his interpretation of Star Trek (Kozinets 2001, p. 76). In this case, his belief system becomes a sort of syncretic combination of

Star Trek and Christianity, the latter of which on its own no longer could provide the satisfying meaning Star Trek provides through its canon and messages.

Academics before me have studied the message that Star Trek sends under many different social science disciplines. For example, Karen Blair (1977) uses a psychological lens to study Spock's conflict between logic and emotion, stating that the show sends a message on the mediation of internal oppositions such as the masculine and feminine. Ina Hark (1979) analyzed how each story within the Star Trek franchise tries to convey various moral messages, such as the perils of becoming too dependent on computerization and the need for kindness in the treatment of outsiders (Jindra 1994, p. 28). This leads me to a key part of my argument: Star Trek gives their fandom a mission, or better said, a shared ideology that is focalized through sacred iconography that takes the form of a utopian future and figures like Jean Luc Picard. In this case, the sacred universe of Star Trek makes the fandom uniquely religious in experience. This is important to the evidence that the Star Trek fandom is a religion because, as Emile Durkheim argues, a religious community as a one whose members are not in it for the one or the few but for the community as a whole (Pals 2014, p. 95). Jennifer Porter's and Darcee McLaren quote a newspaper as saying:

One of the messages [of Star Trek] is that Picard's mission in life is not just mapping stars but also charting new explanations for human existence. It seems like pretty heady stuff for TV (Porter & McLaren 2016, p. 219).

This "heady stuff" is precisely the appeal of Star Trek for fans, however, and lies at the heart of the religious dimensions of Star Trek. For context, Jean Luc Picard is the commanding officer of the Federation starship USS Enterprise (NCC-1701-D) in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. In this series, he balances the challenges of people and technology and is moved by a deep desire for exploration of the universe while maintaining a strong sense of duty, aided by masterful

diplomacy and debate skills. In his more recent series titled *Picard*, he is now a retired admiral, and, in this series, we get to see more of his inner struggles rather than just existential ones, making the well-loved character even more well-rounded.

Parasocial relationships have been proven to increase life satisfaction and are a key aspect of religious communities, including religious fandom (O'Donovan 2016). Kozinets presents an example of a religiously-inflected parasocial relationship in the Star Trek fandom. He explains different styles of Star Trek sacredness, stating the following about the subject:

A different style of Star Trek sacredness is given by 'Harvey,' a 35-year-old computer programmer. Harvey finds that, for him, 'Trek does have a certain mythic resonance' (e-mail interview, November 24, 1996). He cites central Star Trek characters Kirk and Spock as personally meaningful 'Jungian archetypes.' When re-read with critical scrutiny, he believes the Star Trek text can encompass a form of New Age and scientized spirituality (Kozinets 2001, p. 76-73).

Kirk and Spock are most notably from *Star Trek: The Original Series* but exist in other Trek content as well. James Tiberius Kirk was the captain of the USS Enterprise known for his "cowboy diplomacy," confidence, bravery, ability to think outside the box, and for his talent for navigating impossible situations. Spock is Kirk's first officer, half human and half Vulcan, which was often a central plot point as Vulcans believe in logic and have a religion based on the suppression and control over emotion, whereas humans let their emotions free; this continues to be a plot point in the newer series *Star Trek: Strange New Worlds* in which we get to see a younger Spock.

Moe stated that she looks toward the series and the characters/individuals involved with it for life advice and feels that it is a community space for her. However, when looking for an example of a character that has influenced her, she thought of someone else's experience that was a good representation of this type of experience. The individual she knows is an avid Star Trek fan with autism who feels and affinity with the *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* character

Bashir because, as she and many other fans believe, Bashir is coded as autistic. Moe stated the following:

I know a lot of other fans, including myself, like to think that Dr. Bashir is autistic and has a lot of those tendencies. And despite having genetic modifications, it just reworked the way he thinks a little bit, but he still has whatever was wrong with him that they tried to fix in the first place. And it just kind of kickstarted a bunch of things.

In one episode, Bashir is outed as an Augment, a human who has been genetically engineered; he underwent a treatment called accelerated critical neural pathway formation as a child, which increased his IQ, and further treatments improved his hand-eye coordination, vision, reflexes, stamina, height, and weight. Augments like this were illegal in the federation, but his parents did it in secret because Bashir was behind the other children his age developmentally (“Julian Bashir,” n.d.). In the episode, Bashir is misunderstood by his parents because he was born developmentally different, so he gives a big speech (Livingston, 1997). This speech really resonated with the person Moe knows. When Bashir was six, his parents sent him away to get “fixed” and didn’t even try to get to know him the way he was born.

When describing this, Moe said her friend began to break down because this is something many people go through. She said that her friend also looks towards Bashir for how he solves problems to apply it to her own life. Sometimes, Moe will even help her friend who has autism by relating stuff like politics and life events to Star Trek and Bashir. Moe gave an example of referring to the episode where Bashir was trying to cure a group of aliens of a drug addiction. The Federation did not want him to do it because the aliens had sided against the Federation during a War. Bashir helped them anyway because he saw it as black and white: these people needed his expertise, so he gave them help. To Bashir, the right thing to do was clear (Auberjonois, 1995). Moe sees important similarities between her friend’s mentality and

Bashir's; she described them as "thinking alike," which is why she finds him to be a useful reference point:

And I know a lot of other fans, including myself, like to think that Dr. Bashir is autistic and has a lot of those tendencies. And despite having genetic modifications, it just reworked the way he thinks a little bit, but he still has whatever was wrong with him that they tried to fix in the first place. And it just kind of kickstarted a bunch of things.... And it's just, I know, a lot of people take inspiration from him, who have autism and just are like, you know, this guy is like, so cool. He's chief medical officer... and he has a huge responsibility. And he handles it in a way that other characters wouldn't, but it's perfect for him. And they need him as a crew member. And he's super important. Despite having, you know, autism, which, like, you don't see a good representation in the media even today. Because it's like, yeah, you have all these stereotypes of what autism is, but who are they? Like, are they like, who are they as a person? And I feel like a lot of shows miss that. I'm also thinking of Big Bang Theory with Sheldon; she also doesn't show very much, as it's just that his character is that he has autism. Yes. Like, that's it. It's like, yeah, what? What, that's not what this is about.

Furthermore, Star Trek fans apply the morals of the character in the show them to their own lives, even referencing works such as the Star Trek Prime Directive (Porter 2016, 221):

The Prime Directive, also known as Starfleet Command General Order 1, the Non-Interference Directive, or the principle of non-interference, was the embodiment of one of Starfleet's most important ethical principles: non-interference with other cultures and civilizations. At its core was the philosophical concept that covered personnel should refrain from interfering in the natural, unassisted, development of societies, even if such interference was well-intentioned (Memory Alpha, n.d).

Instead of salvation through a moral code, Star Trek fans seek a better future for the Star Trek fandom collective and society as a whole. Furthermore, Star Trek fans want to be a part of forming that future (Jindra 1994, p. 40). This isn't an accident, as Roddenberry revealed in an interview that he made a conscious decision to implant humanist philosophies into Star Trek to spread the idea of humans taking control of their own destiny. Therefore, there was a purposeful message sent out by Star Trek, a mission given to the fans as a collective (Porter & McLaren 2016, p. 219). An example of Roddenberry's plan for the narrative working is the effect it had on one fan who posted the following on Reddit:

Star Trek saved my life. I'm not even exaggerating at 23 years old, I was in an immense depression. Failed my university, going through minimum wage jobs, distanced from family, and going through a breakup with rejections. What hit me the hardest is that I lost my faith over time and was genuinely planning on suicide. Made failed attempts where I backed out. At this moment in my life, I was introduced to Star Trek. It gave me something I didn't know I was lacking and needed. Star Trek gave me hope that perhaps someday humanity just might abolish all of its damaging aspects and focus on its true potential to become a truly enlightening species. Putting behind things like materialistic desires and its ego. Focusing on bettering themselves physically and mentally. ... Gene Roddenberry's vision of the future gave me a true and pure hope I needed most to keep on going. The most important thing was that Star Trek gave me an understanding of ethics and the importance of a moral center. I genuinely believe that Star Trek helped improve my character and made me a better human being. With this much-needed boost, I picked myself up and motivated myself to pursue a better career. I'm now working as a 3D Mechanical Designer for a Steelworks company in Turkey. I am also going to attempt resuming University again. Star Trek is one of a kind, a show that truly helps the betterment of mankind. Gene Roddenberry and all the people who helped create it have my utmost respect (r/startrek, 2023).

Science fiction, as a genre in a secular era, likes to create a link between politics and religion with the vision of the future it displays mixing science, religion, and politics into a commitment to humanistic values and ideals. This is, in part, what makes the stories in the genre so alluring (Ammon 2014, p. 392). Star Trek is a prime example of science fiction doing pushing a humanistic ideal through the utopian future depicted within the series, which was Roddenberry purpose. The Star Trek franchise follows secular liberal humanism, which has been described as follows:

Liberal humanism broadly refers to the view that the arts, literature, and culture are life-enhancing and inspirational practices and vouchsafes individual freedom, asserting that all have an equal right to liberty, including rights to free trade and personal property. Secular humanism engages a more politically referenced stance and is at best agnostic in its outlook, aiming to establish moral and ethical principles that are conducive to freedom and well-being not only for the individual but for all (Grech 2016, p. 14-15).

Roddenberry was a dedicated humanist who described Star Trek as being about people rather than technology. Star Trek has now become a show about the human condition with a large emphasis on core emotions such as empathy (Ammon 2014, p. 380). He became a member

of the American Humanist Association in 1986 and presented at the Association's 1991 Humanist Art Awards in acknowledgment of his contributions to humanism (Grech 2016, p. 14). Roddenberry wrote many Star Trek episodes, but his contributions and influence on the franchise didn't end there. He was involved in every aspect of the show's development, including casting and selecting/revising scripts. Furthermore, it was well known by his coworkers that Roddenberry was protective of the humanistic core of Star Trek and wanted to maintain a sense of morality within the series. The show portrayed these values through repeated plot points showing voluntary cooperation in the characters' attempts at non-violent conflict resolution while retaining the right of self-defence and maintaining respect for all life forms. Though some writers were disgruntled with the fact that deviating from these humanistic values in the scripts meant getting re-written, most would say that these values have provided the universe of Trek with a unifying hopeful vision that makes Star Trek so beloved and durable as a franchise (Grech 2016, p. 15). Though Rodenberry's involvement declined before his death in 1991, he had successfully embedded humanism into the core of Trek storytelling for all of those who continue the work after him (Grech 2016, p. 15).

Roddenberry's humanistic agenda, his intention to provoke compassion and self-reliance, made Star Trek into a cultural text promoting an optimistic vision of a future filled with tolerance and equality; even cast and crew members do not who did not necessarily agree with the full message and principles it presented do not deny his vision. The original series was intended to address issues of the period it was produced—the 1960s—and subsequent series and films attempt to do the same, which maintains Star Trek as a cultural phenomenon meant to disrupt and indirectly put a spotlight on social issues (Wagner & Lundeen 1998, p. 8). The following are examples of the Star Trek franchise using their plots to make a point.

Star Trek: The Original Series season three episode fifteen, “Let That Be Your Last Battlefield,” explicitly makes a statement about racism. The USS Enterprise discovers a stolen Federation shuttlecraft with failing life support and a suffocating pilot. When they transfer the pilot, named Lokai, to their sick bay, they notice that he has a two-tone face: one half is black, and the other is white. On its way to turn Lokai in for theft, the Enterprise encounters another ship. After the pilot, Commissioner Bele, boards the Enterprise, the crew notice that his skin is the opposite of Lokai’s: black where Lokai’s is white and vice versa. Bele reveals that he has been chasing Lokai for 50,000 years for leading a revolt against the ruling class. However, Lokai states that on their planet, Bele’s people enslaved his, and he requests political asylum with the Federation, which Kirk could not supply. When the USS Enterprise arrives at the planet Cheron, they discover the destruction of all major cities and large piles of unburied corpses. The entire population has mutually killed each other in a civil war. Lokai and Bele blame each other for what happened. Kirk offers them a home with the federation but ultimately the two transport themselves back onto the surface of the planet to continue their fight (Taylor 1969).

Star Trek: The Next Generation season two, episode nine, “The Measure of a Man,” also comments on slavery, using the debate about the android Data’s status as a living being or property as a focal point. In this episode, a Commander named Bruce Madox boards the Enterprise to conduct maintenance on Data; however, we later find out that he wanted to obtain Data’s memory and hardware in an effort to recreate the technology used to build him. Data, concerned about the risks of this procedure, rejects Madox’s request. Madox turns to Starfleet to force Data to comply. Under the advice of Captain Jean-Luc Picard, Data resigns from Starfleet so that they no longer have authority over him and cannot do this. Madox then argues that Data is the property of Starfleet, not a sentient being, and therefore does not have the right to choose

to resign. Later in court, Madox proposes three criteria for what constitutes a sentient being: intelligence, self-awareness, and consciousness. Picard, in a speech, points out that Data is intelligent and self-aware and asks who in the court can show a means of measuring consciousness. The court rules in the favour of Data, giving him the right to choose (Scheerer, 1989). Picard's speech is as follows:

You see, he has met two of your three criteria for sentience. So, what if he meets the third, consciousness in even the smallest degree? What is he then? I don't know. Do You? Do You? Do You? Well, that's the question you have to answer. Your honour, the courtroom is a crucible. In it, we burn away irrelevancies until we are left with a pure product—the truth—for all time. Now, sooner or later, this man, or others like him will succeed in replicating Commander Data. Now, the decision you reach here today will determine how we will regard this creation of our genius. It will reveal the kind of a people we are what he is destined to be. It will reach far beyond this courtroom and this one android. It could significantly redefine the boundaries of personal liberty and freedom. Expanding them for some savagely curtailing them for others. Are you prepared to condemn him and all who come after him to servitude and slavery? Your honour, Starfleet was founded to seek out new life. Well, there it sits. Waiting. You wanted a chance to make law. Well, here it is. Make it a good one (Scheerer 1989).

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine, season three, episodes eleven and twelve, “Past Tense, Part 1” and “Past Tense, Part 2,” are about the failure to deal with homelessness. Commander Sisko, Dr. Bashir, and science officer Jadzia Dax, who live on a space station in the twenty-fourth century, accidentally end up in 2024 San Francisco. Sisko and Bashir are mistaken for homeless people and sent to Sanctuary District A, a walled-off “ghetto” that the city uses to contain the poor, sick, and anyone else who cannot care for themselves. They realize that a famous riot that happened in the Sanctuary is supposed to happen the next day. While trying not to alter the events of history, Sisko and Bashir live on the streets, where we get to see the struggles of poverty and lack of sufficient care. Dax, however, is found by a prominent businessman and sees how the wealthy live. This parallel between the expenses of Sisko and Bashir in the underclass and Dax's experiences in the upper class make it easy for the viewer to see the struggles of

homelessness and how easy it is for society to swipe it under the rug (Badiyi, 1995). There are many more episodes in the franchise I could discuss, but these examples display the commitment to social commentary at the core of the franchise.

Star Trek addresses these types of problems and shows us that it's possible to overcome them, providing a dramatization of much-needed hope. The world in Star Trek isn't perfect, but humans are different: they are driven by an all-for-one mindset, and we are no longer the threat but the solution. Even aliens look towards humans for help because, in the Star Trek universe, humanity solves its problems through the application of reason, science, and technology and is no longer divided by conflict over race, ethnicity, sexuality, or gender (Jindra 2017, p. 228). This is a message that Roddenberry purposely put into his work and has been embraced by multiple Star-Trek-inspired groups that are formed to help the world, such as the Women Make Trek Program, which uses fan art depicting the Star Trek women who inspire the group to raise funds for breast cancer research. This sense of humanitarianism in the Star Trek Fandom makes the community feel safe and speaks volumes about its sense of morality; one of my interviewees, Moe, said regarding the Star Trek Fandom and fans:

I feel like I can trust them as a human if they've watched Star Trek and they resonate with it, and they're like, this is how people should be. Because that's, I think the core thing when you watch Star Trek is you watch it, and you're like, I really hope this is what our future has in store for us. I hope this is where we get to be as humans. And I think that it's just a very comforting thought that people want to be close and connected and be a unified humanity together.

This is why she feels comfortable revealing the American state she lives in to members of the Star Trek fandom, feels comfortable meeting up with them in person, and confiding in them online. Her trust speaks volumes about the strength behind the mission put forth by the narratives in Star Trek and the effect it has on fans individually and as a community. Jindra found the same in his research, that fans' belief in Star Trek's message of a better future represents faith for our

future. He writes that Star Trek “actively encourages a ‘suspension of disbelief’ and sets itself up as ‘reality’ in which fans can exist” (Jindra 2017, p. 234). Moe’s statement also implies that the fandom is a religion, the type of community belonging where you are never truly alone.

CHAPTER 3

THE IMPACT OF RITUAL

3 The Impact of Ritual

3.1 Star Trek Fandom Religion Ritual

One of the biggest ways that religion helps with loneliness is through ritual, in which individuals experience belonging to higher beings in a specifically defined relationship with them (King 2003). Ami Rokach theorizes that the experience of feeling connected to a supreme being, along with affiliating with religious groups to practice faith, provides individuals with strength, inner peace, and a sense of community or belonging (Rokach 2018). Star Trek fans can obtain the same experience through rituals like “masking,” more commonly known as cosplay (Jindra 1994), or through pilgrimages (Porter and McLaren 1999). Ritual is an important part of how religion can help one cope with loneliness. Rokach discovered in his research that there are six dimensions of coping strategies for loneliness. These dimensions are acceptance and reflection, solitude, self-development and understanding, a social support network, distancing and denial, and finally religion and faith. The author and I were surprised to find religion and faith as one of the dimensions; however, I believe this discovery helps us characterize Star Trek as a fan religion.

First, we must re-establish what ritual is and how it functions, using Barry Stephenson’s *Ritual: A Very Short Introduction*. He states that ritual is used in three different ways, which helps describe what ritual is through its functions: ritual is a variety of actions with unique formal features, a cultural domain that people act and are acted upon, and an actor in its own right, as discussed in section 2.3 of this thesis (Stephenson 2015, p.71).

