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**“THEY F*CKING OWN THIS SH*T. THEY’RE RUNNING IT”:
ARE MUSIC FANDOMS ORGANIZATIONS?**

by

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**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS**

PROFESSOR BARBARA JUNISBAI

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“[Fangirls are] the most honest — especially if you’re talking about teenage girls, but older as well. They have that bullshit detector. You want honest people as your audience. We’re so past that dumb outdated narrative of ‘Oh, these people are girls, so they don’t know what they’re talking about.’ They’re the ones who know what they’re talking about. They’re the people who listen obsessively. They fucking own this shit. They’re running it.”

– Harry Styles (as cited by Sheffield, 2019)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	4
ABSTRACT	6
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	7
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	9
<i>History of Organizational Studies: The Modern Perspective and Organization as Machine</i>	10
<i>The Post-Modern Perspective: Organization as Domination and Organization as Politics</i>	13
<i>The Symbolic Perspective: Organization as Organism and Organization as Culture</i>	14
<i>Organizations in Flux</i>	16
<i>Identity</i>	17
<i>Conclusion</i>	17
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY	19
<i>Participants</i>	19
<i>Procedure</i>	20
<i>Limitations</i>	22
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS	24
<i>Defining Organization</i>	24
<i>Defining Fandom</i>	25
<i>Characteristics of Fandom and Qualifications of Membership</i>	28
<i>Politics and Power</i>	32
<i>(Political) Identities</i>	38
<i>Conflict</i>	42
<i>Culture</i>	43
<i>Change and Lasting Impacts</i>	47
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION	52
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION	60
References	63
Appendix A	65
Appendix B	67
Appendix C	69

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ABSTRACT

Organizational Studies as a field typically focuses on organizations such as workplaces, large businesses, corporations, or governments. While organizational theorists often recognize in their definitions of organization that other forms of human groups and communities can be considered organizations, they don't often include non-traditional organizations as examples in literature. In this thesis, I argue that music fandoms are a form of organization by examining multiple definitions, power relations, culture, influence on identity, and lasting impacts of fandom.

Keywords: organization, fan, fandom, organizational culture, power, identity, lasting impact

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

I have long defined myself as a fangirl. As I sit writing this, I am wearing a Harry Styles sweatshirt and I painted my nails yesterday the same way he has them painted on the album artwork of his upcoming sophomore album. I have an alert on my calendar for his performance on SNL tonight and post-notifications on for not only him, but his “HSHQ” account and three fan-run update accounts. Many of my friends are people I have met through fandom, including one friend from over 2,500 miles away who I have known for almost seven years. Like many of my study participants, I believe that these behaviors (owning merchandise, interacting with others in fandom, staying up to date with the artist, and an overall passion about everything the artist does) qualify me as a member of music fandom. Music fandoms have been a defining feature of my life since early high school when I first began joining internet fan communities.

When I first thought about what to write my thesis on, I was at a loss. My professor advised me to pick something I really loved and would enjoy researching for a whole semester. Surprisingly, I did not initially think of fandoms. Perhaps this was because I was stuck in the confined construct of how we tend to define organizations. Organizational Studies as a field typically focuses on organizations such as workplaces, large businesses, corporations, or governments. While organizational theorists often recognize in their definitions of organization that other forms of human groups and communities can be considered organizations, they don't often include non-traditional organizations as examples in literature. Lamenting to a friend that I had no idea what to write about, she commented one day, “Why don't you write about music fandoms? That's something you love.”

Pondering this for a few days, I began to think of the many ways that fans organize: fan projects like the one in Milan, Italy, where fans spelled out “We are 1D Family” by holding up

colored papers from every seat of the stadium (Kolgraft 2018), raising thousands of dollars for charity in honor of band member's birthdays like a fundraiser that raised \$10k for the British Asian Trust in honor of Zayn Malik (Mellor 2015), or starting a company selling One Direction related t-shirts and earning over \$200k in their first year in business (Isler 2017). These are all examples of things that occurred in or through fandom and that required immense coordination from large groups of people. While feats like these are what initially made me think of fandoms as organizations or at least as "organized," when I thought more about what I had learned in organizational studies, I realized that the day-to-day realities of fandom are what make it an organization: I thought about culture and power in music fandoms, and the impact that fandoms have on fans' identities and lives in general.

To promote the conception of music fandoms as organizations, I conducted this study. I interviewed 25 people who self-identified as members of fandoms and asked them about the fandoms they were in, what qualified them as members, and how they defined fandom. I also asked them about power and culture within fandoms and fandom's impact on fan's identities and lives. Through conducting this research, I provided an opportunity to participants (and any future readers and myself) to consider a significant part of their life that is, unfortunately, often seen as frivolous or not serious in an academic context.

I argue that fandoms can and should be considered organizations. First, I give an overview of organizational studies literature. Then, I explain the methodology of my study and summarize my findings. Next, I discuss my findings and connect them with established research and theory. Finally, I conclude by considering the implications of my study and how this research could be improved upon in the future.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Organizational theorists argue that we all organize and that we are always organizing: “organizing is a key activity of life” (Hatch, 2011, xi). We go to school, work, the store, the bank; we travel, we interact with the government, we go to hospitals, we attend houses of worship: “just about everything we do occurs within an organization” (Grey, 2013, 129). Organizational scholar Mary Jo Hatch (2011) defines organization as what happens “when people work together to accomplish some desired end state or goal. It can happen through intentionally designed activity, spontaneous improvisation, or some combination of the two, but it always depends upon coordinated effort” (1).

Definitions of organization and organizing vary among theorists and have changed over time. In this literature review, I endeavor to summarize three different approaches for analyzing organizations, using both a table of perspectives developed by Mary Jo Hatch (2011) and metaphors used by organizational theorist Gareth Morgan (2006). I will then discuss how organizations are changing today to be more transient or temporal. Finally, I will summarize literature about how organization interacts with identities, specifically gender, race, class, sexuality, and ethnic/cultural identities.

Organizational Studies has long been concerned with how we analyze organizations, emphasizing that the way we look at an organization highlights some elements while hiding others. Chris Grey (2013), organizational theorist, contends that “[the study of organization] is crucially concerned with a contestation about what features of organizations will be noticed or ignored, emphasized or discounted, seen as important or dismissed as irrelevant” (130). Similarly, Morgan (2006) argues that “the “reading” of a situation always implies a degree of authorship [...] We are not passive observers interpreting and responding to the events and

situations that we see. We play an important role in shaping those interpretations, and thus the way events unfold” (Morgan, 2006, 365). We, as organizational researchers and theorists, highlight and hide, we are active authors. Grey (2013) goes so far as to claim that this authorship can change the way we define organizations: “in organizations [...] the facts do not speak for themselves. They are always interpreted and when the interpretations ‘stick’ and get believed by all or most people they become constructions. This issue can be seen even at the most basic level of defining what an organization is” (130).

As Morgan (2006) argues, to “read” or understand organizations we often rely upon metaphors, even if implicitly. Metaphors both highlight and hide; they provide “a way of thinking” and “a way of seeing” (4). It is for this reason I have chosen to use the metaphor approach in my organizational analysis. While predominate narratives about what constitutes an organization may hide the organizational qualities of fandoms, by using multiple organizational metaphors or lenses we can reveal aspects of fandoms we might not otherwise notice. The following table lists the key attributes of the three perspectives and corresponding metaphors that I used in my analysis:

Modern Perspective: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ “Objectively real entities” ○ Rational, efficient, effective (Hatch) 	Organization as Machine: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mechanical overtones, rational, predictable (Morgan) ○ Efficiency, hierarchy, division of labor (Grey)
Post-Modern Perspective: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ “Sites for enacting power relations” ○ Irrationality, oppression (Hatch) 	Organization as Domination: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Further interests of elites at expense of others, systemic exploitation (Morgan) Organization as Politics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Who sets the rules & sanctions (Grey) ○ Scarcity of resources results in conflict ○ Organizations are both political arenas & agents (Bolman & Deal)
Symbolic Perspective: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Socially constructed realities ○ Meaning creates bonds (Hatch) ○ Symbols, values (Grey; Acker) 	Organization as Culture: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Collective meaning ○ Assumptions, values guide behavior (Hatch) Organization as Organism: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Organizations reflect & respond to the external environment (Morgan; Hatch)

History of Organizational Studies: The Modern Perspective and Organization as Machine

Human organizations are complex, and as Hatch (2011) explains, they require both competition and cooperation (3). We can think about the origins of human organization by

considering the development of local communities and eventually governments and nations: a progression from villages to towns, cities, city states, and eventually countries (Hatch, 2011, 4).

Benedict Anderson (1983) describes nations as “imagined communities:”

[The nation] is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion [...] it is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. (6-7)

Anderson argues that belonging to a nation does not require face-to-face interaction but instead a perceived horizontal comradeship. We can perhaps extrapolate this to organizations.

According to Morgan (1993), we began describing groups as organizations in the mid 1800s:

The idea of describing a group of people as “an organization” became popular in the wake of the Industrial Revolution and acquired mechanical overtones. Organizations, like machines, came to be viewed as instruments that could be rationally designed and managed, so that their human and technical “organs” behaved in a rational, predictable way. (278)

Grey (2013) argues that “for the bulk of mainstream organization theory, the interpretation and construction of organizations is almost always refracted through the lens of efficiency” (130). Along with this push for efficiency came the assumption that “organization must mean hierarchy and a division of labour between ‘managers’ and others, whether they be called workers, professionals, employees, team members, or even partners” (135).

Similar to the organization as machine metaphor, Hatch (2013) describes the “modern perspective” of organizational theory which views organizations as “objectively real entities operating in a real world; when well designed and managed they are systems of decision and action driven by norms of rationality, efficiency, and effectiveness directed toward stated objectives” (15). Again, in this perspective we see a focus on management and efficiency. This definition brings to mind organizations that are workplaces and operate through hierarchy.

But if “just about everything we do” occurs in organizations, how can they be limited to only bodies of government and workplaces? Grey (2013) posits:

It’s true that most of the study of organizations has been concerned with the corporations and institutions where people work, and usually the larger ones at that. But more fundamentally, all forms of collective activity – politics, the family, as well as work – are about organization in some way. Which also means – *and it’s a major failing of most books to ignore this* – that to study organizations involves thinking about philosophy, politics, ethics, and much more. And behind or beyond these abstractions are the lived experiences of people not just working together but joking, arguing, criticizing, fighting, deciding, lusting, despairing, creating, resisting, fearing, hoping or, in short, organizing. (2; emphasis added)

So, Grey argues, organizations are not limited to what we might think of traditionally as organizations: large corporations, institutions, governments, or other workplaces; but any “lived experience” such as communities, families, networks, or maybe even music fandoms.

Thus far I have presented one way of seeing through metaphor, that of organization as machine, which is deeply embedded in the modern view of organizational life (Hatch 2011). I

now move to another popular category of organizational lens, the post-modern perspective and metaphors of domination and politics.