The Star Trek fan rituals I will describe all serve these functions, which I have used as a guideline for identifying a ritual. Stephenson’s work, however, is not the only work I looked towards to identify ritual in this context. For example, *Ritualistic Consumption Decreases*

Loneliness by Increasing Meaning by Xuehua Wang, Yixia Sun, and Thomas Kramer applies particularly well to Star Trek fandom. Though Stephenson characterizes the religious nature of ritual by foregrounding symbolic value, Wang, Sun, and Kramer argue that the meaning behind rituals is derived from the small aspects, the tiny details in our actions that are performed for purposes others may overlook. Rituals do not have to be grand, and the meaning put onto them is what separates them from what is a habitual or simply mundane; furthermore, the performers “do not expect them to be imbued with symbolic meaning (unlike, e.g., wedding rituals) or to be characterized by the lack of direct instrumental purpose to be meaningful” (Wang, Sun, & Kramer 2021, p.284). What this means is that novel and consumption rituals like purchasing Star Trek merchandise can carry meaning, and behaviors with or without “direct instrumental purpose,” such as preparing a cocktail or bouncing a ball in a certain way before a game, can have meaning and be considered rituals. On top of that, the meaning of a ritual can also be derived from the cognitive recognition itself that one’s actions constitute a ritual (Wang, Sun, & Kramer 2021, p.284).

3.2 Cosplay

Ritual becomes obvious when analyzing Star Trek fandom as a religion. Michael Jindra found that when fandom members perform a ritual such as cosplay, “the masked figure personifies the ambiguity of the person underneath the mask and the spirit that is the mask,” which characterizes the performer’s deeper connection with the sacred being they are inhabiting (Jindra 1994, p.47). He compares it to play and ritual in African religions, a combination which is no longer obviously visible in Western religious institutions. Of the 86 surveys I distributed, 25.40% of participants checked off that they perform Star Trek cosplay, and 53.64% of those

who perform Star Trek cosplay feel more connected to the character they are cosplaying, with 66.67% agreeing that cosplay does make them feel as if they are part of the Star Trek Universe. I interviewed Jessica Ko, who is extremely active in the world of cosplay and is known for dressing as a Ferengi, a humanoid species from the planet Ferenginar that was first introduced in *Star Trek: Next Generation*. When I asked how she would describe her experience cosplaying, she had the following to say:

Oh, yeah, it is extremely fun, sometimes challenging, sometimes a little stressful. You know, and you're trying to ship eight costumes in a single carry-on. It can be a little hectic. I have been on the airplane in full uniform. But no, it's just, it's amazing because, like I said, you could kinda live out the fantasy for a day, and of course, you know you're just in costume, you know the phaser is not actually doing anything, but I suppose its why people play Dungeons and Dragons, why people do live action role play. It's just It's like you're a kid playing with Barbies, but you get to be the Barbie, and you get to have adventures, and it can be a little silly. It can be a little goofy, but that's the beauty in it. And You know, afterwards, you know, you meet someone, you goof around, you're like, hey, you're under arrest for the temporal prime directive, you know, especially like Renaissance fairs. And then, you know, after it gives you a conversation starter and then you can actually maybe make a friend from that.

Her statement demonstrates the experience and behaviour of play ritual and its positive effects. I also asked how being a Star Trek fan affected her identity:

Hmm. I think it's helped me. Develop my skills more, you know, my identity is multifaceted, I identify as a creator or a writer. I like to create art, and I think Star Trek has helped me really improve in those skills. You know, through this larger community, I've gotten to talk to makeup artists who worked on the show, like asking questions when I was putting together my cosplay of the Ferengi, and I have fabric samples from strange new worlds for when I was making my uniform. It's really, really special, and it helped me really step up my game. But I don't think it's changed how I see myself as a person. I don't think it's changed, you know, like my orientation, my gender identity. I was very solid in those when I joined this fandom, and it hasn't changed it. If anything, I've seen that it does help other people feel seen. Which is great it helps people know that they are, they are valid in their identity it is a beautiful thing.

Thus we see how this ritual can help with self-expression, skill building, and escaping emotional isolation, which can be a cause of loneliness.

3.3 Pilgrimage

Additionally, Ellen Badone argues that conventions should be considered sites of pilgrimage:

Star Trek conventions are fun for a variety of reasons, including the enjoyment garnered from seeing favourite television stars, collecting autographs, watching reruns of favourite shows, and browsing or buying the voluminous merchandise associated with Star Trek. Fun, however, is not exclusive of pilgrimage. Moreover, upon reflection, many fans identify as their reason for participation precisely the goal identified by Morinis (1992) as a key criterion of pilgrimage journeys: that is, the pursuit of embodied ideals. The ideals identified by fans as central to the Star Trek context are precisely those identified by Durkheim as constitutive of the “cult of man”: that is, individualism, liberalism, freedom, justice, equality, and tolerance for diversity (Badone 2022, p. 164-165).

Star Trek is embedded with deeply meaningful ideas that draw fans into conventions. Badone references Henry Jenkins, who found that almost every Star Trek fan identifies Star Trek’s optimistic view of the future and its ideals as central to the understanding of Star Trek’s True meaning. “Ideals characterized by humankind’s attainment of peaceful coexistence among all nations and with non-human species; the acceptance of equality for all regardless of ethnic, racial, gender, species or other difference; and the mastery of technology in the peaceful pursuit of space exploration” (Badone 2022, p. 165). The ideals in Star Trek’s vision of the future are personal, not abstract or fictional. Fans try to live up to these ideals in their own lives, but at conventions, for a few days, they get to feel as if they have participated in an “archived event” of this future (Badone 2022, p. 165).

Star Trek Fandom members perform the ritual of pilgrimage to sites such as the Oregon Museum exhibit and Star Trek film sets. Fans have been recorded describing these places as their “Mecca” and have called them “a dream come true” (Jindra 1994, p. 39-40). Fans dream about being on the show and in the universe with the characters that they sacralize and idealize. By performing pilgrimages, and other ritualized behaviours such as live-action role playing, fans

get as close to the Star Trek characters as they possibly can (Jindra 1994, p. 40). At these locations, fans do act out footage from the Star Trek television series or movies, take photos in uniforms pretending to be in the show, exchange theories and thoughts on the Star Trek universe, attend lessons on how to make cosplay, and much more (Jindra, 1994 p. 40-41). Many fans report that going to these events can feel like a homecoming. Jessica Ko said the following about being able to perform her cosplay at the Star Trek Mission.

So, I've actually been on a few podcasts now talking about it. And over 2020 and 2021, I put together an actual, like Ferengi, full-blown prosthetic costume. And that's kinda open to some doors because I can, like I said, go to events in character now, and I actually was able to go to the Star Trek mission last year. So, I flew out to Chicago, and I made a ton of friends there. I met a lot of people who I had only known online in person, and it really did feel like a homecoming because it is like everyone gathered there for, you know, the same reason, and we're all able to just goof around and, you know, pretend we're on the enterprise for two days.

These pilgrimages also serve the purpose of connecting fans with other people within the community. One description of how this may happen comes from my interview with Jessica Ko.

I went to a convention where there was a table for an organization called Starfleet International. And I ended up joining that as more of a local club so that instead of just faces on the internet, I could have some local fans that I could, you know, meet up with, go to events with. And that's why I think I really started to get involved. Because now that I had these in-person events and people I could go and see and just talk about trek and anything else related, and you know, tangents always occur. It really became real. It felt like an actual community.

These rituals are also significant because they help facilitate a connection between fans, creating a sense of belonging and community, which helps with combating loneliness. I will discuss this belonging aspect more thoroughly in Chapter 4.

One of the biggest ways that religion helps reduce loneliness is by providing opportunities through ritual where individuals experience belonging and a deeper relationship with a “higher being” (King 2003). Rokach theorizes that the experience of feeling connected to a supreme being and affiliating with religious groups to practice faith provides individuals with

strength, inner peace, and a sense of community or belonging (Rokach 2018). Additionally, ritual can help facilitate a connection and relationship with a brand or, in this case, the Star Trek universe and other fans, creating a type of “intrinsic connection” and a “sense of moral responsibility” among the fans (Wang, Sun, & Kramer 2021, p.284). The remainder of this chapter will focus on the kinds of ritual behaviours engaged in by Star Trek fans and the analysis of these ritual behaviours through psychiatric and functionalist analysis of religion as prosocial.

Rituals such as pilgrimage and larping (live action role playing) are performed by fans because their dream is to be on the show in the universe with the characters that they sacralize and idealize. Larping can be performed while in cosplay, or while dressed as an original character, so often, there is much crossover between cosplay and larping. “A LARP, or live-action role-playing game, is an activity enabling participants to act out their fictional characters in a make-believe world” (Vorobyeva 2016, p. 181). Porter, in her chapter “To Boldly Go: Star Trek Convention Attendance as Pilgrimage in Star Trek” in the edited volume *Star Trek and Sacred Ground* (Porter and McLaren 1999), explains when examining Star Trek religious pilgrimages, like conventions, Victor Turner’s idea of pilgrimages is helpful.

Although recent theoretical critiques of Turner have been proposed (e.g., Eade and Sallnow 1991; Morinis 1992; Coleman and Elsner 1995), Turner’s model of pilgrimage remains seminal in the study of both traditional religious and secular pilgrimage journeys... Turner characterizes pilgrimage as a ritual journey in which participants are temporarily freed from the social constraints of everyday statuses, roles, and expectations (Porter, 1999, p. 246).

Furthermore, modern pilgrimages are different from those in traditional religions in that they are experienced in the leisure realm instead of the formal and institutional; additionally, pilgrimage now represents a voluntary journey which, to Turner, can occur outside the religious as many of the “symbolic and ludic capacities of tribal religion” have in modern society moved into “nonreligious genres” (Porter, 1999 p. 247). This is because traditional religions lack the

need for social escape from “structural commitments” that lead to a search for cultural expression that can be ritualized but is not distinctly religious. Further pilgrimage is a liminal occurrence that is created through a journey in which one obtains “communitas” (Porter, 1999 p. 247). At these conventions, fans can escape everyday life existing outside of space and time as social boundaries lower and “egalitarian ideals become realized” (Porter and McLaren, 1999 p. 9).

Analysis of Star Trek convention attendance in terms of liminality and communitas reveals marked similarities between this form of secular ritual in Turner’s model. Star Trek conventions have been bringing Star Trek fans together since the first convention was held in 1973. Participants at these conventions often identify the sense of communal belonging, or communitas, and the sense of freedom from everyday statuses and roles, or liminality, that they feel in the convention context as central to their participation. According to Turner (1974a: 197, 1974b: 232), it is in liminality that the potential for communitas emerges, for liminality is, by definition, a threshold, bridging two sets of status and social role expectations. As such, it constitutes a “place and a moment in and out of time,” where social expectations, statuses, and roles are temporarily abandoned, and the potential for unmediated egalitarian relationships with others consequently arise. (Porter, 1999, p. 247-248).

By performing these rituals, fans get as close to the Star Trek characters as they possibly can (Jindra 1994, p. 40). One example of a Star Trek pilgrimage location and experience is the Star Trek set at Universal Studios theme park in California. Tourists go there in full Star Fleet cosplay to act out Star Trek scenes, and one fan spliced together their re-enactment at the site with actual footage from a Star Trek film, fully merging themselves with the Star Trek universe (Jindra 2017, p. 232). Another site of pilgrimage is the convention. When fans attend conventions, they step outside of the mundane world into a place where all social boundaries are transformed and enlightenment can begin. Some fans have described the conventions as a “moment outside of time” (Porter & McLaren 2016), allowing the fans to feel true liberation. This resembles how traditional religions experience pilgrimages (Porter & McLaren 2016, p. 9). Partaking in conventions is a form of religious immersion in “the Star Trek ‘experience’” (Jindra

2017, p. 231). A major example of this sort of pilgrimage is The Star Trek Mission, a convention that includes celebrity guests, interactive exhibits, exclusive merchandise, costume exhibits, and much more. Many fans spend months preparing their cosplay for the Star Trek Mission events. I asked fans if any moments had a profound impact on their lives. Jessica Ko, replied:

I'm gonna say absolutely I think the moment that I joined the local club, it became more than just something I did at home. It became, you know, I started cosplaying and going to events in character. And eventually, it led to me, you know, I kind of felt like I found this niche in the Ferengi of all things. I couldn't tell you why I decided they're my favourite, but as I was watching Deep Space 9, I was just like, these weirdos are fun. I like this, and so I kinda dug a niche for myself as the Ferengi expert. So, I've actually been on a few podcasts now talking about it. And over 2020 and 2021, I put together an actual, like Ferengi, full-blown prosthetic costume. And that's kinda opened some doors because I can, as I said, go to events in character now, and I actually was able to go to the Star Trek mission last year. So, I flew out to Chicago, and I made a ton of friends there. I met A lot of people who I had only known online in person, and it really did feel like a homecoming because it is like everyone gathered there for, you know, the same reason, and we're all able to just goof around and, you know, pretend we're on the enterprise for two days.

Through such rituals and traditions, like-minded members of a religion increase their social circle and feel protected through their connection to sacred beings—those individuals perceived to be the self, in this case characters like Jean-Luc Picard. This connection assuages loneliness by providing another worldly bond, as the members now live as a united entity (Rokach 2018). Science fiction fans, through their fandoms, can effectively cope with loneliness through their connection with other members; even if they are physically alone, they are never truly alone because things as simple as reading posts online are enough to make fans feel a sense of togetherness (Anderson et al., 2022, p. 77).

3.4 Escapism

Similarly, Rachel O'Donovan theorizes that fans use fictional worlds in which their favoured narratives take place to escape the lives they have in the mundane world. O'Donovan

found that fans tend to be excluded from the mainstream world, so they use fandom to escape the loneliness of the mainstream into a different reality (O'Donovan 2016, p.53-54). Chrisha Anderson, Kathryn Watkins Van Asselt and Bradley Willis found the same in "Women in Online Science Fiction Fandoms: Psychological Well-Being" (2021). They stated that the most consistent way fandom helps its participants cope with emotional difficulty was through distraction and escapism, which only worked if the fans had a good balance between their fandom activities and their everyday responsibilities. They also found that most of their participants found their fandom life to have a fully positive impact on their psychological well-being. They described fans turning to sci-fi fandom to escape the reality of their difficult jobs by rewatching the shows, talking to other fans, and collecting and displaying merchandise as a form of escapism, describing fandom as "therapeutic" (Anderson et al. 2022 p. 76-77). This is very similar to my findings concerning the ritual of rewatching Star Trek, convention pilgrimages, fan forum activity, and consumption ritual. When presented with the statement, "The Star Trek fandom has provided me with a place to escape reality," the majority who completed my survey agreed to some degree, with 52.38% strongly agreeing, 26.98% somewhat agreed, 15.87% who were neutral, 3.17% who somewhat disagreed, and only 1.59% who strongly disagreed. My online and in-person observations also supported this: for example, at conventions, I met many people who claimed the reason they like to dress up and go to events is because, for a day, they don't have to be themselves. They can be a Klingon (a humanoid warrior species from the planet Qo'noS) or an explorer. Furthermore, on many Reddit forums, I read posts about how people watched Star Trek to get through hard childhoods by pretending they were part of the crew or, as many described, chosen families presented on the shows as many of the fans did not have a warm family life of their own.

John Lyden, in *Film as Religion*, analyzes this ritual behaviour in a religious context of watching a film to escape reality and to come out of that unreality better. Though the film feels real when we are watching it, there is still a sense of unreality, so the true power of film is to provide a temporary escape from reality that is not a mere allusion but more of a construction. This experience when watching the film is like a religious ritual where we willingly enter another world, a ritual space that, though not real, still has power as the viewers, who become absorbed by the film to the point where they no longer dwell on reality for a moment. This link between the unreal world and the real world gives this illusion power or relevance and makes the subject desire it (Lyden, 2003, p.53). Lynden further explains that the knowledge that this reality is made by humans does not take the power it has.

In addition, the fact that a cultural phenomenon--- like religion or film--is humanly constructed does not take away from its power to express another reality, even when people are aware of the constructed, “imaginary” nature of the phenomenon. Just as people can be affected by stories that they know are fictitious and even change their view of the world as a result, so also constructed religious artifacts can connect people with other realities even when they know that they are human “inventions” (Lyden, 2003 p. 54-55).

Many Star Trek fans watch films and television series in this way: to escape their realities for a moment; but in many of cases, not only do they escape, but afterward they feel hopeful and, in some way, improved. This brings me to another point Lynden made on cinematic ritual escape: these film worlds are desirable because we find something wrong with our own. It is imperfect, and this desire to flee our world also comes with the desire to return to our everyday lives better than when we left, rejuvenated or refreshed, which is the case with Star Trek viewership as well (Lyden, 2003 p. 53).

Furthermore, within the context of film’s function as a religion, the watching ritual offers a way to connect the mundane world and the other world, with “models of and models for

reality” which express what the world is and what it should be, creating a truer sense of reality for the fan (Lyden, 2003 p. 54). This makes the act of entering a cinematic reality not simply escapism but a desire to change the world they are escaping to be more like the way Star Trek displays the world as already being, which is at a “higher level” (Lyden, 2003 p.55). In Star Trek fandom, the ritual behaviour of rewatching the Star Trek television series and movies is driven in part by the utopian world depicted in the universe, which gives fans both hope and a mission as they attempt to shape the future on the model provided by the franchise.

In the ritual context of viewing a film, we “entertain” the truth of its mythology and ethos as a subject of consciousness even as it “entertains” us. It presents a reality that differs from that experienced in an ordinary profane time and space as the reality depicted in religious myth and ritual differs from the empirical world of our everyday lives. And yet, that alternate reality is still integrally connected with the world of the everyday, and hence its vision is reality to it (Lyden, 2003 p. 55).

As a popular culture religion, the Star Trek fandom shares an ideology and mission, which facilitates the fans to grow faster and stronger (in a mental and personal sense) by providing them with the tools and coping mechanisms that they would need in traumatic situations, along with loneliness, and they can now find meaning despite the loneliness. Spiritual quests, like pilgrimage and the experience of transcendence, can result in spiritual and personal growth, which makes individuals better at accepting the reality of their situation and finding meaning in their hardships and loneliness; they also utilize more creative coping strategies, have positive problem-solving skills, and are more likely to access a social support network (Rokach 2018, p.65).