The Post-Modern Perspective: Organization as Domination and Organization as Politics

The post-modern perspective offers critiques for unchecked power and domination that occurs in organizations. While organizations through the lens of machines may on the surface appear rational and scientific, their effects are far from neutral. Indeed, according to the Post-Modern perspective, organizations are always problematic: they are “sites for enacting power relations, giving rise to oppression, irrationality, and falsehoods but also humor and playful irony; as they are texts or dramas, we can rewrite organizations so as to emancipate ourselves from human folly and degradation” (Hatch, 2011, 15). This perspective focuses on power within organizations and is evocative of the “organization as domination” metaphor used by Morgan (2006): “Organizations are often used as instruments of domination that further the selfish interests of elites at the expense of others, and there is an element of domination in *all* organizations” (293). While we may assume that only certain types of organizations lead to or create domination, Morgan argues that “[o]rganization, whatever ideological cloak it wears, seems to give form to systemic patterns of exploitation and social domination” (304).

Another metaphor similar to the post-modern perspective is “organization as politics.” Politics are inherent to organizations. The idea of politics in organizations is a central focus of Grey’s (2013) argument and analysis. He argues that “when we study organizations we must necessarily be concerned with politics, economics, history and society” (104-105). Similarly, Morgan (2006) argues that “organizational choice always implies political choice” (156). As a way of seeing, the political lens aims to uncover many aspects of organizations that may be hidden: “When organizations are simply thought about in terms of ‘getting the job done,’ it cuts out so much that matters – who says what the job is, who says how it should be done and how

are people affected by getting it done this rather than that way?” (Grey, 2013, 3). These questions of who does (or says) what and how are the central concerns that political theorists raise.

An important aspect of the politics metaphor is how we deal with the scarcity of resources and the conflict that arises from this scarcity: “The political frame stresses that the combination of scarce resources and divergent interests produces conflict as surely as night follows day [...] From a political perspective, conflict is not necessarily a problem or a sign that something is amiss [...] Conflict is normal and inevitable. It’s a natural byproduct of collective life” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, 206). The metaphor highlights how individuals or competing groups “articulate preferences and mobilize power to get what they want” (201).

Moreover, politics do not only occur within organizations but organizations themselves can be political actors. “Organizations are both arenas for internal politics and political agents with their own agendas, resources, and strategies. As arenas, they house competition and offer a setting for the ongoing interplay of divergent interests and agendas [...] As agents, organizations are tools, often very powerful tools, for achieving the purposes of whoever controls them” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, 246).

The politics and domination metaphors, as well as the post-modern perspective, more generally, take a critical view of top-down management practices and hierarchy. A third perspective and set of metaphors examine how meaning is created and reinforced within organizations among all members. This is the symbolic perspective and the metaphors of organism and culture, to which we now turn.

The Symbolic Perspective: Organization as Organism and Organization as Culture

The symbolic perspective, as described by Hatch (2013), argues that organizations are “contexts continually constructed and reconstructed by their members through symbolically

mediated interaction (e.g. organizational dramas); socially constructed realities where webs of meaning create bonds of emotion and symbolic connection between members” (15). Theorists agree that symbols and culture are ingrained within organizations: “All organizations are sites of symbolic production” (Acker, 1992, 482); “organizations are both a cause and consequence of, and so inseparable from, culture” (Grey, 2013, 104). Morgan (2006) defines culture as: “Shared values, shared beliefs, shared meaning, shared understanding, and shared sense making [...] These patterns of understanding help us to cope with the situations being encountered and also provide a basis for making our own behavior sensible and meaningful” (134). An important element of culture is that it is *shared* or *collective* among organizational members. Beyond understanding and meaning, culture influences our behavior: “Organizational culture lies in the depths of collective meaning that express basic assumptions about life [...] These assumptions manifest as the values that guide our behavior” (Hatch, 2011, 63).

Another metaphor posited by Morgan (2006) is “organization as organism.” While the culture metaphor focuses on how organizations operate internally, the organism metaphor asks how organizations fit into their external environment. Morgan says: “it is possible to ID different species of organization in different kinds of environments [...] certain species are better adapted to specific environmental conditions than others” (33). Similarly, Hatch (2011) argues: “As institutions, organizations are embedded within a larger institutional order comprised of the cultural, social, political, and legal sectors of the environment. Organizational structures and practices reflect as well as respond to rules, laws, and conventions built into the institutional environment that controls them even though they may not be fully aware of these effects” (59).

This perspective is helpful because it is important to recognize that we cannot analyze or understand organizations as isolated entities but must take into account the context that

surrounds them. Not only do organizations respond or adapt to the environments they are in but they, in turn, shape those environments (Morgan, 2006, 63). We will now consider how, in responding to the external environment, organizations may change over time.

Organizations in Flux

A benefit of studying organizations through multiple perspectives and metaphors is that we can adapt our analysis along with the changes of the organizations we are studying: “in times of change it is vital to be in touch with the assumptions and theories that are guiding our practice and to be able to shape and re shape them for different ends” (Morgan, 2006, 364). Rarely are organizations permanent in our lives. We graduate from school, we change jobs or even entire industries, we move and become part of new communities and governments, attend different businesses: we are constantly entering and exiting organizations. As their members fluctuate, organizations are also constantly in transition: “Organizations are seldom static. They are generally dynamic, ever-changing phenomena that are created, influenced, and transformed by all members” (Christensen, 1988, 55).

Organizations have changed dramatically with globalization and technological change: “We are shifting from a world dominated by bureaucratic-mechanistic principles into an electronic universe where new organizational logics are required” (Morgan, 2006, 364). Hatch (2011) explains: “Historically, managers and organizational researchers favored outcome-based definitions because these lend themselves to objective measurement and thereby support management control. However, as both organization(s) and organizing become more complex in the wake of globalization and technological change, process knowledge becomes increasingly important” (Hatch, 2011, 11). Hatch (2011) continues, explaining that new technology (especially the internet) has allowed for decentralization, reduction of hierarchy, and less of a need for face-to-face interaction and management or oversight (47). “Organizing remains,”

Hatch argues, “but formal organization all but disappears” (47). Now we turn to individual identities and how they can impact organization.