3.5 Ritual Transcendence

Conventions offer another opportunity for transcendent experience and pilgrimage. When fans partake in conventions, they step outside of the mundane world into a place where social

boundaries are gone, and enlightenment begins. The conventions are described as a “moment outside of time,” allowing the fans to feel true liberation. This is similar to what traditional religions’ pilgrimages do for their followers (Porter and McLaren 2016, p. 9). Though I found this to be true in my interviews, participant observation and secondary research, my surveys displayed otherwise. The regularity of participation in Star Trek fandom-related activities varied, as can be seen in Figure 2 below:

Q2 - How often a year do you participate in activities related to Star Trek

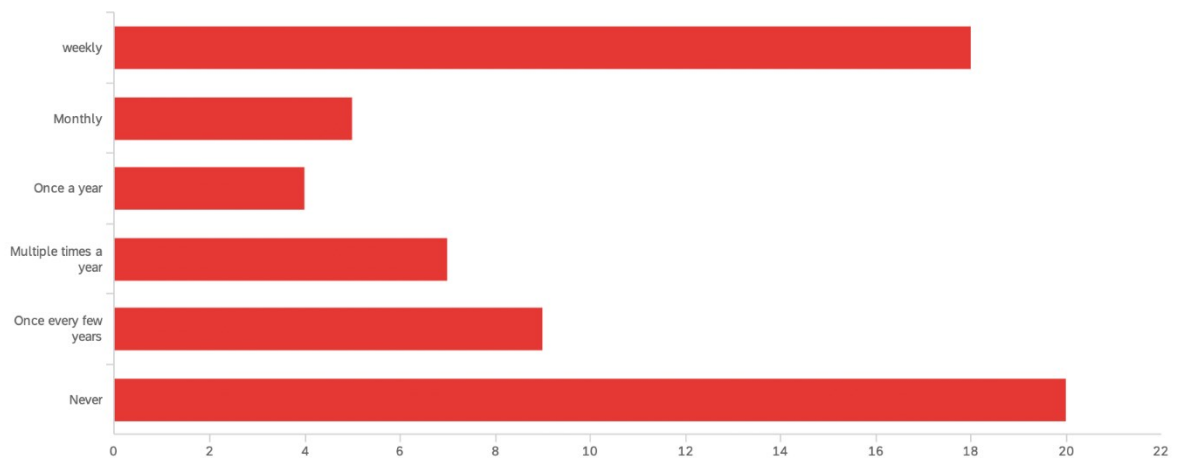


Figure 2

Furthermore, 44.44% said those events were recurring, with 19.05% not recurring, while 36.51% stating they do not participate in events. Out of those who participate in recurring events, 46% repeatedly go to these recurring events, with 54% stating they do not. As for conventions specifically, 33.33% participate in conventions, with 66.67% not participating in conventions. Of those who participate, 30.43% feel like they are stepping outside their normal life when doing so,

but 69.57% do not. I have mapped out all the detailed percentages about event participation because I believe the result that most fans don't feel different at conventions when my interviews, observations, and secondary research reveal that they do, is because many of the people who took the survey are not avid event/convention goers. Also, the majority of fans who participated in the survey did so through online links left on sites like Reddit, which leads me to believe that they are more involved in the online community than in person. Another reason I theorize this is that when it comes to belonging, the vast majority agreed, to some degree, that participating in the Star Trek fandom makes them feel a sense of belonging, as seen in Figure 3 below.

Q10 - As a member of the Star Trek Fandom, I feel a sense of belonging.

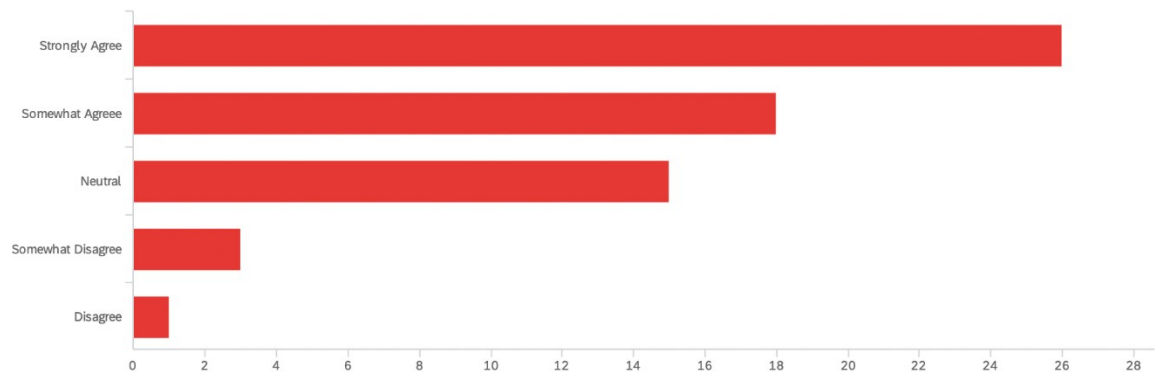


Figure 3.

As a result of this tendency, and having more research revealing the opposite—that conventions and Star Trek activities make them feel like they exist outside their normal life—I would not see this as definitive proof that fan activities have no effect. Another reason I believe this is although my survey didn't find that fans feel like they are stepping outside of the mundane world when attending conventions, it was found that the majority of fan gatherings, to a degree,

make the Star Trek fans feel more secure in their identity, as seen in Figure 4 below, showing that fan events still have a positive effect on Star Trek fans.

Q20 - I feel more secure in myself and my identity when I gather with other Star Trek Fans.

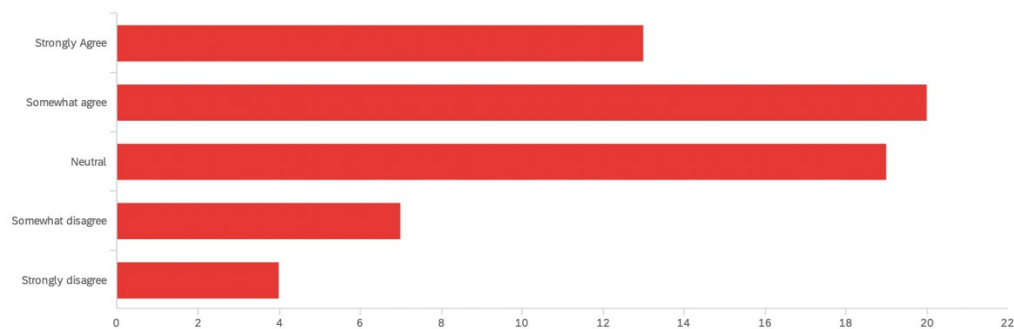


Figure 4.

An important factor that affects fans is that Star Trek stories feature plots in which space and time are manipulated, allowing opportunities for characters to “set things right.” “Time travel allows us this ritualistic recourse, much the same way healing rituals based on origin myth do” (Jindra 1994, p. 41). In addition to talking about the beginning, an origin myth provides a message about all facets of time, as do the time travel narratives. To experience transcendence from isolation and the mundane world through these narratives, fans perform re-enactment rituals (Jindra 1994, p. 41).

3.6 Fanfiction

Speaking of their literature, another performance of ritual is when the fans write fanfiction. This practice inserts the writer into that universe, either through the immersive act of writing it, or by writing themselves into the story, which also allows them to leave the mundane

world (O'Donovan 2016, p. 50). Fanfiction is “creative literature written by fans of a particular piece of media that utilizes the characters and/or settings of the canonical works to tell non-canonical stories” (Wolff, 2023, p.227). A popular form of fanfiction where fans insert themselves into the stories of their favourite character is called POV fanfiction or, in other words, a point-of-view story. “Point of view is defined as ‘the narrator’s position in relation to a story being told.’ The narrator could be one of the characters in the story (first person), viewing the characters as an outsider (Third person) or addressing the reader directly (second person). These styles have varying effects, depending on how and where they are used” (Fanfic). Typically, however, POV fanfictions are written in the first person as the author inserts themselves directly into the story. The practice of fanfiction, in general, inserts the fan/author into that universe but also allows them to leave the mundane world, even if it is just as a creator (O'Donovan 2016, p. 50). There are also POV videos usually posted on Tik Tok, where the TikToker creates a video where you would see things the viewer from the perspective of someone in the Star Trek universe; for example, you are a nurse at Starfleet Medical speaking to Beverly Crusher (doctor on the USS Enterprise in *Star Trek: Next Generation*)⁶, or you are Captain Janeway (the Captain of the USS Voyager in *Star Trek: Voyager*)⁷, or you are talking to a Star Trek preschool teacher.⁸

Victor Turner also considers ritual to be a religious behaviour linked to social transitions, as opposed to simply religious ceremonies, which are more linked to social status; therefore, ritual is a transformative experience; the mechanism by which they transform participants is

⁶ Example: https://www.tiktok.com/@scruffyspaceelf/video/7402554397705653537?_r=1&_t=8osfLtMfK33

⁷ Example:
https://www.tiktok.com/@thescifisavage/video/7361799917909691679?_r=1&_t=8osfaA1GXmH

⁸ Example:
https://www.tiktok.com/@thescifisavage/video/7395062627908750638?_r=1&_t=8osfoRVDARh

symbolism tied to myth (Turner, 1967 p.96-97). Star Trek fans, through the ritual of fanfiction, have a transformative experience that allows them to play with sacred symbols and characters. In *Textual Poachers*, Henry Jenkins describes the general fans' process of writing fanfiction as treating the literature as mouldable, extending the boundaries of the work, adding in their concerns, and changing the characters to suit their own needs or wants (Jenkins, 2013 p. 156). Additionally, this type of play allows the fans to use fanfiction to communicate messages regarding their personal lives in a way that makes them comprehensible using the language of the franchise, not only telling a story of Trek but also telling the story of the fan author and the community simultaneously (Bacon-Smith, 1991 p.65 & 150). Furthermore:

Fanfiction, at its most basic structural level, constitutes the writerly text: ever-changing, ever-growing, ever entwining the creative lives of its writers in the interwoven process of communicating through narrative the life of the community (Bacon-Smith, 1991 p. 67).

Therefore, fanfiction as a ritual not only can allow the participant to experience transcendence in a liminal space but also works as a tool that can help participants process their reality through the narrative of Trek. This is a particularly helpful tool when considering the effect on loneliness, as it can help fans communicate in a different type of format and as part of something larger. Also, fanfiction is an easy ritual for fans to perform when in isolation, as it is primarily performed alone on a computer.

In my survey, I asked the participants to rank how much they agreed with the following statement: "I feel more connected to the Star Trek universe and characters when reading, or writing, fanfiction." Many participants agreed to some degree. 15.87% strongly agreed, 25.40% somewhat agreed, 36.51% were neutral, 9.52% somewhat disagreed, and 12.70% strongly disagreed. It was also found that the ritual act of fanfiction increased confidence and built certain skill in fans, with reports of fans improving their writing skills, refining English as a second

language, and fostering a more outgoing personality in fans (O'Donovan 2016, p. 54). It is possible that fandoms create a supportive social network through its rituals and intense parasocial relationships, which encourages fans to engage in these activities. Continual participation in fandom rituals and other related activities can make the real, mundane life easier as it provides fans with the skills that transfer from one context to the other (O'Donovan 2016, p.54-55).

3.7 Consumption Ritual

Another form of ritual found within the fandom is the “consumption ritual,” which includes purchasing and use of products, in this case, Star Trek memorabilia, “that add meaning to their lives via the meaning imparted to the products, which in turn reduces loneliness,” as found by Xuehua Wang, Yixia Sun, and Thomas Kramer (Wang, Sun, & Kramer 2021, p.285). They further found that once individuals can find meaning in some other part of their lives, these rituals will no longer affect the level of loneliness they experience; thus, the rituals are only needed to reduce loneliness in the absence of other meaningfulness (Wang, Sun, & Kramer 2021, p.285). The act of purchasing the product and the possession of the product are both important in this case. Consumption rituals like this can be seen at conventions at the vendor stands in places like artist alleys at conventions, where individuals look for any art representing their favourite fandom or memorabilia they have sought. Not only do these purchases have meaning because of the franchise they represent, making individuals feel closer to that universe, but also because these pieces and the purchasing process to acquire them provide the fan with an opportunity to bond with other like-minded individuals, as I observed many times during my participant observation at conventions.

Consumption ritual helps with loneliness because it was found to have a positive connection with greater meaning in life, which mediates the relationship between consumption ritual frequency and loneliness, creating a significant decrease in loneliness, as Wang, Sun, and Kramer found using a 5,000 re-sample with replacements and with a 95% bias-corrected confidence interval (Wang, Sun, & Kramer 2021, p.285). They also found that through consumer rituals, individuals can gain a greater sense of self control and feeling of control, which can then lead to healthier choices. Research supports the finding that it can also decrease anxiety, all of which help reduce loneliness (Wang, Sun, & Kramer 2021, p.295). Michael Jindra also found that the Star Trek Fandom gives fans control over their lives in the same way quasi-religions do by inspiring them with a hopeful image of the future. The franchise has inspired fans to do well in school and to become engineers, doctors, and scientists (Jindra 2017, p. 233).

3.8 Parasocial Relationships

One common theme among some of the rituals discussed above is that they are used in a way to connect with, become closer to, or look towards the Star Trek characters that the fan idealizes. In *To Boldly Go Where No Psychologist Has Gone Before: Effects of Participation in Fandom Activities on Parasocial Relationships*, Rachel O'Donovan specifically analyzes the effect parasocial relationships have on Star Trek fans within the fandom as a functioning religion. She hypothesizes that people who participate in fandom activities are lonely, feel alienated, and many times have symptoms of mental illness because they are only able to form relationships through fandom. However, by the end of the study, O'Donovan found that fandom and the parasocial relationships formed by fans have much more positive effects, with no seemingly solid evidence that they isolate the fans; however, she does not abandon the

hypothesis. I recorded an example of parasocial relationships helping an individual cope with loneliness during my online observation on Reddit. A person who is active in the reddit Star Trek forums posted that they “had a really lonely childhood and grew up watching TNG [*Star Trek: The Next Generation*] during its original run. I genuinely felt like the characters were my friends sometimes. It was nice to see a place where anyone could belong, even if it was only imaginary” (2023). Another example from a Star Trek Reddit forum is an individual who said Star Trek shaped their life because they grew up in an abusive household with no one to turn to for help and no role models. This homelife made them “shy and timid,” and kids at school began to bully them, and by the time they were teens, they became suicidal. This is when they looked towards fiction to escape reality and found *Star Trek: Next Generation*, which helped shape their life in a “huge way.”

Captain Picard stood out as my favourite character in fiction because I wished that I could grow up to be like him. I stopped thinking of killing myself and started trying to shape my actions as if I were trying to be like Captain Picard. It may just be a show, but it is part of the reason I am still alive today. It played a vital role in shaping who I am today. I have re-watched the show maybe ten times now, and I still like to imagine being part of a family that actually cares about you (2021).

This is not the first time I have read or heard a fan describe Star Trek as making them feel like they were part of a family that cares about them. Jessica Ko said the following:

Although I will admit, I love the fact that no matter which show you're watching, the crew is like a family..... It feels like you're watching this very close-knit group of friends. You know, try and solve issues together and sometimes get on each other's nerves, and it's just watching it feels like going home.

Additionally, as seen above in this chapter, research demonstrates the opposite of Rachel O'Donovan's hypothesis on isolation and loneliness. To reiterate, Wang, Sun, and Kramer found that once individuals can find meaning in some other part of their lives, these rituals will no longer affect the level of loneliness they experience, and thus the rituals are only needed to

reduce loneliness in the absence of other meaningfulness (Wang, Sun, & Kramer 2021, p.285). Furthermore, Ami Rokach found in religion (no religion specifically) that members share an ideology and mission which provides the members with the tools and coping mechanisms that they need for traumatic situations, along with loneliness, and the capacity to find meaning in the loneliness (Rokach 2018).

Rachel O'Donovan's study used twenty-three women who were polled about the intensity of their parasocial relationships before and after participating in fandom, as well as how often they involved themselves. She enumerates several themes that emerged from her analysis. The first theme is escaping reality or, in other words, transcendence. Next is the theme of improved confidence and skill. An example of this theme comes from my interview with Jessica Ko, who has a passion for cosplay:

I think it's [the Star Trek Fandom] helped me. Develop my skills more, you know, my identity is multifaceted, I identify as a creator or a writer. I like to create art, and I think Star Trek has helped me really improve in those skills. You know, through this larger community, I've gotten to talk to, you know, makeup artists who worked on the show, like asking questions when I was putting together my cosplay of the Ferengi, and I have fabric samples from strange new worlds for when I was making my uniform. It's really, really special, and it helped me really step up my game.

As for confidence, Mae said that dressing in costume can make cosplayers feel more confident because it makes them feel more “put together.” She explained that seeing other people who are also dressed up gives you more confidence socially because you know that you and these other people already have a shared interest. Additionally, Moe talked about how the Star Trek fandom encourages an environment where you can be more open with what you are comfortable with and uncomfortable with in conversation and, therefore, become less socially anxious, possibly due to the representation of different types of people on Star Trek series and how the characters navigate those relationships.

Next, there is the theme of fandom participation, helping fans to relate to people more easily in the mundane world. I saw Star Trek fans doing this by relating situations and actions of others in the real world to those of the characters on Star Trek. In several of my interviews, fans claimed that this helped them look at the situation from outside their own bias and understand more clearly. The next theme is openness, which fans present regarding their parasocial relationships by being both publicly open about the relationship and emotionally open in the relationship. Another theme, fandom participation creates a closeness and understanding of the subject of said parasocial relationship, leading to further fandom participation (O'Donovan 2016, p.48).

All these themes were found to help alleviate loneliness. More specifically, O'Donovan found that people who have intense parasocial relationships establish “good,” “intimate” relationships, in other words, personally close lasting friendships, and are, in turn, more devoted friends themselves. In addition, they have more dating experience and are more satisfied with their lives as a result of participating in fandom activities, as it was found that parasocial relationships resulting from fandoms are stronger than others (O'Donovan 2016, p. 52-53), much in the same way relationships made in traditional religious groups are. The fandom activities discussed in this chapter—consumption rituals, fanfiction, and pilgrimage—can be seen as Star Trek rituals in a religious sense. Furthermore, the relationships fans form due to their parasocial relationships are with likeminded people, which promotes an accepting community (O'Donovan 2016, p. 57).