Identity

A key area of identity that research has identified as connecting with organizations is gender. Citing Kathy Ferguson, Grey (2013) explains: “Organization and management [...] are inherently masculinist. That is, the preoccupation with order, control, instrumental rationality, hierarchy and domination are attributes of, if not men, then masculinist apprehensions of how to be in the world” (136). Sociologist Joan Acker (1992) similarly argues: “The organization itself is often defined through metaphors of masculinity of a certain sort. Today, organizations are lean, mean, aggressive, goal oriented, efficient, and competitive but rarely empathetic, supportive, kind, and caring. Organizational participants actively create these images in their efforts to construct organizational cultures that contribute to competitive success” (482). Because of these masculine frames present in organizations, Acker (1992) argues that there is a need for new organizational theory from a feminist perspective “to account for the persistence of male advantage in male organizations” (480). She also argues that an understanding of gender must consider class and race and that understandings of class and race must consider gender (481). I endeavored to incorporate both of these directives in my research.

Conclusion

Organizations and organizational theory traditionally focus on management, hierarchy, division of labor, efficiency, and control: organization as machines or the modern perspective. A critique of this framing led to the development of the post-modern perspective, and metaphors of organization as politics and domination. Yet another way to consider organizations is through the symbolic perspective or organization as culture and organism. While organizations are typically only considered to be businesses, workplaces, or governments, we can use these perspectives to

recognize the behaviors and phenomena that we observe in “traditional organizations” in other communities or groups that we may not initially think of as “organizations,” like music fandoms. By using multiple “lenses,” I highlighted and hid different aspects of organizations, allowing me to consider fandoms in ways that I hadn’t before. This approach was helpful in addressing my main research questions: Are music fandoms organizations? And if they are, why go to so much effort to classify them as such?

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The question that guided my research was: are music fandoms organizations? To answer this question, I chose to collect my own data from self-identified members of music fandoms. I wanted to understand fandoms from my participants' perspectives and use their words instead of doing a numerical analysis. Rather than conducting a survey which would have only included participants' levels of agreement with my own assumptions about fandoms, by conducting in depth interviews I allowed participants' the space to expand on their own experiences and bring up themes I may have neglected to include. Because I wanted to know about the inner operations of fandoms – the development and enforcement of culture and power – and personal aspects of fandom, like its influence on identity and lasting impacts on members, I wanted to hear from fandom members themselves, not from “experts” or “scholars.” As Harry Styles (2019) reminds us: “They’re running it” – I hoped that my study would reflect the experiences of fans who are running fandoms.

Human subjects approval from the Scripps College Institutional Review Board (IRB) was given in advance. My research project was deemed exempt from IRB review because it included only interviews, under exemption categories 2, ii and iii. I will now outline the participants, procedure, and limitations of my study.

Participants

My population of interest was anyone who self-identified as a member of fandom, with a focus on members of music fandoms. Participants were either members of the Claremont Colleges or people I found online from my personal social media pages. All participants were over eighteen and from the United States. Anyone interested in participating was given the opportunity to interview (granted they were over 18, in the U.S., and were available for interview

during the four weeks in which I conducted interviews). My sample did not include any members of vulnerable or protected populations.

I primarily sought out “active” participants in music fandoms (those who engage with other members of the fandom, follow and/or engage with the band/crew/management/other industry members, and who are active on social media platforms). However, I also interviewed more “passive” and/or “past” music fandom members and members of non-music fandoms. Of my sample of 25 participants, 19 identified themselves as current participants in fandom while 6 were past or passive members of fandom. Three were primarily members of non-music fandoms.

I conducted 25 interviews over the course of four weeks. The first interview was conducted on October 13, 2019 and the last interview was conducted on November 7, 2019. Five interviews were conducted in person while 21 were conducted over the phone. Participants were found via the following methods: four from my personal Facebook, nine from the Scripps College Current Students Facebook, five from my personal Twitter, one from my personal Instagram, and seven from word of mouth, for a total of 26 interviews. For one phone interview I was unable to clearly hear the participant or get a recording, so their responses have been omitted. Due to time constraints, for one interview only 30 out of 36 questions were asked. Interviews lasted between 25 and 70 of minutes. To protect participants and their confidentiality, they will not be referred to by name.

Procedure

For all social media recruitment, the following message was posted: “Do you consider yourself to be a member of a music fandom? I am looking to interview people about their current or past experience as members of fandoms (specifically music fandoms – but all fandoms welcome) as part of my senior thesis project. Please message/dm me with your interest or questions!” Once potential participants expressed interest, they were given more information

about my study via the direct messaging function of whichever platform we were using, or through texting. They were told that I was the primary (and only) researcher on this project, that I am a senior at Scripps College, and that the project was being conducted under guidance by Professor Barbara Junisbai of the Organizational Studies department at Pitzer College. They were told that the research was to investigate the (potential) connections between music fandoms and organizations and their corresponding fields of study, focusing on whether we can define music fandoms as organizations, and what we can learn from that definition. They were informed that their participation in the research would include a brief interview with me, either in person or on the phone, of optional, open-ended questions. They were told that their participation would be voluntary and that they would not be compensated. Finally, they were told that quotes and/or information from their interview would be confidential.

Prior to interviews, participants provided written documentation of their consent. For in person interviews, I provided printed copies of the informed consent form. For interviews conducted over the phone, consent forms were emailed, signed, and pictures or scans of signed consent forms were returned to me. All participants were encouraged to read the consent form in its entirety and ask any questions they had. The consent form included a brief synopsis of my project, an explanation of voluntary participation and right of refusal, an explanation of what participation would involve, an explanation of confidentiality measures in place, descriptions of possible benefits and risks, and contact information for the Scripps College Institutional Review Board. A copy of the complete informed consent form can be found in Appendix A.

All participants gave consent for their responses to be voice recorded and all interviews were conducted either in the Scripps College Student Union or in my dorm room, with the exception of two in-person interviews which were conducted outside on the Scripps campus as

chosen by the participants. Before each interview I emphasized that participation was voluntary and stated my gratitude for participation. I explained that participants could choose to skip any questions and end the interview at any time. I also reminded participants that interviews were confidential and that I would not attach their name to any quotes or data or share their identity with anyone else. Finally, I reminded participants that questions were meant to be open ended and that I was not searching for “right answers.”

I asked participants a series of 36 open-ended questions that I divided into five categories: introduction, power, culture, identity, and lasting impact. I designed the questions to address issues from the organizational literature I reviewed, although a few originated from my own curiosity about people’s experience in fandoms. The last question allowed participants to share any additional thoughts about fandoms that they felt were important and had not come up in answering previous questions. A full list of questions asked can be found in Appendix B.

After completing the interview, participants were asked to listen to a debrief which I read. A copy of the debrief was also emailed to all participants and has been included in Appendix C. In the debrief I thanked participants for their time, gave a deeper explanation of the purpose of my study, and allowed participants to ask any questions they had. Finally, I provided my own contact information and that of the Scripps College Institutional Review Board.

After interviews, audio files were stored on my password-protected Scripps Box account. Additionally, they were uploaded to the transcription service Otter.ai. After PDF transcription files were downloaded, all files were deleted from Otter.ai. All files related to this research (other than this thesis itself), including emails, notes, audio files, transcriptions, and direct messages were deleted prior to December 13, 2019.

Limitations

There were several limitations to my study. First and foremost, I was not able to get a large, representative sample. By using a convenience sample, I interviewed a greater percentage of participants who are members of fandoms that I am also a member of, and who are more demographically similar to me. I would have liked to interview people from more diverse fandoms, especially more from K-pop fandoms but I was only able to find one interested participant. (The one K-pop fan I know personally who I did reach out was initially interested but then chose not to participate). I would have also liked to interview participants under eighteen and from countries other than the United States, as many fandoms are both international and comprised of young fans. However, I was not able to dedicate enough time to the IRB processes required to include those populations.

In providing examples or explanations to questions, I may have skewed participants responses to be more similar to my own ideas of how to respond to specific questions. Some participants may have also chosen to give incomplete answers to questions due to time constraints. Finally, in some cases participants may have refrained from giving complete answers because of their personal relationship with me.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

My interviews generated a wide variety of findings which I have grouped into the following categories:

- Defining Organization
- Defining Fandom
- Characteristics of Fandom and Qualifications of Membership
- Politics and Power
- (Political) Identities
- Conflict
- Culture
- Change and Lasting Impacts.

These findings came from participants who belonged to the following music fandoms: Ariana Grande, Bazzi, Bea Miller, The Beatles, Beyoncé, Billie Eilish, Boy Genius, BTS, Chase Atlantic, Earl Sweatshirt, Elvis Presley, Fifth Harmony, The Grateful Dead, Halsey, Harry Styles, The Jonas Brothers, The Killers, Mitzi, Olivia O’Brien, One Direction, Pretty Much, Radiohead, Riot Girl, Shadow Puppets, Shawn Mendes, Taylor Swift, Why Don’t We, Zayn, and 5 Seconds of Summer. I also spoke with fans of playwrights, politicians, TV shows, books, musicals, movies, theatre troops, web comics, and sports teams.¹

Defining Organization

Participants gave varied definitions of “organization,” but some common themes emerged. Almost all participants identified similar interests, similar goals, or one singular

¹ In an effort to maintain clarity, I will refer to the “object” of fandom as “the artist” as the vast majority of my responses relate to music fandoms. Compilations of participants responses that refer to the “artist” will therefore sometimes also include the politician, author, or sports team, etc.

common goal as part of their definition of organization. One person said organizations are spaces where “everyone is kind of interested in the same thing” while a different participant had a more specific definition: “a group of people or individuals that work together towards one goal.” One participant referred to the common goal as a mission, but most participants used less formal language (such as “similar interests”). One participant wondered whether groups that have similar interests but lack a singular common goal qualify as organizations: “communities that have been a little bit less structured, may have lots of individual goals rather than a large one, so I’m not sure if I would call that organization.” Participants mentioned a variety of organizations they belonged to, including athletic groups or teams, sororities, religious groups, workplaces, non-profits, theater groups, communities, large corporations or companies, affinity groups, clubs, schools, political organizations, online forums, newspapers or art organizations, and fandoms.²

Seven participants mentioned structure in their definition of organization. One said: “the core of the word being organized, there has to be some structure that is probably a little bit more formalized.” These participants used words like “systems,” “hierarchy,” or “roles.” Other participants disagreed that structure was an inherent part of organization: “[organizations are] a collective of people that, regardless of structure, have a common cause and are doing something.”

Defining Fandom

In defining fandom, most participants argued fandom is “looser” or less formal than organization, and they talked about fandoms being more spread out and less organized or “cohesive.” Participants disagreed about whether active participation was a requirement of

² Participants may have been more likely to identify fandoms as organizations because of their knowledge that fandoms were the subject of the interview. I cannot be sure that they would have identified fandoms as organizations if they were asked this question outside of this context.

fandom: some argued that individuals could identify as part of a fandom simply because they appreciated an artist while others insisted that fandom is “the act of people sharing a love for some[thing], using the internet or some other means to share knowledge and talk to each other about what they love.”