CHAPTER 4

RELIGIOUS BELONGING AND MORAL COMPASS

4 Religious Belonging and Moral Compass

4.1 Belonging

Belonging to a religious community is a particularly effective way for people to overcome social isolation. Furthermore, belonging is an important part of religion, and it is a fundamental need that humans have (Williams 2021). I found the definition of cultural and, by extension, religious belonging used by Knut Lundby in *Patterns of Belonging in Online/Offline Interfaces of Religion* useful as a baseline for understanding of what it means to experience belonging; he defined belonging as follows:

“Belonging,” in general, is about a person’s relation to a social collectivity with its culture. “To belong to a culture means, most generally, to be part of a universe of shared learning,” the sociologist Göran Therborn (1991, p. 182) states. He points to three aspects of belonging. First, through belonging, one finds support for specific preferences as one learns to distinguish different ends and desires in life, particular norms of conduct and specific ways of expressing and handling emotions. Second, belonging to a culture means to have learnt a certain cognitive and communicative competence and to be part of a particular universe of meaning. Third, cultural belonging implies a shared identity with some people and a shared differentiation from other people (Therborn 1991, pp. 182–183). Religious belonging could be regarded as a form of cultural belonging (Lundby 2011, p.1221).

Religion is primarily communal, mainly residing in the type of social group that exist for the sake of relationships. As this type of social group, religion serves to obtain purpose and meaning in life through relationships (Williams 2021). This is relevant when discussing the Star Trek fandom religious effect on loneliness because, as previously stated, meaning is an important part of religion. For example, Ami Rokach found that religion, by providing meaning, provides meaning and thereby decreases loneliness (Rokach 2018). Additionally, Xuehua Wang, Yixia Sun, and Thomas Kramer found that members find meaning through consumption ritual, which reduces loneliness, and once they can find meaning in other parts of their lives, they will no longer rely on the rituals to alleviate loneliness. In this case, the belonging and community they

later obtain through the Star Trek fan religion and through activities like consumption ritual and pilgrimages to conventions, they can find new meaning that is more sustainable and will also facilitate relations in the mundane world (Wang, Sun, & Kramer 2021, p.285).

4.2 Fandom Relationships and Unique Belonging

A big part of fandoms in general, not only the Star Trek fandom, is community and belonging because, for a very long time, fans of science fiction were considered outsiders. Fan Expo Canada even created the slogan “United by Fandom,” with artwork for t-shirts and posters for different conventions (see Figure 5).



Figure 5. Merchandise, including t-shirts and a poster from Comicon 2023 and Fan Expo 2023.

Vera Lucia Conceicao Pereira conducted six interviews and found that everyone with whom she spoke identified the community aspect of fandoms as what fandoms are all about. The importance of fandom is derived from the friendships and the deeper connections it facilitates. One subject stated that “fandom means international friendship” because they found that fans’ shared interests make it so that you can talk to a stranger like you have known them your whole life (Conceicao Pereira 2017, p.9; Jindra 1994, p. 38). Even acquaintances are impactful on the fandom participants. Ami Rokach found that acquaintances, like the ones formed in the Star Trek fandom, provide company, a sense of belonging, guidance, and advice, all of which combat

loneliness (Rokach 2018, p.64). Ten Kate, Willem de Koster, and Jeroen Van Der Wall found that belonging to a religious community can cause a social leak into non-religious domains as it helps members form new social connections across many domains (Ten Kate, Koster, & Van Der Waal 2017). I think the following statement from my interview with Jessica Ko is a good example of this type of connection and demonstrates what the Star Trek fandom community is:

Even if you leave the fandom, even if you stopped watching the shows, you know, kind of go off the map for a little while. It's always there to go back to you can leave, but I don't think it ever fully goes away. I don't think it's something you can just forget. And if it's something you ever want to get back into, you know, it's there waiting for you..... So, I think that's just, that's, in my opinion, what makes Star Trek kind of unique amongst other communities. Is that it's not just, hey, let's check out the new show. Hey, let's check out the new game. It's just. You're there for it as a whole. And I like, you know, you come because you like the show. You come, you come because you like the movies. But you stay because you find a sense of community. You find support; you find like-minded individuals who I think already said this, but even if all you have like you come together because you like Star Trek, but you end up not talking about Star Trek, end of talking about life, you end up talking about other interests. Or anything. And it and you realize, you know, Star Trek's the catalyst, but it's the, it's the people in it that make it interesting.

This above statement is an example of how Star Trek, as a universe and a fandom, is a constant force that will always be there for members; even those who leave it still find it valuable because they can return any time. It is a space for self-expression that goes beyond Star Trek, much like many other religions. This consistency can bring many fans comfort and make them feel like they're never truly alone, similar to how many traditional religions describe the feeling of God or the church community. Moe also described the Star Trek fandom as a community that will always be there, a place where people care; for example, if you aren't active in the discord for a while, someone will often check in on you. One time, she couldn't afford food because she was a student on a fixed income, and a fan from the Star Trek Discord group offered to send her twenty dollars for a sandwich, no strings attached; they just wanted to do it because they cared about her as a human being. Furthermore, Jack Williams describes a social spectrum which

religion navigates differently than other groups. Religion is primarily designated as the group that exists for the sake of relationships because that is how religious groups originally attract or obtain people. However, members' lives evolve, and religion begins to fill other functions beyond the original goal. Williams takes this idea of the human need to belong, and the types of belonging, and goes even further to the point where belonging changes how people perceive, believe, and experience human practices (Williams 2021).

Star Trek fandom provides a key integrative function that increases life satisfaction and decreases loneliness through a framework of meaning, a future to strive towards, and a sense of belonging. There are canonized religious narratives, rites, and rituals (see chapter 3), which all contribute to making the members feel and maintain a sense of togetherness. Religious belonging is therefore stronger than just other types of community belonging, and the belonging derived through fan religions presents to the same extent as traditional religious belonging does (Williams 2021). Being part of a community of like-minded people fosters a sense of intimacy and creates an invisible safety net for emotional security (Ten Kate, Koster, & Van Der Waal 2017). In my survey research, I found that most participants agreed that the sense of belonging they felt from being a part of the Star Trek fandom was unique compared to the belonging they felt in everyday life activities, as seen in Figure 6 below:

Q23 - The sense of belonging I feel being a part of the Star Trek Fandom is unique from the belonging I feel in everyday life activities.

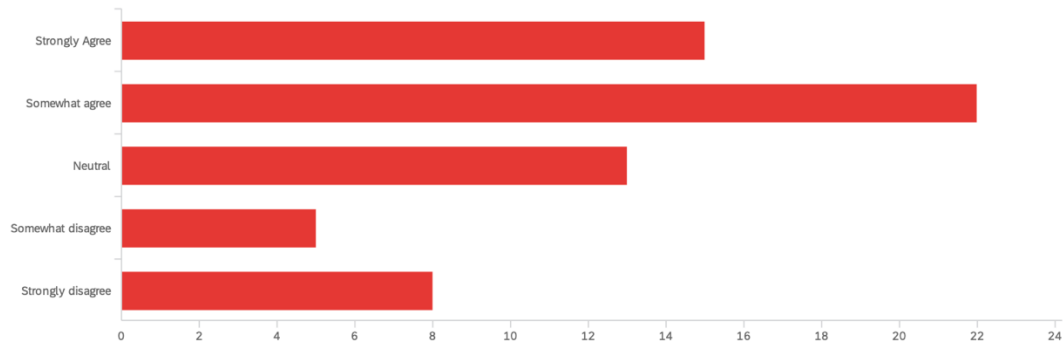


Figure 6

4.3 Identity

Vera Lucia Conceicao Pereira found that being a part of a fandom shaped fans' identities. She gave an example of a fan whose identity was shaped by the fandom because they joined it during adolescence and grew up within it. Another fan revealed that the reason the fandom affected his identity was that he joins fandoms that already coincide with his values and personality, which solidifies and nurtures those traits. Conceicao Pereira described another interview during which a fan stated they did not think fandom affected their identity but rather influenced their personality, and after discussing it further, the subject realized that fandom had shaped their identity without their awareness (2017, p.12). She concluded her analysis of the identity-shaping qualities of fandom by stating that she found, across all her interviews, a sense of belonging, identification, and a shared emotional connection as being evident within fandom (2017, p.13).

In my research, I have also found that the Star Trek fandom has helped many participants form their identities as individuals and that belonging to the Star Trek fandom has helped increase their social circles. Responding to my survey statement, “Star Trek has helped me form my identity as an individual,” 50.79% strongly agreed, 31.75% somewhat agreed, 4.76% were neutral, 6.35% somewhat disagreed, and 6.35% of the participants strongly disagreed. Additionally, when asked how much they agreed with the statement, “Belonging to the Star Trek Fandom has caused my social circle to grow,” 11.11% of participants strongly agreed, 31.75% somewhat agreed, 26.98% were neutral, 7.94% somewhat disagreed, and 22.22% strongly disagreed.

4.4 Common Ground

Furthermore, Conceicao Pereira found that, even among fans interacting for the first time, the fact that they both enjoy the same thing-provides a deep connection; fandoms provide the feeling of inclusion and engagement (2017, p.9). Rachel O’Donovan found that there was a common theme of acceptance among fans. She saw how many fans who originally formed their relationships through fandom activities developed feelings of true acceptance. One fan even stated, “You can talk about these things that are really important to you without worrying that they won’t understand or judge you” (O’Donovan 2016, p.51-52). She also found that participation in fandom activities made it easier to relate to people in real life, with participants stating things such as, “It helps me connect to people,” and “I am quite shy with new people, so it has helped to start conversations with people.” This displays fandom breaking boundaries and acting as a comfort blanket. She theorizes that this could be due to fans having a vast knowledge of what the other fan is also interested in, giving them confidence and, due to this, further

encouragement to try to make new relationships and to repair old ones (O'Donovan 2016, p.54-55).

I found the same while conducting my research. For example, in Chapter 3, I discussed my interview with Mae, a cosplayer who said that other people's Star Trek cosplay signals a shared interest, thus increasing their comfort with them. Another example comes from my interview with Jessica Ko, for whom Star Trek opened the door to some very close friendships that eventually developed beyond their initial context: "A lot of my like best friends in real life I met through the Star Trek group." Additionally, she discussed how the shared interests not only make it easier to socialize with other fans, but the mentality and values that usually come with this shared interest indicate like-minded individuals:

Looking back on it now, it may not feel that way, but Star Trek has always been very progressive and very like, I don't want to say educationally minded, but it's always it treats its viewer like you're a smart person, it doesn't assume that you're not paying attention or don't care. It assumes that you do care. So, I think it just attracts very, you know. Knowledgeable people, very caring people, people who can see someone who doesn't look like them and still have empathy for them. And I think that's definitely part of what makes this fandom special. Also, I think just the history of Star Trek, it being a what, 65-year franchise now. You're going to have a lot of people who it's been in their veins their whole life, like I know some people who still mail each other Spock fanfiction in the mail.

4.5 Social and Family Ties

Religious scholars Ten Kate, de Koster, and van der Wall similarly found in their research that members of religious communities share and reaffirm social norms and practices within that community. This is one of the reasons religious belonging correlates with a greater number of family and social ties. These connections may lead to higher self-esteem, more social support, less loneliness, and a greater sense of control—all of which contribute to higher life satisfaction (2017, p.141). They also found that religious individuals have more family ties when

compared to non-religious individuals, and this is due to the sharing and reaffirmation of norms and practices within a religious community (2017, p.141). In other terms, the messages, stories, social norms, and customs in a religion resonate with its members, so they share it with their family, who may also relate to it, which creates a greater connection to those members and fosters like-minded ideals and views, making the members feel less alone like they have more control, a greater sense of self-affirmation.

Examples of family members passing down the teachings and norms of their religion to bond with their family can be found in the Star Trek fandom. During my field research, I met an individual who fondly reminisced on how he bonded with his father through Star Trek as a child, and how one of his core memories was his father gifting him a phaser (a directed energy weapon from the Star Trek universe) he had personally carved out of wood so that he could feel more like a real Star Fleet officer when playing. He now shares his love of Star Trek and bonds with his significant other by wearing Star Trek cosplay together at conventions (see Figure 7).



Figure 7. Two customers at a Science Fiction convention, August 2022. Photographed with permission of subjects.

I also found examples of Star Trek members increasing family ties through passing Trek and its messages down through the generations in my online observations. One specific example

is a Reddit post in which an individual comments on a thread about Star Trek helping someone cope with the loss of a family member:

Sorry for your loss... I also lost my dad to Alzheimer's ten years ago. It's a terrible disease. Star Trek was very important to both of us. We started watching TNG when I was around 8. He'd have a beer, and I'd lay my head on his lap. Trek was always something for us to talk about... the future, morality, etc. I really wish I could show my father 'Picard,' he was his favourite captain by far. My son is now around the same age I was, so now he sits with his head on my lap. Time passes on, though it's rarely easy in so doing.

This example not only displays Star Trek fans passing down Trek through the generations and increased familial ties caused by this deep connection with Trek in a way much like traditional religions, but also it displays Star Trek helping its fans cope with the hardships in life.

Moe provides another perspective when she describes how she got into Star Trek in the first place. Unlike the participant above, despite the rest of her family loving the series, she did not grow up watching and loving the show; instead she got into it when she was fourteen and was introduced to it by her sister. After giving the show a chance, she sought more information online and was introduced to the community. She soon learned its difference from other fandoms. She had this to say about her introduction to the community:

I was so surprised how different it was from everything else I had been a part of at that point in my life. And I didn't, I didn't understand it. Because when I was interacting with people, I was only in, like, season five. I was before the whole Dominion War arc, which is what everyone likes to talk about in Deep Space Nine. And I didn't fully understand what everything was; everything was going on. But no one ever was like, set me up for that. No one was like, oh, you gotta watch it and then come back to me. And we can talk about it. It was always just very, oh, you're gonna love when this part comes up? Or this episode's my favourite or stuff like that. And it's just a very endearing space to be in.

This experience allowed her to connect with her sister more and made her want to introduce Star Trek to other people, which then led to her meeting her girlfriend:

So, I guess I got into it just because my family has always been really into Star Trek. And now that I'm into it, I kind of I kind of I joke with my sister. I say I got to indoctrinate more people when they've never seen it. And I'm like, oh, let me let me show you it.

Because that's how that's how I met my girlfriend. She was like, I've never seen Star Trek.

So, Star Trek not only allowed her to connect with her family more over a newfound shared interest and community, but it also led to more social ties from friends on online forums to a romantic partner.

4.6 Interpretation

Now that Moe has this shared understanding of Star Trek, she uses the narratives and morals in the work of Star Trek to talk to other fans, like her girlfriend, about current moral and political issues in the mundane world. An example she gives is how she was talking to her girlfriend about the Tennessee Adult Entertainment Act, also known as the anti-drag bill, which banned public “adult cabaret performances” (vaguely described as “male or female impersonators who provide entertainment that appeals to a prurient interest”) from taking place in public or in front of children in the state of Tennessee (Perry, 2023). Moe related the bill to the *Star Trek: Next Generation* episode titled “The Outcast” (Scheerer, 1992). This episode featured aliens called the J’naii that, in a way, were nonbinary because their species evolved to be genderless. A long time ago, they had been males and females, but in the present those designations are considered wrong by their species. It is explained that some people on their planet are born differently and identify with a gender, but these people must live in secret because if they are found, the government will take them away to perform “treatments” on them as they believe it is something that needs to be fixed and that the people who identify as a binary gender are sick. One of the aliens, Soren, develops feelings for William Riker, the first officer on the enterprise, and comes out as secretly female to him; because he is human (a species with gender), this relationship would not be allowed by her people. They are later found out by the

J'naii, and she is put on trial so that her people can determine if she does identify as a gender and, if so, put her in treatment. Riker tries to cover for her by saying that he had been the sole instigator of the relationship. However, Soren, explaining that she is tired of hiding, comes out as a sort of trans woman through a speech where she explains how she is not broken (Scheerer, 1992). Moe said that this speech “rang” with her on how it could relate to the Tennessee situation. The speech went as follows:

No. I am tired of lies. I am female. I was born that way. I have had those feelings, those longings, all of my life. It is not unnatural. I am not sick because I feel this way. I do not need to be helped. I do not need to be cured. What I need, and what all of those who are like me need, is your understanding and your compassion. We have not injured you in any way, and yet we are scorned and attacked. And all because we are different. What we do is no different from what you do. We talk and laugh. We complain about work. And we wonder about growing old. We talk about our families. And we worry about the future. And we cry with each other when things seem hopeless. All of the loving things that you do with each other that is what we do. And for that, we are called misfits and, deviants and criminals. What right do you have to punish us? What right do you have to change us? What makes you think you can dictate how people love each other? (Scheerer, 1992).

Moe further explained that the science fiction narrative devices camouflage some of the creators' real-life moral opinions or political resonance, which viewers like Moe sometimes only realize later. The camouflage makes it easier to speak on such matters through this lens as viewers aren't blinded by personal bias at the moment. She further explained how it has now become second nature to explore morals, politics, and problems through this lens:

It works so well in Star Trek, too, because they're just they're aliens. You know, like, you're not thinking about the human politics of it until you actually sit down and think about it. And you're like, oh, we were doing something like that. Or we have done something like that in the past. And it's like, Oh, okay.

For many Christians, interpreting issues through Biblical figures assuages loneliness, and the moral code set by religious ideologies makes it easier to resolve moral issues (Ten Kate, Koster, & Van Der Waal 2017). Likewise, Star Trek fans reference the narratives to discuss what kind of

future they should be working towards. In my survey, I found that the vast majority of participants did look towards the Star Trek characters for guidance during hard times. When asked how much they agreed with the statement “At troubling times in my life, I sometimes look towards the characters of Star Trek for Guidance,” 50.79% of participants strongly agreed, 23.81% somewhat agreed, 9.52% were neutral, 6.35% somewhat disagreed, and 9.52% strongly disagreed. As for the importance of canon, most fans agreed that what is considered true canon in the Star Trek universe is important to them, though it was not by much, as can be seen in Figure 8. The greater importance of the characters and relatively less value placed on canon was not a big surprise to me as, in my interviews and observations, I noticed that fans seemed to focus more on what the character stood for and represented than on every detail of a script.

Q17 - What is considered true cannon in the Star Trek universe is important to me.