Almost all participants, similar to their definitions of organization, again included shared interest in their definitions of fandom. They talked about connection with other fans, using words like “bonded,” “family,” and “mutual love.” While similar interests were mentioned, participants didn’t initially believe that fandoms work towards common goals: “I definitely think [fandom is] also a community. But rather than necessarily having specific goals, I think of fans just being connected, by common interests, and that they find ways to connect with each other.”

When asked if fandoms have a common goal, I got many responses similar to this one: “I find usually the goal is pretty open ended and not usually stated anywhere.” However, a few general themes emerged. Predominately participants identified supporting the artist as the goal of fandom: “supporting the [band] members and their happiness [...] buying their music, streaming their stuff, the physical earning money and topping the charts.” They talked about raising awareness about the artist, increasing streams and sales (sometimes with more specific goals of making specific songs reach number one on a specific chart), watching all performances or appearances, voting for any fan-voted award shows, and more generally “being the best fans in the world.” More generally, participants talked about being there for the artist in any way that the artist wanted support. They also talked about defending the artist or arguing with other fandoms about who the best artist or band is. This goal of supporting the artist was identified by participants as more difficult for fandoms in which the artist is no longer active, such as The Beatles or The Grateful Dead. These fans talked about still promoting the artists and encouraging

appreciation of their music in general as goals of their fandom, but they expressed that it was difficult to have a common goal with no new content.

Participants mentioned many different behaviors they engaged in in order to promote the artists they were fans of. Fans will buy music, “gift” it on iTunes or other music services, or have “streaming parties” to increase the number of streams on a certain song. They will watch music videos over and over to increase views, “refreshing not replaying.” Modern fans have learned the detailed and complex rules for how artists top charts or make money and they tell each other how to best support artists: “refresh not replay,” for example, became a mantra after fans discovered that using the replay button on YouTube did not count as additional streams. Fans repost links to songs and videos on their social media pages and text their non-fandom friends, they buy and wear merchandise, they call their radio stations and request songs, and they vote excessively for award shows. In addition to promotion, fans also show their devotion through their desire to connect with the artist. Participants described continuously trying to engage or be “noticed” by artists on their social media platforms, trying to meet them in person, or even in some cases, stalking as ways that fans try to engage with artists. They also identified attending as many concerts or live events as possible as part of their devotion. A unique way many fandoms show their love of the artist is to create a birthday fundraiser: the fandom comes together and donates to a cause that is important to the artist in honor of their birthday.

Some participants either disagreed that supporting the artist was the goal of fandom or argued that in addition to that goal, another common goal was supporting each other and creating a community of fans. They talked about loving each other, finding friendships through fandom, making the fandom more accessible to outsiders, engaging in discourse, increasing knowledge, or helping each other get “noticed” by the artist as common goals. One participant said “I feel

like we just are kind of there to be together and enjoy it together. There wasn't like a mission that we had or anything. I think it's just more a bonding experience of loving the same thing."

Similarly, another argued "it's not linear, you're not trying to achieve something. I see it more as a space for celebrating a shared interest."

Characteristics of Fandom and Qualifications of Membership

Almost all participants talked about the devotion that fandom members have for the "object" of their fandom (the artist, band, etc.). One participant explained: "I think [fandom] does denote that there's some sort of greater level of emotional/time/cultural investment by the people who claim to be a part of it." While some used calmer descriptors like "appreciation," "supporting," or "following," others talked about more intense emotions such as "love," "passion," "obsession," "worship," or being "crazy." (Some talked about what they viewed to a negative stereotype of fandom relating to gender which I will talk about in the Identities section).

It was this devotion that differentiated their membership in certain fandoms from simply enjoying the music of other artists. When asked about why they didn't consider themselves members of fandoms of other artists whom they did like, participants said that those artists didn't "consume their life," and spoke about a lack of "personal investment." They said they didn't obsess in the same way, that those artists weren't part of their daily lives. One explained her lack of involvement in one fandom by comparing it to the amount of commitment she had for a fandom she did consider herself a member of: "I did not obsess over him as much [...] like, I did, but not to the extent of high school One Direction days where I really deeply delved into all that." Another participant even argued that he engaged in many similar behaviors, but it wasn't the same: "I don't like to devote so much of my time and energy to them. I love them, and I know a lot about their life, and sometimes I'll read books and buy stuff [related to that artist], but it's just not at that next level."

Some said this was because they didn't have as much knowledge about other artists or didn't consider themselves "a day-one:" "I don't have the same sense of devotion or I haven't maybe, educated myself a lot on [the artist] besides their music." Others said they only liked their music but weren't interested in other parts of the artists life: they didn't engage in the same behaviors such as stalking social media pages or reading fanfiction. Another reason participants gave for not participating in fandoms of artists they enjoyed was not connecting as much with other fans or having no interaction with other fans at all. One participant said that fandoms often have a "vibe" and she connected and wanted to participate with some of those vibes while she felt pushed away or excluded by others. Another explained that she felt more drawn to participate in fandoms when she connected with the values of the artist in addition to their music.

Earlier, I identified lack of devotion, lack of engagement with other fans, and lack of knowledge or curiosity about other aspects of the artist's life aside from music as reasons participants gave for not belonging to fandom. It follows then that many participants would agree that these three areas can be seen as qualifications for membership in fandoms. I asked participants about both what qualified them as members of fandom and what kinds of behaviors they engaged in as part of fandoms. However, I would like to note that some fans disagreed with the idea that there were qualifications at all for membership and argued that as long as you like an artist or enjoy their music, you can qualify as part of the fandom.

Most participants identified their devotion to the artist as qualifying them as members of fandom. They described themselves as "crazy" or "obsessed" and shared with me the amount of time they spent on fandom and the extent of emotional connection they had with the artist or object of their fandom. One participant explained, "so [fandom is] dedication in a way, you keep up with what [the artist is] doing in their careers and [...] you want them to succeed so you buy

their single or you stream their music, watch the show, or even I know some people promote their stuff, like they put up posters around.”

Almost all participants identified engaging with other fans as a key part of fandom: “it’s really important to me that I have this friend from [fandom] [...] I think that’s what really brings me in because it’s hard to be in a fandom if you don’t have some type of contact with people and I think the biggest type of contact is either face to face you know someone in person, or Twitter or whatever your fandom is most heavily in.” As this participant mentions, fans engage with other fans both online and in person. Participants identified social media as the primary space online that they engaged with other fans, including Twitter, Instagram, Facebook (specifically the groups function), Reddit, Tumblr, and Kik Messenger. People who had been part of fandoms before social media became popular mentioned internet forums or the artists’ own websites as spaces to engage with other fans. The online portion of fandom is incredibly important. One participant explained: “I think a big part of fandom life is online and I don’t know that they would flourish without it.”

But fans also often engage in fandom in person. Several participants talked about sharing their participation in fandom with close, “in real life” friends. They also talked about meeting fans at fan-created meetups and events or at concerts. One participant talked about attending workshops or presentations related to their fandoms. Another talked about themed events related to his fandom, such as a Taylor Swift-themed Drag Brunch. Participants also talked about meeting people while waiting in line for events or while wearing merchandise of their favorite artist. Finally, participants also mentioned calling and texting other fandom members, either people they knew previously in real life or people they had met through online fandom or at live events as a way of participating in fandom.

Quite a few participants mentioned forming lasting emotional connections and friendships through fandom. They said that often within fandom spaces, like fan Twitter accounts or Instagram direct message groups, people talk about their own personal lives in addition to the artist or subject of their fandom. One explained that “most of the time I don’t know any of these people in real life, right? But people post very personal stuff from their lives and, things that are going on with their friends, and we give them advice and stuff. It’s definitely a weird corner of the internet.” Another shared that “[Taylor Swift’s] responsible for some friendships, people that I haven’t even met yet, like my friend who lives in Boston and I became friends with him because I saw his picture from the [Reputation] tour when he got to meet her.”

Participants identified several reasons to not participate in fandoms. Some said they would participate in fandom if it existed, but they were waiting for someone else to define or establish it. One explained that if they weren’t on the platform or forum that the fandom was primarily based on, this was a reason to not participate: “I wouldn’t consider myself part of that fandom, because I’m not on Twitter, like having an account dedicated, to these characters, or this show.” Another argued that a lack of content or involvement from the artist resulted in a lack of fandom: “There’s some bands where they just release the album and then they don’t do interviews. They’re not super active on Instagram or Twitter so there’s like not much to latch on to besides the music you know? And I feel like for true fandom you have to keep feeding it.”

An important aspect of fandom is the community. Participants mentioned conversations, group chats, Twitter threads or reposting on Instagram, organizing and attending in person meetups, and just generally being nice and wanting everyone to have the best experience as ways that they created community. They identified a feeling of shared respect and admiration for the artist as a connecting force, and a shared desire to engage in discourse together about the object

of their fandom. A huge part of fan community is content creation and appreciation. Participants mentioned fanfiction, fan art, covers, edits or “manips” (manipulations: photoshopping existing images to add tattoos, add yourself or other fans into a photo with the artist, etc.), and lyric videos as examples of different content fans create. They also talked about creating books or collections of letters and art from fans that a fan who might be able to see the artist in person would then gift to them. When there is an absence of this community and content creation, or if the community and content is inaccessible, individuals will not participate in fandom.

Politics and Power

Some participants identified knowledge about the artist as a qualification of fandom membership, and increased levels of knowledge often increased fans’ power: “I think just knowing all their songs and, their background, their story, where they came from and all that stuff. I think that just knowing that you're part of the fandom you support them.” Some participants identified themselves as “day ones” and, while most didn’t agree with it, they acknowledged that there is often gatekeeping in fandoms: older/longer term fans will question the eligibility of newer fans based on how much they know about the artist, not only about the music but also about their personal lives. While only a few participants mentioned “official fan clubs,” there is obviously a separation between members of the official club and non-members in those fandoms, both in levels of membership and amounts of power. Official fan clubs often streamline campaigns or fandom efforts but having one central source of information. (For example, one participant talked about Taylor Nation, Taylor Swift’s official fan club which creates hashtags and promotes events she will be at or new releases). However, fandoms don’t require official fan clubs to run organized campaigns. One participant talked about the BTS fandom, saying “it's very calculated, it's almost like professional level, media campaigns that people run in order to get BTS to win, fan voted awards and stuff.”

Continuing my inquiry into power within music fandoms with Gareth Morgan's lens of organization as domination in mind, I asked participants if and how they experienced domination in fandoms. Some fans brought up domination that came from more official channels or powers within the music industry. For example, one participant talked about a time Beyoncé's publicist told fans to "chill" when fans were "defending Beyoncé." Another participant talked about the domination of artists' management, giving an example of One Direction's management "silencing Larry" (a fan theory that Harry Styles and Louis Tomlinson were/are romantically involved) by deleting comments, scheduling them for different interviews/events (and thus physically separating them), and emphasizing heterosexual themes or language. Several participants also commented that domination in fandoms mirrored societal forces, identifying power dynamics and the influence of money as examples. In the same vein, another form of domination identified was elitism: fans are considered elite if they are able to attend more shows or if they have "elite taste," whether that be taste in songs or other things about the artist.