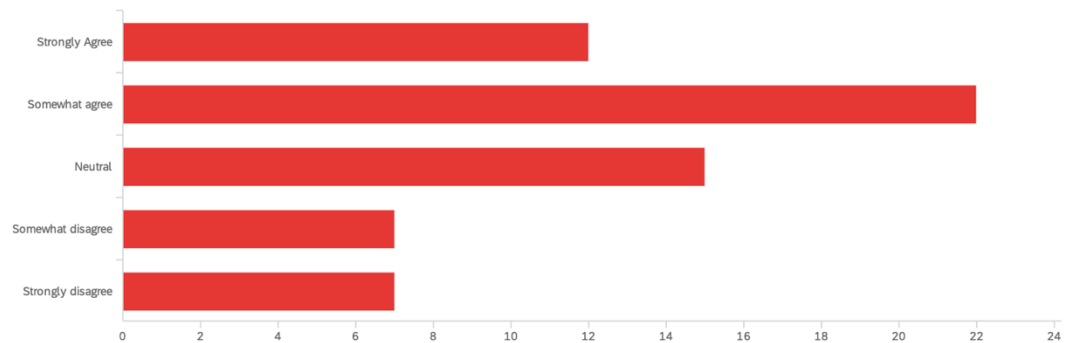


Figure 8

Walter Burkert, in *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual*, discusses how myth is a “tale applied” (Burkert, 1979). Firstly, he states that myth is within the class of traditional tales in fictional storytelling, relating it to the Greek word *mythos*, which means to tell a tale while disclaiming responsibility, but the myth is still seen as “important, serious, even

sacred” despite being fictive. This idea of myth lines up perfectly with the Star Trek fans’ experience of the Star Trek franchise narratives. Taking away the question of truth allows the person consuming the myth to enjoy and think about the myth more, as they are no longer worried about what is factual (Burkert, 1979, p. 3-4). Furthermore, Burkert’s thesis is that “myth is a traditional tale with secondary, partial reference to something of collective importance” (Burkert, 1979, p. 23). He believed that the essence of myth lies in its use, and its relevance and seriousness are derived from this use.

This brings me to another finding: consuming the narratives/the myth of their religion helps members to enhance their perceptions of control by their faith, providing the tools they need (Ten Kate, Koster, & Van Der Waal 2017). Research shows that Star Trek, just like traditional religions, through its moral code, mission, and myths, also provides individuals with the tools that they need to take control of their destiny (Jindra 1994, p. 33-34). Additionally, religious figures, like gods or sacred beings, serve as a source of support and companionship when participants of the religion are stressed and lonely, providing them with the feeling of safety/love. Often, members look towards these figures for guidance, as it gives them a sense of hope and control (Ten Kate, Koster, & Van Der Waal 2017). An example of this within the Star Trek fandom is individuals re-watching the series for comfort or writing to the actors that play the characters whom the fans have idolized. Para-textual media also plays a role in fan comfort. An individual who is active on the Star Trek Reddit forums posted, “For me, it’s the Star Trek lore videos on YouTube that help calm me down more than the actual show” (Fantastic_Green_1278, 2023). This comment was followed by many more replying to him asking for suggestions and suggesting good Star Trek clips and channels to watch for comfort.

A more serious example of para-textual media playing a role in fan comfort comes from an article posted in *The Companion*, which is an app-based platform founded by Lawrence Kao that focuses on publishing content relating to film and television. Their mission is “to revolutionize mental health and wellness by partnering with celebrities, leveraging their influence for good, and creating community-based gamification to deliver impactful mental health tools serving fans of sci-fi, fantasy, and gaming” (Kao). The article I am referencing is “Star Trek: Miles O’Brien Stopped Me from Taking My Life” by Duncan Barrett, posted on June 22, 2023. His topic may be triggering to some, if you are uncomfortable, please skip the next paragraph.

In this article, Barrett, who likes to watch Star Trek at times when he needs comfort, tells the story of Dan Davidson, the founder of the TrekGeeks podcast network and co-host of *eponymous flagships*. Twenty years ago, Dan’s life was very different. He lost his job and was having troubles in his marriage, so he fell into a depression. Dan was alone a lot since he was newly unemployed, and he would watch Star Trek VHS tapes for comfort and “hope.” But when that was no longer enough, he planned to kill himself. In the days leading up to the event, he wrote letters to say goodbye to everyone. When his wife left for work, he placed the gun in his mouth but hesitated to pull the trigger, and that is when he saw *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* playing season 1 episode 5 on the television. Dan saw Chief O’Brien risk his whole Star Fleet career to help Tosk, someone he wasn’t very familiar with, evade the man hunting him because “every life is important.” In the article, Barrett states that Dan felt like O’Brien was speaking directly to him: “‘That was the moment that stopped me pulling the trigger,’ [Dan] tells me. ‘I remember laying on the ground, curling up in a ball, and just bawling for I don’t know how long. It was that moment in that episode that stopped me from doing it. Things didn’t get better right

away, but at least I was still alive to allow them to get better” (Barrett, 2023). After his marriage ended and he moved back in with his parents, Dan continued to look towards Star Trek for support and encouragement, describing it as ““integral to my coming back”” (Barrett, 2023). Dan even describes a transcendent property to watching the series for comfort, stating, ““Star Trek was my place to go when I needed to get away from the real world, so it was extremely important to me during my recovery”” (Barrett, 2023). The hope Dan received from the series gave him the strength to get help from a friend, who later became his wife. Through his work with the fandom, he was able to meet and thank the actors from the *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* clip who saved his life. Dan also made a podcast about what he went through in the hopes he can help even one Star Trek fan, stating ““I can be Tosk.”” Scott MacDonald, the man who played Tosk, told him ““You are now Tosk.”” Later, Dan received an email from a fan who was going to kill themselves but didn’t because of the podcast episode describing his experience.

I devote so much space to this article because I believe it is important and a perfect encapsulation of my argument. Barrett’s article displays the impact of all the following: a parasocial relationship with a being in the fandom (Miles O’Brien), the ritual of rewatching the series, the experience of transcendence as stepping outside our reality into another, hope through the mission of a humanitarian utopian society that Star Trek depicts, and a distinctive sense of community. This article also gives an example of how being a part of the Star Trek fandom can help you form relationships outside of the fandom through the skills and coping tools it has provided you. It presents an example of a fan bettering their life and the world by trying to be like a Star Trek character.

4.7 Social Support

Consuming the Star Trek narratives, however, is not the only way that the fan religion provides life tools and coping strategies. Belonging to religious communities offers a multitude of tools for problem-solving and offers coping strategies in times of stress by providing members with social support, love, caring, sympathy, and community membership, which causes higher self-esteem and a sense of control both of which have a positive effect on well-being. The impact Star Trek seems to have on the fans is particularly visible in the Star Trek Online forums. We see the effect in the kind of serious, personal narratives such as Dan's story in the previous section, and through the simple act of meme sharing (see Figure 9)

Meme



Figure 9. A meme from a Star Trek Facebook group

Being part of a religion increases life satisfaction, due to greater access to social support, and causes a decreased level of loneliness (Ten Kate, Koster, & Van Der Waal 2017, p.141).

Rokach reported that having a satisfactory social support system makes people more generous, optimistic, and resilient, which invites warmth and goodwill from other people which improves social networks. Furthermore, social support was also found to dull the effect of depression (Rokach 2018, p. 64). For example, Jessica Ko stated the following:

I think Star Trek is the kind of show that helps you see that the future can be bright and by seeing all of the kind, lovely people in the fandom, you know, It I don't want to say restores hope for humanity, but it lets you know that you can always go to a supportive group who are going to share that same view of the future who want to see people reach their highest and best selves and be able to be valued regardless of your skill. I love the concept that you know your value isn't how much you make or how smart you are it's in your reputation. It's how you treat other people. It's, you know, your contribution is weighed purely on what you get from it, not how it serves others. And I think that's a really nice concept. That is something that's definitely shared in the Star Trek community. Maybe not verbatim, but I think intrinsically people internalize that from the show from the media in it. It creates a really nice community where everyone's kinda on the same level, regardless of age, income, location, race, gender. None of that matters. We're just here to, you know, have hope for the future.

This sentiment is an example of how important the show and fandom can be to a Star Trek fan and how it can be a source of comfort that makes it so you are never truly alone.

4.8 Online

Belonging can present itself in many ways and does not only exist in in-person environments. Knut Lundby wrote *Patterns of Belonging in Online/Offline Interfaces of Religion*, which explores the patterns of belonging caused by religious activities in online and offline settings. This research applies to the activities in online Star Trek fand communities on websites such as Tumblr and Reddit to show that belonging and religious belonging can exist in these online spheres. Belonging to “imagined communities,” online communities are much easier

to sustain in the modern age as social media has expanded these communities, which are based on the expectations the members have of an institution or collectivity like a transnational religious community (Lundby 2011, p.1223). In this case, belonging would be rooted in the expectations of the fans in the Star Trek Fandom; this connection to like-minded fans and having things in common fosters belonging. The vastness of the community online in comparison to offline can make it much easier to sustain this belonging (Lundby 2011, p.1225). Lundby writes that the religious aspects of Star Trek have come out of this technologically mediated society, which facilitates social interactions (Lundby 2011, p.1223). Conceicao Pereira wrote that new technologies, like social media, are important because these fandoms exist outside of geographical boundaries, making the physical location of each individual fan irrelevant to function as a community (Conceicao Pereira 2017, p.9).

Furthermore, Lundby believes religiosity and religion are formed through the “interplay of mediation and belonging at the offline/online interface” (Lundby 2011, p. 1231). The belonging is theorized to be moulded based on the established offline religion, in this case, the Star Trek fandom, as an online extension of that structure. Though derived from the offline religious community, the online structure creates new forms of belonging by inviting a wider spectrum of social imagination and identification. He believes that these changed patterns of belonging may cause further changes to religion as a whole (Lundby 2011, p. 1231-1232). Belonging is a powerful thing as it is created in an environment of acceptance and gives a sense of meaning, which can be integral in alleviating loneliness.

Rachel O’Donovan discusses how science fiction fans who feel excluded from or isolated by the outside world, turn to online forums because they make connections through shared interests rather than location. Also, because not all fans have access to in-person fan events, they

rely on the online community to find meaningful relationships. O'Donovan notes that this is important because it demonstrates that the fans, despite lacking "real life" social relationships, have found a way to fulfill all the needs of traditional relationships, standing in as an adequate replacement (O'Donovan 2016, p.51-52). This acceptance, which fosters a sense of belonging and the opportunity to form meaningful relationships through these online fan forums, can help Star Trek fans not only alleviate loneliness but also bring them out of social isolation.

4.9 Religious Role

There is a theory that perhaps the evolution of the Star Trek fandom into a fan religion is an outcome of secularized societies needing a replacement for the place that religious institutions take in social and psychological aspects of individual's lives (Bickerdike 2015; Jindra 1994, p.32). This shift can be seen in a Reddit thread where many members of the Star Trek community discuss how it would be ridiculous to call Star Trek a religion (most likely because their idea of what a religion is shaped by the institutional form of traditional religion). Nonetheless, the fans are still able to recognize that Star Trek fandom provides the same sense of belonging and religious aspects that have positively affected their lives. One participant starts by stating:

I left religion a few years back. I'm not going to get ridiculous and say Trek is my religion, but it fills a similar role in that it gives me a fantasy to offer me hope. I can't tell you how meaningful Trek has been to me in the last few years. It's so silly, I know. For the first time in my life, I am interested in getting a tattoo that would read "Boldy go..." on my right foot. It's my personal mantra as I left my religion and also other transitions in my life. I have Star Trek, HG Wells and Birding. Those are my inspirations in life (daveescaped 2023).

This post elicited some notable replies. "Not silly at all. I left religion years ago. And rediscovering Star Trek and the morals of the stories have brought me more peace and

introspection than religion ever did.” This reply demonstrates how the moral code set by the mission dictated in the Star Trek narratives has a positive effect on fans lives. Another replied: “Star Trek has helped shape my belief system, I wouldn’t call it a religion, but as ridiculous as it may seem, maybe it’s not far from it,” demonstrating the impact Star Trek has on these fans beliefs and way of thinking while also demonstrating it has religious qualities. This is similar to what Adam Possamai and Murray Lee found in their study of hyper-real religions, which are “innovative religions and spirituality's that mix elements of religious tradition with popular culture.” Furthermore hyper-real religions are “a simulacrum of a ‘traditional’ religion created partly out of popular culture; popular cultural symbols and narratives provide inspiration for believers slash consumers” (Possamai & Lee 2011, p. 229). During their study of this type of religion, they found that many people rejected their traditional religions for a popular culture-based one such as Jediism. This is very similar to what I have found with Star Trek and may well back up the theory that in a secularized age we are developing new outlets of religious practice.

Furthermore, Conceicao Pereira interviewed six individuals and found that, through shared interest, participants can create connections online that transition to offline interactions, which has happened to her participant Rachel. Conceicao Pereira even quotes Rachel when talking about fandom as a community: “[being part of a fandom] I connected with a lot of people with the same interest (...) a lot of [friendships] started online but I've met a lot of them in real life and then just recently I've met my boyfriend in real life who I met online [within the fandom]” (Conceicao Pereira 2017, p.9). Additionally, due to many Star Trek fans being attracted to the series due to its morality, the fans already have a shared ethical understanding of how the world works—or should work. Because they all follow the same moral compass derived from the Star Trek narratives, they develop an even deeper sense of belonging as they're all

working towards a shared ethical goal for a better collective future. This moral compass also makes it easier for fans to trust, connect, bond, and further feel like they belong with other fans. They find a purpose.

CHAPTER 5

PURPOSE

5 Purpose

5.1 Imperfectly Perfect

One of the hardest aspects of loneliness to overcome is the paralysis that often accompanies it (Rokach 2018). However, when you are part of a faith, its mission, purpose, and social circle have been found to help individuals overcome this side effect (Rokach 2018). In this case, it would be the hope for the future that Star Trek projects and the pursuit of the humanitarian mission that is portrayed in their scriptures that would keep the fans who are part of the Star Trek fandom religion pushing through to cope with loneliness while supporting one another, even if they do not realize they are doing so. I saw and heard many examples of this during my online and in-person observations (see Figure 10):



Figure 10. One example of fans finding hope and purpose, from a Star Trek Reddit forum.

The first comment to the initial post in Figure 10 points to an important aspect of why the optimistic message of Star Trek resonates with so many people: it is “grounded in reality,” which makes it feel possible in real life (i.e., advancements in technology shape the future, rather than,

for example, magic). As I mentioned in Chapter 2, the world in Star Trek is not perfect; humanity still has struggles, but people are different: they are driven by an all-for-one mindset rather than, as the first commenter writes, being “the worst.” Star Trek depicts the potential we have as a species for good both in fiction and reality. Additionally, the franchise is so old and large that there is a vast amount of lore, making the imperfectly perfect universe of Trek feel even more real. The mix of optimism, realism, and moral message in the series can evoke immense hope and faith in a fan.

Michael Jindra reported that Star Trek, in a religious way, has a “profound effect on fans’ lives” (Jindra 2017, p. 223). Actors from the Star Trek casts have said that Star Trek fans have been inspired by the series to do well academically and achieve high-level careers such as engineers, doctors, or scientists. An example of Star Trek fans being inspired in this way comes from my online observations on Reddit:

Since I first saw the Enterprise-D pass through the deep void of space, accompanied by Picard's narration of the Captain's vow, I became hooked on the Universe of Star Trek. Not just because it's cool gadgets, settings, or aliens, but because it is a beautiful vision of the future that I think we should all strive towards. Infinite Diversity in infinite combinations. A universe where everyone from the infallible Captain Kirk to the loveable hot mess Reginald Barclay has a place in humanity's future. Inspired by Trek and other heroes of my childhood, I knew that I wanted to one day help humankind in my own way. Here I am, several years later, in the middle of my undergraduate studies to become an engineer. And while it sure isn't as easy as Scotty makes it out to be, Star Trek continues to inspire me to give it my all in classes and be the best me that I can be. So that brings me to my question how has Star Trek inspired you in your life (JokerFett 2016)?

The reason Star Trek inspires fans in such a way is that the franchise has given Star Trek fans hope for the future, inspiring the fans to take control of their lives in the same way many traditional religions do (Jindra 2017, p.233). This sense of control is important in providing an atmosphere where you don't feel so alone. This is because the hope given by Star Trek and the sense of belonging and identity that comes with it can make fans fully aware of themselves as

human beings discovering their inner strengths, resources, and ability to survive despite loneliness or other struggles; the hope takes fear and pain and turns it into a sense of control. One Reddit fan described how Star Trek helped them survive and deal with a troubled upbringing:

Star Trek has been a bright beacon in my life. I had a horrible upbringing I had to escape from, and it left me feeling just empty and afraid for a lot of my adult life. As I heal and pick up the pieces, their adventures that inspire hope remind me to have hope in myself a lot. Sometimes, I really like that quote from Tuvok. 'This experience will force you to adapt. You are no longer the same person, and the course of your life will change as a result, where that new course lead is up to you (Livelonganddiemad 2023).

Star Trek, through its narratives and the resilience of its characters, has created this idea in the fan community that our future is what we make it, causing a sense of personal agency.

Ami Rokach saw this effect in his research on coping with loneliness; he recorded that the control obtained in this way made it so individuals no longer are desperate for intimate relationships. He found that the newfound control over their lives made it possible for them to form relationships, when ready to do so, at ease instead of clinging to anyone who gave them a chance due to the desperate need for connection and the insecurity that comes with a perceived lack of control; with a new appreciation of human relations, people are able to offer more of themselves to someone (Rokach 2018, p.63)

5.2 Outsiderhood & Identity

The Star Trek ideology seeks to produce a progressive world where people from all backgrounds work together to expand knowledge, thus pointing the fans towards another world like many other religions do (Jindra 1994, p. 33). This representation of the value of outsiderhood is also important in making people feel less alone, and the Star Trek mythology that depicts these outsiders gives the fans hope and a connection to feeling less alone in their otherhood while giving them hope for their future. Jordan Hoffman, a writer and critic based in

New York, examined outsider characters like Data (an android), Seven of Nine (a human who is a former Borg drone), Spock (a half-human-half-Vulcan), Odo (a changeling), and the Doctor (an Augment). According to Hoffman:

What's key, though, is that each of these characters – the characters that meant most to me and, I can tell you from attending conventions, mean the most to many of us – were still heroes. Moreover, they were accepted for what they are: weirdos set apart from the rest of the group, but actually quite necessary for the closed society of a Starship to excel (Hoffman 2016).

These valued outsider characters in Star Trek allow fans to see that their lives still have meaning and purpose, and that they can be accepted, all of which are important components in alleviating loneliness. Religion provides a distinct setting for identity exploration and commitment through offering an ideological, social, and spiritual context. This promotes a concern for the social good, and it is a setting for people to form an identity as it has many developmental benefits: an identity that strengthens through gatherings like congregations (King 2003). Through my survey research, I found that most Star Trek fans who participated agreed that Star Trek fandom had affected the way they view the world, and they aspire to make a difference in their reality in the same way Star Trek characters have in theirs. When asked how much they agree with the statement “The Star Trek fandom has affected the way that I look at the world,” 49.21% of the survey participants strongly agreed, 22.22% somewhat agreed, 19.05% were neutral, 4.76% somewhat disagreed, and 4.76% strongly disagreed. Continually, when asked how much they agree with the statement “I aspire to make a difference in my reality the same as the characters of Star Trek have in theirs,” 53.97% of survey participants strongly agreed, 33.33% somewhat agreed, 6.35% were neutral, 3.17% somewhat disagreed, and 3.17% strongly disagreed.

Additionally, mixing religious beliefs with ideas of how to live life may be essential to identity building (King 2003). This mixing of ideas can also be seen in Star Trek fandom, which

includes people from all different backgrounds and is broken up into different fan clubs. Some fans believe so strongly in Roddenberry's depiction of the future that they see it as a beacon of hope. Michael Jindra quoted a fan who gave up their aerospace engineer job to sell Star Trek merchandise: "Star Trek isn't about a television series, it's about faith in our future" (Jindra 2017, p.234). This drive can also be seen in the everyday Star Trek fan on online forums. In a Reddit forum, an anonymous fan described the effect of watching Star Trek as follows:

What I've seen so far [of Star Trek] has filled a part of my soul I didn't realize had been forgotten. A sense of wonder, of optimism, in the belief in the human spirit. Having characters face dangers and foes not with fear or anger but a desire to understand, to reconcile. To constantly strive for a better world before we leave it. I wish more series did this. A few days ago, I looked up at the sky for a long time, wondering about what adventures and sights await us out there. I couldn't help but imagine being on the deck of a Starship as clouds of space dust and glimmering novas passed us by. It was then I realized I hadn't looked up for so many years. Star Trek made me imagine again. I hope it does the same for you, too (EnsignScuti, 2023).

This post eloquently encompasses what it feels like to be inspired by the Star Trek universe. This fan felt moved and motivated while writing this post, which is why I felt I had to include it in my research. The comments on the post give the impression that the fans who read it felt the same. Many of the replies were on how Star Trek has been a "constant light no matter how dark it gets" and how "Star Trek has always been a friend," with fans describing how Star Trek has helped them deal with deaths of loved ones, how it makes them optimistic for the future, how it helps them deal with not achieving the goals they wanted to because it shows them that the important goals are achieved as a collective not as an individual, and many more examples of Star Trek helping these fans deal and cope with trauma and loneliness.

5.3 Transcendent Enlightenment

Additionally, Star Trek provides its followers with a sense of transcendence and allows people to experience life outside of time and the mundane world. Chapter 3 included experiences of transcendence in the Star Trek Fandom such as larping, which allows the fans to perform their mythology, existing outside of time and space or conventions which make fans feel like they exist outside of time. Transcendence experienced through rituals in the Star Trek fandom provides solace by giving fans a connection to both the past and future and allowing them to step outside of the mundane world into a place where everyday social boundaries are gone, and enlightenment begins. In this chapter, I will expand this point by discussing impact of the mission obtained through said enlightenment; fans can see when they are in a transcendent state and, through their mythology, the purpose it gives them.

In Chapter 4, I wrote about how established shared values draw individuals into certain religions and make it easier for the individual to form an identity and sense of belonging. The shared interest within the religion makes it easier for the members to break boundaries and create social connections, even with a stranger. The shared mission and the morals and values that come with that mission does the same. It strengthens identity because spirituality is concerned with transcendence, addressing the big questions of life and its meaning, creating an outlook that there is more to life than what we can see or fully understand. It also makes us more aware of who we are in relation to others (King 2003). This experience can give fans a sense of comfort in times of stress. They can use it to place their experience and position in life at an optimistic point, seeing the past and present correlate with the bigger, better future told by Star Trek. Jordan Hoffman articulates the idea of comfort nicely:

When my sister was in her final stages this spring, turning to old Star Trek shows was a panacea for me. I didn't really watch them, but I would let them play and take solace not just in their familiarity but their optimism. The future will be better – Earth's races will unite, we'll overcome poverty, we'll travel faster than light, and we'll all look good in

tight velour clothing – even if right now it looks like the stars are burning out (Hoffman 2016).

Hoffman is one of many fans who rewatch Star Trek episodes for hope for the future. The impact Star Trek has on the fans and how much hope and solace it created became clear, especially when observing the online communities. Here is another example from a Star Trek Reddit page:

This is exactly how it made me feel when I first started watching it. New Trekkie here, too, and I started off with TOS after catching my parents watching Enterprise and getting really into the few episodes I saw. Star Trek helped pull me out of a major depressive episode, and I felt like I could hope again, not just for my own future but for the future of humanity, too. Now I'm on my second rewatch of the series, and it's a real comfort show for me :) (gentlystirring, 2023).

5.4 Working Towards a Trek-Like World

Michael Jindra found that Star Trek fans want to make the real world more like the idealized world of Star Trek universe and have taken active steps towards doing so. An example he gives is that Star Trek fans have been eager supporters of increased funding for space programs and brought parts of Star Trek into the mundane world when they named the first space shuttle prototype the USS Enterprise (Jindra 2017, p. 233). Furthermore, Star Trek drives its followers to a greater purpose by influencing them to pursue a mission and to take control over their destiny as a collective, thus strengthening their bonds/relationships even more.

Religion provides connection to the divine or natural other, with whom this mission originates, integrating the participant into a community of believers. Being part of a collective of believers who are working together towards a shared goal is part of what gives Star Trek fans purpose, which is also promoted by Star Trek's message of working for the good of the many. The reason the mission and purpose are so profound and easy to believe in is theorized to be because the show encourages “‘suspension of disbelief’ and sets itself up as a ‘reality’ in which fans can exist” (Jindra 2017, p.234). It is all in the realm of possibility because it depicts a

universe that is in some ways perfect but still struggling and striving for better, and it's that inch of imperfection that makes it possible. I could see the impact of this while performing my research. On a Star Trek Reddit page, a fan posted the following:

Yeah. It does that. It helps me dream. I see the stars in a different light. I imagine all the possibilities. I imagine them out there as if they are because it's not that far-fetched a possibility, or maybe that's just the magic of the show. Maybe it is, but they present that it isn't that far-fetched by how seamlessly they stitch in reality and character depth to their space travels. It has such intense substance. It spills over into our world or dimension, filling this reality with possibilities and opening up our visions for the future. It's grand and tolerant and something better, a better version of humanity; it's something to strive for when all the world around us seems to be crumbling and degrading in morals instead of lurching forward in our humanities (Riverkaylee 2023).

This statement displays the presence and impact of the Star Trek universe affecting fans' ideas of what is in the realm of possibility. The Star Trek universe is so vast and so meticulously devised that it makes it easier to make it imperfectly perfect. No other fandom has been as active in filling out its alternate universe, attempting to relate it to the real world (Jindra 2017, p. 225). When describing part of the way Star Trek has always been there for him, Jordan Hoffman said a key component was the unbelievable depth of the imagined world with many species to learn about as a fan and knowing the differences didn't only get you into a fan club but also "could help you reflect back on the conflicts of the real world" (Hoffman 2016). This is an example of Star Trek helping fans reach out into the mundane world, which, as seen in Chapter 4, helps fans make meaningful relationships in different domains.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

6 Conclusion

6.1 Star Trek Fandom is a Religion

According to Statistics Canada, fewer Canadians than ever before now claim religious affiliation (Porter & McLaren 1999). My survey data also found that most Star Trek fans also did not identify as religious. When asked how much they agreed with the statement “I am a religious person,” 11.11% of fans strongly agreed, 17.46% somewhat agreed, 15.87% were neutral, 14.29% somewhat disagreed, and 41.27% strongly disagreed. What fans and statistics may not be considering is that perhaps the nature of religion has changed in our modern, technologically mediated culture. Media franchises may well form the basis for experiencing religious belonging and community in the changing nature of Western society.

Two fundamental results of religion are a unique feeling of belonging and a sense of community; Star Trek fandom offers both of these. Many of my interviewees describe it as unique, more of a family, and say that it provides the feeling of home. Furthermore, my surveys reveal that the Star Trek fandom provides a feeling of belonging, with 41.27% strongly agreeing, 28.81% somewhat agreeing, 23.81% feeling neutral, 4.76% somewhat disagreeing, and 1.59% strongly disagreeing. It provides a feeling of belonging that differs from the belonging they feel in everyday life activities. When asked how much they agreed with the statement “The sense of belonging, I feel being a part of the Star Trek Fandom is unique from the belonging I feel in everyday life activities,” 23.81% strongly agreed, 34.92% somewhat agreed, 20.63% were neutral, 7.94% somewhat disagreed, and 12.70% strongly disagreed. Furthermore, my survey data also supports the argument that Star Trek fandom helps the fans form an individual identity, with 50.79% strongly agreeing, 31.75% somewhat agreeing, 4.76% feeling neutral, 6.35% somewhat disagreeing, and 6.35% strongly disagreeing. The data also backs up the theory that

congregating in the Star Trek fandom makes the fans feel more secure in their identity, with 20.63% strongly agreeing, 31.75% somewhat agreeing, 30.16% feeling neutral, 11.11% somewhat disagreeing, and 6.35% strongly disagreeing.

Michael Jindra, Jenifer Porter, and others found that the Star Trek fan religion exhibits key salvific aspects of a religion, like canon and mythology, transcendence and ritual, and a mission. Through my surveys, I also found that what was considered canon was important to most Star Trek fans: 19.05% strongly agreeing, 34.92% somewhat agreeing, 23.81% feeling neutral, 11.11% somewhat disagreeing, and 11.11% strongly disagreeing.

Concerning transcendence, through my survey, I found that most Star Trek fans feel the Star Trek fandom has provided them with a place to escape reality, and they feel more connected to the Trek universe and characters when performing rituals such as cosplay and fanfiction. When asked how much they agreed with the statement “The Star Trek fandom has provided me with a place to escape reality,” 52.38% of survey participants strongly agreed, 26.98% somewhat agreed, 15.87% were neutral, 3.17% somewhat disagreed, and 1.59% strongly disagreed. When the survey participants were asked, “If you perform cosplay, do you feel as if you are a part of the Star Trek universe while doing so and therefore closer to it as well?” 16.39% said yes, 8.20% said maybe, and 75.41% said the question does not apply to them. Additionally, when asked, “Do you feel more connected to the characters you are cosplaying when in cosplay?” 17.24% said yes, 15.52% said no, and 67.24% said that the question did not apply to them. Furthermore, when asked how much they agreed with the statement “I feel more connected to the Star Trek universe and characters when reading or writing fanfiction,” 15.87% of survey participants strongly agreed, 25.40% somewhat agreed, 36.51% were neutral, 9.52% somewhat disagreed, and 12.70% strongly disagreed.

Regarding a mission, I found through my surveys that the Star Trek fandom affects the way many fans look at the world, and the fans aspire to make a difference in the world much like the characters of Star Trek did in theirs. 49.21% strongly agreed the statement “The Star Trek fandom has affected the way I look at the world,” 22.22% somewhat agreed, 19.05% were neutral, 4.76% somewhat disagreed, and 4.76% strongly disagreed. When asked how much they agreed with the statement “I aspire to make a difference in my reality the same as the characters of Star Trek have in theirs,” 53.97% strongly agreed, 33.33% somewhat agreed, 6.35% were neutral, 3.17% somewhat disagreed, and 3.17% strongly disagreed.

6.2 A Positive Parasocial Relationship

One of Ami Rokach’s six strategies for coping with loneliness was religion and, specifically, the sense of connection with a supreme being it provides. I found that this connection with a supreme being is also important in the Star Trek fan religion, and that it is often strengthened through rituals such as the practice of fanfiction and cosplay. This connection to a higher being, such as Spock, can be obtained through ritual as it provides teachings and opportunities that Star Trek fans experience belonging to the higher being in a specifically defined relationship to them (King 2003). Through rituals, fans get as close to the Star Trek characters as they possibly can, facilitating a connection between fans and creating a sense of belonging and community, which helps combat loneliness (Jindra 1994, p. 40). Through such ritual traditions, like-minded members of the Star Trek fandom increase their social circles and feel protected through their connection to the supreme being, meaning an individual above the self, which allows them to combat their loneliness, as they no longer feel as alone and afraid, as the members now live as a united entity (Rokach 2018).

Additionally, like in the religions Ami Rokach studied, the Star Trek fans form parasocial relationships with the characters and actors; in other words, fans connect to higher beings in a one-sided but productive relationship, and their affiliation with the Star Trek fandom provides them with strength, inner peace, and a sense of community or belonging that is in religious communities (Rokach 2018). The shared identity, ideology and mission that is provided to them by the series and their sacred figure Eugene Wesley Roddenberry, is reinforced through rituals such as pilgrimages and cosplay. In my survey data, I found that 25.40% of participants checked off that they perform Star Trek cosplay, and 53.64% of those who perform Star Trek cosplay feel more connected to the character they are cosplaying when in cosplay. 66.67% agree that cosplay does make them feel as if they are part of the Star Trek universe.

Ritual helps facilitate a connection and relationship with the Star Trek universe, and fans form an intrinsic connection to each other and a sense of moral responsibility (Wang, Sun, & Kramer 2021, p.284). The ritual act of fanfiction increased confidence and skill in fans, with reports of fans improving their writing and English as a second language; in addition, they report feeling greater confidence and developing a more outgoing personality (O'Donovan 2016, p. 54). Fandoms create a supportive social network through the relationships developed within the fandom via rituals and intense parasocial relationships, which help encourage fans within the fandom to develop increased confidence overall. Participation in fandom rituals and related activities can give you the tools to make it easier to relate to real life (O'Donovan 2016, p.54-55).

Additionally, parasocial relationships lead to more devoted friends in the lives of people who practice them, and these individuals were found to have more dating experience and more satisfaction with their lives (O'Donovan 2016, p. 52-53). Furthermore, the relationships fans

form due to their parasocial relationships are with likeminded people, which promotes an accepting community (O'Donovan 2016, p. 57)

I found in my secondary research, surveys, and online research that interpreting their issues through Star Trek characters made fans feel less alone. Furthermore, the moral code set by their ideologies made it easier for them to solve their issues, with fans looking towards the characters and shows for guidance giving the fans a sense of control (Ten Kate, Koster, & Van Der Waal 2017). When asked how much they agreed with the statement "At troubling times in my life, I sometimes look towards the characters of Star Trek for Guidance," 50.79% of survey participants strongly agreed, 23.81% somewhat agreed, 9.52% were neutral, 6.35% somewhat disagreed, and 9.52% strongly disagreed. Additionally in an article published by *The Guardian* titled "How Star Trek Helped Me Cope With the Death of My Sister," Jordan Hoffman stated that despite not being a die-hard Star Trek fan who had all the memorabilia, he has "difficulty remembering a time in my life before Star Trek and, what's more important, is that I don't recall when it hasn't been there for me" (Hoffman 2016). Star Trek makes it so that fans are never truly alone.

6.3 Transcendence

There are also the transcendent properties of ritual, facilitating not only an escape from the mundane world but also a connection to the past and the future, much like how larping allows fans to perform their mythology and step outside their regular lives. A contributing factor is that time and space are both manipulated in the Star Trek series, providing a message about all facets of time and ritual recourse (Jindra 1994, p. 41). Rachel O'Donovan found that fans use fandom to escape the lives they have in the mundane world as fans tend to be excluded from the

mainstream world, so they use fandom to escape the loneliness of the mainstream into a different reality (O'Donovan 2016, p.53-54).

Star Trek fans have a shared ideology and the goal of a utopian, humanistic world to work towards that provides them with the tools and coping mechanisms they need to deal with traumatic situations and loneliness: to find meaning. The experience of transcendence that can be experienced in the Star Trek fandom can result in spiritual and personal growth, which helps fans accept the reality of their tough situations and find meaning in their hardships and loneliness; fans develop more creative coping strategies, have increased problem-solving skills, and are more likely to have access to social support networks (Rokach 2018, p.65). Furthermore, transcendence helps fans build their identity by creating an outlook that there is more to life than what we can see or fully understand and making them more aware of who they are in relation to others (King 2003). This can create a sense of comfort for Star Trek fans in times of stress that builds optimism, seeing the past and present correlate with the better future depicted in Star Trek narratives.

6.4 Meaning Through Memorabilia

Star Trek fans also obtain meaning in their lives through consumption rituals: they impart meaning to the memorabilia they collect, which reduces loneliness. Once individuals can find meaning in some other part of their lives, these rituals will no longer affect the level of loneliness they experience, and thus the rituals are only needed to reduce loneliness in the absence of other meaningfulness (Wang, Sun, & Kramer 2021, p.285). These purchases have meaning because they make individuals feel closer to the fictional universe, and the purchasing process provides the fan with an opportunity to bond with other like-minded individuals who also find meaning in

the product. Because consumption ritual has a positive connection to greater meaning in life, it significantly decreases loneliness (Wang, Sun, & Kramer 2021, p.285). It was also found that consumer rituals contribute to a greater sense of self control and feeling of control over their lives, which can then lead to healthier choices. Research also supports the finding that it can also decrease anxiety, all of which helps reduce loneliness (Wang, Sun, & Kramer 2021, p.295).

6.5 Social Connection and Community

The Star Trek fan religion helps combat loneliness by providing fans with company, advice, guidance, and a sense of belonging. The sense of belonging is particularly relevant as it helps fans form social connections in non-religious domains later on (Rokach 2018, p.64; Ten Kate, Koster, & Van Der Waal 2017). In both my secondary and ethnographic research, I found that even though the initial connection is through a shared interest and being like-minded, the relationships formed in the Star Trek fandom evolve into feelings of acceptance. This acceptance, in turn, made the fans feel like they could relate to the mundane world more successfully due to no longer feeling judged, and they could rely on the fandom as a comfort when trying to start conversations with new people (O'Donovan 2016, p.51-55). This comfort also comes from the confidence the Star Trek fandom causes the fans to have through their social interactions in the fandom, which later helps them form relationships with non-fans and repair old relationships (O'Donovan 2016, p.54-55; see Chapters 3 and 4 above).

Particularly in my interviews and participant observation, I found that many fans see their connection to both Star Trek fans and the Star Trek fandom as a reliable, constant, and always available, even if they step away for a while. It is easier to form connections in the fandom because any interaction begins with a known, common interest to facilitate conversation. I found

many examples of fans describing the relationships that they make in the fandom as long-lasting, a community of people who care, because Star Trek attracts people with similar morals and values, which fosters a sense of intimacy, inclusion, and emotional security (Ten Kate, Koster, & Van Der Waal 2017; Pereira 2017, p.9). The emotional security of being part of a like-minded community facilitates the formation of relationships at a time when it is particularly harder to do so due to life circumstances (Jindra 1994, p. 38).

These morals and values stem from Star Trek's message of a humanitarian, utopian future that gives the fans hope and a mission to work towards, which provides the fans with meaning and a feeling of belonging. To maintain a sense of togetherness, the fandom has religious narratives (the series scripts), rites of passage (watching your first premier), and rituals (pilgrimage to conventions). In my survey research, I found that most participants agreed that the sense of belonging they felt from being a part of the Star Trek fandom was different from the belonging they felt in everyday life activities. Rokach found that having a satisfactory social support system makes people more generous, optimistic, and resilient, which invites warmth and goodwill from other people, which then improves social networks. Perhaps this is another reason why fans find the Star Trek fandom to be so warm, welcoming, kind and accepting. It may also play a role in forming relationships outside the fandom once they join. Furthermore, social support was also found to dull the effect of depression (Rokach 2018, p. 64).

Feeling that they belong to Star Trek fandom also helps fans form identities as individuals and as a community, which helps their social circles grow. In my survey research, when asked how much they agreed with the statement "Belonging to the Star Trek Fandom has caused my social circle to grow," 11.11% of participants strongly agreed, 31.75% somewhat agreed, 26.98% were neutral, 7.94% somewhat disagreed, and 22.22% strongly disagreed. The

messages, stories, social norms, etc., in the Star Trek fandom resonate with its members, so they share it with their family, who may also relate to it, which creates a greater connection to those members and fosters like-minded ideals and views, making the members feel less alone, more in control, and affirmed in themselves. I saw this a lot in my in-person and online observations, as well as in my interviews.

6.6 Online Community

As a new religion in our current, technologically mediated society, the Star Trek fandom has a huge presence online where fans can congregate; the vastness of the online community in comparison to offline can make it much easier to sustain this belonging (Lundby 2011, p.1223). The belonging is based on the established offline religion (Star Trek fandom) as an online extension of that structure. Though the basis is derived from the offline community, the online structure creates new forms of belonging by inviting a wider spectrum of social imagination/identification (Lundby 2011, p.1231-1232). It is important to know that a sense of belonging and community can exist outside of physical communities because many individuals who are experiencing loneliness are often alone or isolated due to some sort of life circumstance, like a pandemic. This acceptance, which fosters a sense of belonging and the opportunity to form meaningful relationships through these online fan forums, can help Star Trek fans not only alleviate loneliness but also bring them out of social isolation. Online relationships can also turn into meaningful in-person relationships, like in my interviews with Moe and Jessica Ko or the relationships documented in Vera Lucia Conceicao Pereira's work.

6.7 Hope

The social circles formed through religion, like the Star Trek fandom, and the mission or purpose it provides (in this case, the hope for a utopian future displayed in the series), have been found to make individuals push through the paralysis of loneliness. They push through this feeling in pursuit of their mission while supporting others in the fandom, and they do so whether they know it or not (Rokach 2018). In my survey, when asked how much they agree with the statement “The Star Trek fandom has affected the way that I look at the world,” 49.21% of the survey participants strongly agreed, 22.22% somewhat agreed, 19.05% were neutral, 4.76% somewhat disagreed, and 4.76% strongly disagreed. When asked how much they agree with the statement “I aspire to make a difference in my reality the same as the characters of Star Trek have in theirs,” 53.97% of survey participants strongly agreed, 33.33% somewhat agreed, 6.35% were neutral, 3.17% somewhat disagreed, and 3.17% strongly disagreed. This is because Star Trek inspires the fans to take control of their lives in the same way many other religions do, resulting in many fans achieving high-level careers to form the future they want (Jindra 2017, p.233).

This sense of control is important in providing an atmosphere where you don’t feel so alone and makes fans fully aware of themselves as human beings discovering their inner strengths, resources, and ability to survive despite loneliness or other struggles. The fans use the hope to turn fear and pain into control, which in turn removes desperation for intimate relationships and can lead to healthy relationships and a greater appreciation for human relations (Rokach 2018, p.63).

The Star Trek franchise also projects a message of equality through its narratives, which resonates with people who feel othered or like outsiders. This representation makes many fans

feel less alone and gives them hope for the future. Outsider characters in Star Trek allow fans to see that their lives still have meaning and purpose and that they can be accepted, all of which are important components in alleviating loneliness. As stated, before, it seems that a specific type of person is attracted to the Star Trek fandom, and it was found that it is beneficial to identity building to mix your personal beliefs with your faith (King 2003). Due to this preestablished interest in the core values, some fans believe so strongly in the universe's depiction of the future that they see it as a beacon of hope driving them to act and be better (Jindra 2017, p.234). In my research, I found that fans describe how Star Trek has helped them deal with close deaths in their lives, hard childhoods, divorce, and other hardships. Star Trek makes fans optimistic for the future; it helps them deal with not achieving the goals they want to because it shows them that the important goals are achieved as a collective, not an individual.

6.8 Concluding Thoughts

I wrote my thesis to address two questions: Is Star Trek fandom a “popular-culture based religion” which displays religious aspects similar to traditional religions? And what impact or effect does this community aspect have on the sense of loneliness and mental health of those who participate?

After completing my research, I believe the answer to both questions is yes. Star Trek is a religion which provides the same sense of community as traditional religions do for their followers. Participation in the Star Trek fandom increases fans' social circles as fans feel more comfortable interacting with and connecting to other fans. This is because they have the safety net of a common interest to fall back on because the fandom attracts people with similar mindsets. Star Trek fans also feel a sense of belonging unlike in other communities. The fans can relate easily to the mundane world through Star Trek, which makes it easier to talk about and

understand more serious matters in the world and life. This sense of belonging helps the fans shape their identity both as individuals and as a collective. All of this increases the fans' confidence, self-awareness and, by extension, helps to form relationships outside of the fandom. It was also found that Star Trek fans had an increased chance of forming romantic connections and family ties. The fandom also provides comfort through the narratives in the series, the mission, and the fan's parasocial relationships with the characters, often looking towards the series and characters to escape their reality and for guidance. The fans were found to have more confidence and skills because they were trying to work towards the future depicted in the series. Additionally, the hope the show provides with its image of the future was found to help fans cope with trauma, isolation, hardships, and loneliness. The connections made within the fandom, even on an acquaintance level, were found to be stronger than in other communities, with many fans describing it as non-judgmental, welcoming, encouraging, caring, and always there. The Star Trek fandom was found to provide comfort by always being a constant force, there for you when you leave for a while and come back. Additionally, Star Trek fans were able to find meaning through the fandom, and this meaning assuages their need until they are able and capable of forming meaning in other aspects of life. Overall, I would say that participation in the Star Trek fandom has a positive effect on loneliness and its member's mental health.

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Appendix A Survey Questions

Pick one option for each question that most applies to you

Q: How long approximately have you been a Star Trek fan for?

- a) less than a month
- b) 1-12 months
- c) 1-5 years
- d) 5-10 years
- e) 10+ years

Q: How often a year do you participate in activities related to Star Trek

- a) Weekly
- b) Monthly
- c) once a year
- d) multiple times a year
- e) once every few years
- f) Never

Q: Are events that you participate in recurring?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) I do not participate in events

Q: If yes to the above question do you repeatedly participate in the recurring events?

- a) Yes
- b) No

Q: Do you perform Star Trek cosplay?

- a) Yes
- b) No

Q: If yes to the above question, do you feel more connected to the character you are cosplaying when in cosplay?

- a) Yes
- b) No

Q: If you perform cosplay do you feel as if you are a part of the Star Trek universe while doing so and therefore closer to it as well?

- a) Yes
- b) No

Q: Do you go to Star Trek related conventions?

- a) Yes
- b) No

Q: If yes to the above question, does attending conventions make you feel like you are stepping outside of your normal life?

- a) Yes
- b) No

Pick the answer that you most identify with

Q: As a member of the Star Trek Fandom, I feel a sense of belonging.

A: Strongly Agree Somewhat Agree Neutral Somewhat Disagree Disagree

Q: The Star Trek fandom has affected the way that I look at the world.

A: Strongly Agree Somewhat Agree Neutral Somewhat Disagree Disagree

Q: The Star Trek fandom has provided me with a place to escape reality.

A: Strongly Agree Somewhat Agree Neutral Somewhat Disagree Disagree

Q: I aspire to make a difference in my reality the same as the characters of Star Trek have in theirs.

A: Strongly Agree Somewhat Agree Neutral Somewhat Disagree Disagree

Q: At troubling times in my life I sometimes look towards the characters of Star Trek for Guidance.

A: Strongly Agree Somewhat Agree Neutral Somewhat Disagree Disagree

Q: I am a religious person.

A: Strongly Agree Somewhat Agree Neutral Somewhat Disagree Disagree

Q: What is considered true canon in the Star Trek universe is important to me.

A: Strongly Agree Somewhat Agree Neutral Somewhat Disagree Disagree

Q: Belonging to the Star Trek Fandom has caused my social circle to grow.

A: Strongly Agree Somewhat Agree Neutral Somewhat Disagree Disagree

Q: Star Trek has helped me form my identity as an individual.

A: Strongly Agree Somewhat Agree Neutral Somewhat Disagree Disagree

Q: I feel more secure in myself and my identity when I gather with other Star Trek Fans.

A: Strongly Agree Somewhat Agree Neutral Somewhat Disagree Disagree

Q: I feel more connected to the Star Trek universe and characters when reading or writing fanfiction.

A: Strongly Agree Somewhat Agree Neutral Somewhat Disagree Disagree

Q: At times of stress or hard times I look towards the characters of Star Trek for comfort or advice on what I should do.

A: Strongly Agree Somewhat Agree Neutral Somewhat Disagree Disagree

Q: The sense of belonging I feel being a part of the Star Trek Fandom is unique from the belonging I feel in everyday life activities.

A: Strongly Agree Somewhat Agree Neutral Somewhat Disagree Disagree

Appendix B

Unstructured Interview Questions

Guiding interview questions

How would you describe your experience as a Star Trek fan?

What attracted you to the Star Trek? Or what caused you to become a fan?

Were there any moments in your time being a fan that really made an impact on you in general or on your life?

What are your relationships with other fans like?

Do you cosplay if so, how would you describe that experience?

Are you a regular at Sci-Fi conventions if so, why? Does the community feel different when you attend these conventions?

Do you ever look to the Star Trek series or the individuals affiliated to them for life advice?

Do you feel that Star Trek is a community space for you?

Appendix C

Consent Form Online Questionnaires

Nobody is Lonely Amongst the Stars: Sense of Religious Community in the Star Trek Fandom Survey

Title: “Nobody is Lonely Amongst the Stars: Sense of Religious Community in the Star Trek Fandom”

Researcher: Brittany Iolanda Calvert, Masters Student
Memorial University of Newfoundland
AA5033, 230 Elizabeth Avenue, St. John’s, NL
Ph: (705) 989-8122
E-mail: bicalvert@mun.ca

Supervisor: Dr Daniel Peretti, Assistant Professor
Memorial University of Newfoundland
ED4053 Education Bldg, St. John’s NL
Ph: (709) 864-8778
E-mail: dperetti@mun.ca

You have been invited to participate in a research project entitled “Nobody is Lonely Amongst the Stars: Sense of Religious Community in the Star Trek Fandom.”

This form is part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. Take time to read this carefully and to understand the information given to you. Please contact the researcher, Brittany Iolanda Calvert, if you have any questions about the study or would like more information before you consent.

[.jg]GkEjQ[My name is Brittany Iolanda Calvert and I am a Masters Student with the Religious Studies Department at Memorial University of Newfoundland. As part of my Master’s thesis, I am conducting research in relation to the Star Trek Fandom under the supervision of Dr. Daniel Peretti.

+kgd]hI]N jPI /jkGs As part of my course work, I am researching the Star Trek fandom as a type of religion that displays salvific aspects and presents the same communitive features as “Traditional” religions. Specifically, I am interested in how these features and community impact loneliness.

7P<j9]k7QYY] [0PQh /jkGs: You will participate in an anonymous online survey. The questions will be about your personal experience as a Star Trek fan and your relationship with religion. It consists of multiple choice and five scale questions that you will be filling out online.

!I<[h]NG<j< E]YYIEjQ[Online questionnaires will take place using the Qualtrics Survey Tool, Memorial University’s recommended and secure research survey platform. The Qualtrics Privacy policy can be found at: <https://www.qualtrics.com/privacy-statement/>

I[OjP]N 0QZI Estimated time commitment for questionnaires is approximately 15 minutes.

If you would like more information about this study, please contact:

The Student researcher, Brittany Iolanda Calvert via phone (705) 989-8122 or via e-mail bicalvert@mun.ca; The graduate supervisor, Dr. Daniel Peretti via phone (709) 864-8778 or e-mail dperetti@mun.ca

If there are any ethical concerns about the research I know I can contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research, such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant, you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

Consent:

By completing this survey you agree that:

- ‡ You have read the information about the research.
- ‡ You have been advised that you may ask questions about this study and receive answers prior to continuing.
- ‡ You are satisfied that any questions you had have been addressed.
- ‡ You understand what the study is about and what you will be doing.
- ‡ You understand that you are free to withdraw participation from the study prior to submitting by closing your browser window or navigating away from this page, without having to give a reason and that doing so will not affect you now or in the future.
- ‡ You understand that this data is being collected anonymously and therefore your data **cannot** be removed once you submit this survey.

By consenting to this online survey, you do not give up your legal rights and do not release the researchers from their professional responsibilities.

Please retain a copy of this consent information for your records.

Clicking yes below and submitting this survey constitutes consent and implies your agreement to the above statements.

Do you consent to performing this survey and to your information being used in the above mentioned study?

☐ Yes ☐ No



Appendix D
Consent form in Person
MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY OF NEWFOUNDLAND
RELIGIOUS STUDIES MASTERS STUDENT RESEARCH
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title: "Nobody is Lonely Amongst the Stars: Sense of Religious Community in the Star Trek Fandom"

Researcher: Brittany Iolanda Calvert, Masters Student
Memorial University of Newfoundland
AA5033, 230 Elizabeth Avenue, St. John's, NL
Ph: (705) 989-8122
E-mail: bicalvert@mun.ca
Memorial University of Newfoundland

Supervisor: ED4053 Education Bldg, St. John's NL
Ph: (709) 864-8778
E-mail: dperetti@mun.ca

Dr Daniel Peretti,
Assistant Professor

You have been invited to participate in a research project entitled "Nobody is Lonely Amongst the Stars: Sense of Religious Community in the Star Trek Fandom."

This form is part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. It also describes your right to withdraw from the study. In order to decide whether you wish to participate in this research study, you should understand enough about its risks and benefits to be able to make an informed decision. This is the informed consent process. Take time to read this carefully and to understand the information given to you. Please contact the researcher, Brittany Iolanda Calvert, if you have any questions about the study or would like more information before you consent.

It is entirely up to you to decide whether to take part in this research. If you choose not to take part in this research or if you decide to withdraw from the research once it has started, there will be no negative consequences for you, now or in the future.

Introduction: My name is Brittany Iolanda Calvert and I am a Masters Student with the Religious Studies Department at Memorial University of Newfoundland. As part of my Master's thesis, I am conducting research in relation to the Star Trek Fandom under the supervision of Dr Daniel Peretti.

Purpose of the Study: As part of my course work, I am researching the Star Trek fandom as a type of religion that displays salvific aspects and presents the same communitive features as "Traditional" religions. Specifically, I am interested in how these features and community impact loneliness.

What You Will Do In This Study: You will participate in a survey and/or interview. Participation is completely voluntary. The questions will be about your personal experience as a star trek fan and your relationship with religion. The interview will be unstructured, and audio recorded. For the survey you would be filling circling the answers on paper that you feel are best to each question. The interview and survey will be conducted in this public space. If you choose to give permission photographs may be taken of you as well, your face will be blurred unless you request otherwise.

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Length of Time: Interviews will be brief and unstructured. Estimated time commitment for questionnaires is approximately 15 minutes, and estimated time commitment for an in-person interview is approximately 10 minutes for in-person interviews. Photographs would take approximately less than a minute to complete.

Withdrawal from the Study: You may choose to end your participation in the project during the data collection process. During this period of time, if you decide to withdraw, anything collected from you, including audio recordings of interviews, transcripts, and photographs. There will be no consequences if you choose to withdraw. After September 30th 2023, it will be unfeasible for me to remove the data from my analysis as it will have already been integrated with other data that had been collected. I will send an audio copy of the interview to you via email prior to September 30, 2023 if you have any concerns with materials in the interviews, this will be your chance to clarify, redact any comments made, or withdraw completely from the project before 4 weeks after receiving the recording.

Possible Benefits: There are no predictable benefits from participating in this interview.

Possible Risks: There may be some moments of emotional feelings during recalling of experiences. If this does occur and at any point, you do not feel comfortable answering a question you may choose not to. Should you feel the need to contact additional emotional support you can contact the Mental Health Helpline at **8-1-1** or consult the following resources:

Ontario: <https://ontario.cmha.ca/provincial-mental-health-supports/>

Newfoundland: <https://www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19/public-health-guidance/mental-health-and-wellness/>

Canada Wide: <https://www.ccmhs-ccsms.ca/mental-health-resources-1>

Confidentiality: The ethical duty of confidentiality includes safeguarding participants' identities, personal information, and data from unauthorized access, use, or disclosure. Any materials and information collected including field notes, audio-recordings, interview transcripts, and photographs, will be accessible to only the researcher with the project is ongoing.

Privacy and Anonymity: Anonymity refers to protecting participants' identifying characteristics, such as name or description of physical appearance. All participants in the study will be de-identified, that is, no personal or identifying data regarding study participants will be released to anyone other than the Principal Investigator and Supervisor, and will not be published unless the participant specifically requests otherwise within the consent form. A pseudonym may be requested to help protect participant anonymity. The use of the pseudonym will allow for protection of your identity as much as possible. However, if you share a unique experience that inadvertently identifies you, the pseudonym may not be entirely effective because of the small community that you are a part of, and the use of direct quotes in this thesis project. Furthermore if you chose to take part in any photography your anonymity will no longer be ensured as well. Additionally, please be aware that research interviews that take place in public spaces, such as Fan Conventions, may have limited privacy given the nature of the space.

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Recording of Data: The interview will be recorded with a digital audio-recorder and saved as an electronic file with your permission. Any photographs taken will only be with your express permission, and will be de-identified using face and identifying feature blurring if this choice is indicated on this consent form.

Storage of Data: I will be encrypting and storing the data on a laptop computer that is only accessible by a password by only the Principal Investigator and her Supervisor. Any hard-copy data will be kept in a locked box until destruction, accessible to only the Principal Investigator and her Supervisor. I will retain all the data for a minimum of five years in accordance with Memorial University's policy on Integrity in Scholarly Research.

Reporting and Sharing of Results: Survey data will be reported in an aggregate form and used for reporting statistical data. The interviews will be used to give examples to and support the statistical data, each participant remaining under a pseudonym unless requested otherwise. Interview notes, audio-recordings, transcripts, and photographs made while conducting my research may be used in future papers, and future publications. Copies of the researcher's thesis will be made publically available. Upon completion, my thesis will be available at Memorial University's Queen Elizabeth II library, Accessible through this link: https://research.library.mun.ca/view/theses_dept/ReligiousStudies.html

Questions: You are welcome to ask questions at any time during your participation in this research. If you would like more information about this study, please contact:

The Student researcher, Brittany Iolanda Calvert via phone (705) 989-8122 or via e-mail bicalvert@mun.ca;

The graduate supervisor, Dr. Daniel Peretti via phone (709) 864-8778 or e-mail dperetti@mun.ca;

I, _____ (participant) allow Brittany Iolanda Calvert (student researcher) to use the voluntarily recorded materials described below for research towards the completion of their research in relation to their thesis and class work as part of their studies in the Department of Religious Studies, Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada.

I agree to be photographed ☐ Yes ☐ No
I would like my photographs to be ☐ Yes ☐ No
de-identified using blurring of facial and ☐ N/A

I agree to the use of direct quotations ☐ Yes ☐ No I allow my
name to be identified in any publications resulting from ☐ Yes ☐ No
this study, if No: I wish to be identified as _____

(pseudonym).

I would like to have a copy of my interview audio emailed to me at

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A
the following email address: _____



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RELIGIOUS STUDIES MASTERS STUDENT RESEARCH
INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

As the participant, I understand that the uses of this research may include thesis, articles, class papers and in-class presentations. I give the student researcher permission to use these materials at her discretion for all academic purposes. (Please initial)

Yes: ____ No: ____ Yes, with the following exceptions: _____
_____.

As the participant, I want the researcher to (choose one and initial):

_____ destroy the materials after the completion of thesis, at minimum five year waiting period.
_____ keep the materials for future research use.

CONSENT: Your signature on this form means that (please initial here and then sign the bottom of form):

_____ You have read the information about the research.
_____ You have been able to ask questions about this study.
_____ You are satisfied with the answers to all of your questions.
_____ You understand what the study is about and what you will be doing. _____ You give permission to use any photographs taken and understand that published photos means that your anonymity will no longer be ensured.
_____ You understand that you are free to withdraw from the study before September 30, 2023, without having to give a reason, and that doing so will not affect you now or in the future.

If you sign this form, you do not give up your legal rights and do not release the researchers from their professional responsibilities.



**MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY OF NEWFOUNDLAND
RELIGIOUS STUDIES MASTERS STUDENT RESEARCH
INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

Participant's Signature:

- ☐ I have read what this study is about and understood the risks and benefits. I have had adequate time to think about this and had the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered.
- ☐ I agree to participate in the research project understanding the risks and contributions of my participation, that my participation is voluntary, and that I may end my participation.
- ☐ A copy of this Informed Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

If there are any ethical concerns concerning the research which cannot be resolved by the student researcher, I know I can contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

of Participant Date _____ Signature

E-mail you want the audio recording sent to

Student Researcher's Signature:

I have explained this study to the best of my ability. I invited questions and gave answers. I believe that the participant fully understands what is involved in being in the study, any potential risks of the study and that he or she has freely chosen to be in the study.

of Principal Investigator Date _____ Signature

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research, such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant, you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.



Consent Form Online Interviews
MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY OF NEWFOUNDLAND
RELIGIOUS STUDIES MASTERS STUDENT RESEARCH
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title: "Nobody is Lonely Amongst the Stars: Sense of Religious Community in the Star Trek Fandom"

Researcher: Brittany Iolanda Calvert, Masters Student
Memorial University of Newfoundland
AA5033, 230 Elizabeth Avenue, St. John's, NL
Ph: (705) 989-8122
E-mail: bicalvert@mun.ca

Supervisor: Dr Daniel Peretti, Assistant Professor
Memorial University of Newfoundland
ED4053 Education Bldg, St. John's NL
Ph: (709) 864-8778
E-mail: dperetti@mun.ca

You have been invited to participate in a research project entitled "Nobody is Lonely Amongst the Stars: Sense of Religious Community in the Star Trek Fandom."

This form is part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. It also describes your right to withdraw from the study. In order to decide whether you wish to participate in this research study, you should understand enough about its risks and benefits to be able to make an informed decision. This is the informed consent process. Take time to read this carefully and to understand the information given to you. Please contact the researcher, Brittany Iolanda Calvert, if you have any questions about the study or would like more information before you consent.

It is entirely up to you to decide whether to take part in this research. If you choose not to take part in this research or if you decide to withdraw from the research once it has started, there will be no negative consequences for you, now or in the future.

Introduction: My name is Brittany Iolanda Calvert and I am a Masters Student with the Religious Studies Department at Memorial University of Newfoundland. As part of my Master's thesis, I am conducting research in relation to the Star Trek Fandom under the supervision of Dr. Daniel Peretti.

Purpose of the Study: As part of my course work, I am researching the Star Trek fandom as a type of religion that displays salvific aspects and presents the same communitive features as "Traditional" religions. Specifically, I am interested in how these features and community impact loneliness.

What You Will Do In This Study: You will participate in an interview that will be audio recorded. Participation is completely voluntary. The questions will be about your personal experience as a Star Trek fan and your relationship religion. Interviews will be conducted via Zoom.

Length of Time: Online interviews will take approximately 30 minutes to complete.



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INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

Withdrawal from the Study: You may choose to end your participation in the project during the data collection process. During this period of time, if you decide to withdraw, anything collected from you, including audio recordings of interviews, and transcripts. There will be no consequences if you choose to withdraw. After September 30th 2023, it will be unfeasible for me to remove the data from my analysis as it will have already been integrated with other data that had been collected. I will send an audio copy of the interview to you via email prior to September 30, 2023 if you have any concerns with materials in the interviews, this will be your chance to clarify, redact any comments made, or withdraw completely from the project before 4 weeks after receiving the Audio Recording.

Possible Benefits: There are no predictable benefits from participating in this interview.

Possible Risks: There may be some moments of emotional feelings during recalling of experiences. If this does occur and at any point, you do not feel comfortable answering a question you may choose not to. Should you feel the need to contact additional emotional support you can contact the Mental Health Helpline at **8-1-1** or consult the following resources:

Ontario:

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/find-mental-health-support>

<https://ontario.cmha.ca/provincial-mental-health-supports/>

Newfoundland:

<https://www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19/public-health-guidance/mental-health-and-wellness/>

Canada Wide:

<https://www.ccmhs-ccsms.ca/mental-health-resources-1>

United States:

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/find-help>

Confidentiality: The ethical duty of confidentiality includes safeguarding participants' identities, personal information, and data from unauthorized access, use, or disclosure. Any materials and information collected including audio-recordings and interview transcript, will be accessible to only the researcher with the project is ongoing.

Privacy and Anonymity: Anonymity refers to protecting participants' identifying characteristics, such as name or description of physical appearance. All participants in the study will be de-identified, that is, no personal or identifying data regarding study participants will be released to anyone other than the Principal Investigator and Supervisor, and will not be published unless the participant specifically requests otherwise within the consent form. A pseudonym may be requested to help protect participant anonymity. The use of the pseudonym will allow for protection of your identity as much as



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possible. However, if you share a unique experience that inadvertently identifies you, the pseudonym may not be entirely effective because of the small community that you are a part of, and the use of direct quotes in this thesis project. For the online interviews, please review Zoom's privacy policy here: <https://explore.zoom.us/en/privacy/>. Every reasonable effort will be made to ensure your de-identification. You will not be identified in publications without your explicit permission.

Recording of Data: The interview will be recorded with a digital audio-recorder and saved as an electronic file with your permission.

Storage of Data: I will be encrypting and storing the data on a laptop computer that is only accessible by a password by only the Principal Investigator and her Supervisor. Any hard-copy data will be kept in a locked box until destruction, accessible to only the Principal Investigator and her Supervisor. I will retain all the data for a minimum of five years in accordance with Memorial University's policy on Integrity in Scholarly Research.

Reporting and Sharing of Results: Interview notes, audio-recordings, and transcripts made while conducting my research may be used in future papers, and future publications. Copies of the researcher's thesis will be made publically available. Upon completion, my thesis will be available at Memorial University's Queen Elizabeth II library, accessible through this link: https://research.library.mun.ca/view/theses_dept/ReligiousStudies.html

Questions: You are welcome to ask questions at any time during your participation in this research. If you would like more information about this study, please contact:
The Student researcher, Brittany Iolanda Calvert via phone (705) 989-8122 or via e-mail bicalvert@mun.ca; The graduate supervisor, Dr. Daniel Peretti via phone (709) 864-8778 or e-mail dperetti@mun.ca

I, _____ (participant) allow Brittany Iolanda Calvert (student researcher) to use the voluntarily recorded materials described below for research towards the completion of their research in relation to their thesis and class work as part of their studies in the Department of Religious Studies, Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada.

I agree to the use of direct quotations	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
I allow my name to be identified in any publications resulting from this study, if No: I wish to be identified as _____ (pseudonym).	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
I would like to have a copy of my interview audio emailed to me at the following email address: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A

As the participant, I understand that the uses of this research may include thesis, articles, class papers and in-class presentations. I give the student researcher permission to use these materials at her discretion for all academic purposes. (Please initial)

Yes: ____ No: ____ Yes, with the following exceptions: _____
_____.



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As the participant, I want the researcher to (choose one and initial):

- _____ destroy the materials after the completion of thesis, at minimum five year waiting period.
_____ keep the materials for future research use.

CONSENT: Your signature on this form means that (please initial here and then sign the bottom of form):

- _____ You have read the information about the research.
_____ You have been able to ask questions about this study.
_____ You are satisfied with the answers to all of your questions.
_____ You understand what the study is about and what you will be doing.
_____ You understand that you are free to withdraw from the study before September 30, 2023, without having to give a reason, and that doing so will not affect you now or in the future.

If you sign this form, you do not give up your legal rights and do not release the researchers from their professional responsibilities.

Participant's Signature:

- ☐ I have read what this study is about and understood the risks and benefits. I have had adequate time to think about this and had the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered.
- ☐ I agree to participate in the research project understanding the risks and contributions of my participation, that my participation is voluntary, and that I may end my participation.
- ☐ A copy of this Informed Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

If there are any ethical concerns concerning the research which cannot be resolved by the student researcher, I know I can contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

_ Signature of Participant

Date

Student Researcher's Signature:

I have explained this study to the best of my ability. I invited questions and gave answers. I believe that the participant fully understands what is involved in being in the study, any potential risks of the study and that he or she has freely chosen to be in the study.

_ Signature of Principal Investigator

Date

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research, such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant, you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

Consent Form Online Photo



MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY OF NEWFOUNDLAND RELIGIOUS STUDIES
MASTERS

STUDENT RESEARCH MEDIA USE INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR
ONLINE IMAGES

Title: "Nobody is Lonely Amongst the Stars: Sense of Religious Community in the Star Trek Fandom"

Researcher: Brittany Iolanda Calvert, Masters Student
Memorial University of Newfoundland
AA5033, 230 Elizabeth Avenue, St. John's, NL
Ph: (705) 989-8122
E-mail: bicalvert@mun.ca

Supervisor: Dr Daniel Peretti, Assistant Professor
Memorial University of Newfoundland
ED4053 Education Bldg, St. John's NL
Ph: (709) 864-8778
E-mail: dperetti@mun.ca

You have been invited to participate in a research project entitled "Nobody is Lonely Amongst the Stars: Sense of Religious Community in the Star Trek Fandom."

This form is part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. It also describes your right to withdraw from the study. In order to decide whether you wish to participate in this research study, you should understand enough about its risks and benefits to be able to make an informed decision. This is the informed consent process. Take time to read this carefully and to understand the information given to you. Please contact the researcher, Brittany Iolanda Calvert, if you have any questions about the study or would like more information before you consent.

It is entirely up to you to decide whether to take part in this research. If you choose not to take part in this research or if you decide to withdraw from the research once it has started, there will be no negative consequences for you, now or in the future.

Introduction: My name is Brittany Iolanda Calvert and I am a Masters Student with the Religious Studies Department at Memorial University of Newfoundland. As part of my Master's thesis, I am conducting research in relation to the Star Trek Fandom under the supervision of Dr Daniel Peretti.

Purpose of the Study: As part of my course work, I am researching the Star Trek fandom as a type of religion that displays salvific aspects and presents the same communitive features as "Traditional" religions. Specifically, I am interested in how these features and community impact loneliness.

What You Will Do In This Study: You will be asked to grant me permission to use your images and/or video stills for the use of my research. With your permission, I will retain digital copies of your photos and/or still of your videos.



MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY OF NEWFOUNDLAND RELIGIOUS STUDIES MASTERS

STUDENT RESEARCH MEDIA USE INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Withdrawal from the Study: You may choose to end your participation in the project during the data collection process. During this period of time, if you decide to withdraw, anything collected from you, including photographs and video stills, will be destroyed. There will be no consequences if you choose to withdraw. After September 30th 2023, it will be unfeasible for me to remove the data from my analysis as it will have already been integrated with other data that have been collected.

Possible Benefits: There are no predictable benefits from participating in this study.

Possible Risks: There is the possible risk of being identified if these images have been posted online. However, unless you choose otherwise, all possible measures will be taken to protect your identity such as using a false name and blurring your face or any other identifiable features.

Confidentiality: The ethical duty of confidentiality includes safeguarding participants' identities, personal information, and data from unauthorized access, use, or disclosure. Any materials and information collected including photographs and video stills will be accessible to only the researcher and her supervisor.

Privacy and Anonymity: De-identification refers to protecting participants' identifying characteristics, such as name or description of physical appearance. All participants in the study will be de-identified, that is, no personal or identifying data regarding study participants will be released to anyone other than the Principal Investigator and Supervisor, and will not be published. A pseudonym may be requested to help remain de-identified. The use of the pseudonym will allow for protection of your identity as much as possible. You will not be identified in publications without your explicit permission.

Storage of Data: Online photographs will be saved on an encrypted computer accessible only to the principal investigator and her supervisor, and will be retained for five years following data collection for the purposes of publication preparation, and will subsequently be destroyed. Faces and identifying features, if requested on the informed consent form, will be blurred using a photo editing software (e.g. Photoshop).

Reporting and Sharing of Results: Photographs and video stills made while conducting my research may be used and/or described in future papers, and future publications. Copies of the researcher's thesis will be made publically available. Upon completion, my thesis will be available at Memorial University's Queen Elizabeth II library, accessible through this link:

https://research.library.mun.ca/view/theses_dept/ReligiousStudies.html

Questions: You are welcome to ask questions at any time during your participation in this research. If you would like more information about this study, please contact:

The Student researcher, Brittany Iolanda Calvert via phone (709) 989-8122 or via e-mail bicalvert@mun.ca; The graduate supervisor, Dr. Daniel Peretti via phone (709) 864-8778 or e-mail dperetti@mun.ca



MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY OF NEWFOUNDLAND RELIGIOUS
STUDIES MASTERS STUDENT RESEARCH MEDIA USE
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I, _____ (participant) allow Brittany Iolanda Calvert (student researcher) to use the voluntarily recorded materials described below for research towards the completion of their research in relation to their thesis and class work as part of her studies in the Department of Religious Studies, Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada.

I would like my photographs to be de-identified using blurring of facial and distinguishing features	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A
I agree to the use of direct quotations	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
I allow my name to be identified in any publications resulting from this study, if No: I wish to be identified as _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

As the participant, I understand that the uses of this research may include thesis, articles, class papers and in-class presentations. I give the student researcher permission to use these materials at her discretion for all academic purposes. (Please initial)

Yes: ____ No: ____ Yes, with the following exceptions: _____

As the participant, I want the researcher to (choose one and initial):
_____ destroy the materials after the completion of thesis, at minimum five year waiting period. _____ keep the materials for future research use.

CONSENT: Your signature on this form means that (please initial here and then sign the bottom of form): _____ You have read the information about the research.

_____ You have been able to ask questions about this study.

_____ You are satisfied with the answers to all of your questions.

_____ You understand what the study is about and what you will be doing.

_____ You give permission to use any images taken and understand that, while de-identification protocols (i.e. facial and distinguishing feature blurring) will take place unless otherwise specified, anonymity is not guaranteed)

_____ You understand that you are free to withdraw from the study before September 30, 2023, without having to give a reason, and that doing so will not affect you now or in the future.

If you sign this form, you do not give up your legal rights and do not release the researchers from their professional responsibilities.



**MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY OF NEWFOUNDLAND RELIGIOUS
STUDIES MASTERS STUDENT RESEARCH MEDIA USE
INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

Participant's Signature:

- ☐ I have read what this study is about and understood the risks and benefits. I have had adequate time to think about this and had the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered.
- ☐ I agree to participate in the research project understanding the risks and contributions of my participation, that my participation is voluntary, and that I may end my participation.
- ☐ A copy of this Informed Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

If there are any ethical concerns concerning the research which cannot be resolved by the student researcher, I know I can contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

Signature of Participant

Date

Student Researcher's Signature:

I have explained this study to the best of my ability. I invited questions and gave answers. I believe that the participant fully understands what is involved in being in the study, any potential risks of the study and that he or she has freely chosen to be in the study.

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research, such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant, you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.