Many participants identified unspoken codes of conduct as a form of domination: "I think it's unspoken for sure, it is so odd because nobody ever says, oh, here's what you can and can't do, [...] you'll see other people called out for stuff and you kind of realize this is what I'm not supposed to be doing [...] I think there's an unspoken way to go about things and other people in the fandom will keep you in check." They argued that there are assumptions about what behavior is considered appropriate, about how to speak, and other self-imposed rules. There are also "moral codes," which vary depending on what the fandom is about. This can create insiders and outsiders of fandoms. While the tone is often set by the artist, these codes are usually enforced by fans. When individuals do not conform to these codes or unspoken rules, they may be subjected to (cyber)bullying. A common form of domination within fandoms is cancel culture:

for example, seeing a “X is over party” hashtag on Twitter is not uncommon. Another form of domination is gatekeeping: some fandoms enforce rules about who is and is not considered a fan or a member of a fandom. Some participants also identified the size of the fandom as a factor: larger fandoms are able to be more dominant in their interactions with other fandoms or artists.

I asked participants about who dictates behaviors within fandom and they identified two categories: the fans themselves and the artist. Individual fans (especially those who run “big accounts”), organize fan projects (for example, lighting up an area like a pride flag during a show or creating a lyric video to a song), organize events, or start/publicize campaigns and movements within the fandom. An interviewee explained, “if you had a big account that was visible and people knew about it, you could organize things. A lot of fan projects were organized that way. [An update account or a big account] said we’re all going to do this and everyone knew that everyone’s going to hear because everyone follows those accounts. So, in that way, certain fans dictate what happens.” Fans often also engage in mimicry or copying fellow fans’ style, starting or participating in trends. As I mentioned, many enforce “unspoken” codes of etiquette or conduct and police or “check” each other’s behavior. However, artists can also dictate behavior: participants explained that artists themselves sometimes jump in if they see behavior they don’t approve of.

Next, I asked participants about individual fans’ sources of power. A great source of power is proximity to the artist. If fans interact with the artist online (likes, retweets, commenting, reblogging) or in-person, if the artist knows them personally (i.e. by name) and gives them special treatment, or if they have been to lots of shows or met the artist, this can give fans power. Fandom members may also gain power based on money, time, or other socioeconomic factors, which allow them to attend more shows or buy more valuable resources. How long a fan

has been a member of a specific fandom is also an important factor that influences power: those who have been in a fandom longer usually have more power. If a fan creates content that other fandom members like, such as fan art or fanfiction, their opinion on other parts of fandom may be more valued. One participant explained: “they have more power because more people are paying attention to them [...] even if their power comes from them writing really good fanfic, then it becomes like, oh I’m going to value their opinion on something else because I recognize them as an influential person in the fandom.”

Participants identified many valuable resources in fandom, most either deriving from money or interaction with the artist. Money, on the most basic level, allowed for access to content (the internet, music streaming platforms, television, etc.), as well as access to more coveted resources such as concert tickets, meet & greets, VIP tickets, and merchandise. Wealthier fans, participants identified, are able to travel to more shows or other events and participate in promotions that give them early access to resources. Participants also explained that living in a city that artists will visit more often, like New York, is an important resource and being able to attend “landmark” shows such as album release shows or performances at iconic venues, like Madison Square Garden, is valuable. Finally, any interaction with the artist, online or in person, is a valued resource.

Fans who have “big accounts” (with more followers) have more influence and clout. They are able to draw attention to specific areas or issues, create hashtags, organize events, etc. When they retweet, reblog, or repost information, it is more powerful because it reaches more people (and conversely, they can draw attention *away* from certain things by not (re)posting them). Fan accounts typically become large if they create more content or have increased knowledge. Some accounts, called “update accounts” have a particular power in the information

they choose to spread: they choose whether to draw attention to a specific controversy, publish an artist's current location, or acknowledge certain fans or collaborators of the artist. These big accounts can set the tone of fandoms and may be well known by other fans. Several participants explained that some fans are almost famous or idolized themselves. Not all participants agreed, however, that having more followers makes fans more powerful and clarified that the power these fans receive is having more influence within the fandom but not having better access to tickets or meeting the artist.

Additionally, I asked participants how fandoms themselves can be political actors. Almost always the first thing they mentioned was how fandoms support artists in causes that are important to them. If an artist mentions a cause, participants explained, fans will become curious and may become involved themselves: "fandoms bring awareness to stuff that's going on in the world." They gave examples of causes such as LGBTQ issues, immigration policy, police brutality, registering fans to vote, and endorsing candidates for political office. Some argued that artists can foster a political space, for example making their shows queer-affirming. Sometimes fandoms push artists to be more politically involved: a participant explained "fans organized a lot for Harry [Styles] to address the Black Lives Matter movement. And then he did acknowledge it and that was a huge deal. And now people are asking him to do more, like you showed a sticker on your guitar and that's not really enough, we want you to address it more vocally like you have other issues. And he followed the fan that said that right after she tweeted it. So that was a cool way, where it was like validation." There often can be overlap between fandom and social justice movements but, as one participant explained, there is often disagreement about whether fandom should be political in the first place and some argued that "It's really pretty nonpartisan, everybody is there to enjoy the music [...] just like a love for the sound and dancing."

In my interviews, I made sure to give an expansive definition of “politics,” asking participants how fandom members form coalitions or compete for resources in addition to what the word “politics” traditionally brings to mind. Participants therefore also talked about inter-fandom fights or coalitions. One participant explained that if two artists are friends, their fandoms will likely support each other. The opposite is true if the artist has a negative relationship with another artist. Another participant explained that fans will ignore intra-fandom issues and bond together to fight with another fandom, often “defending” the artist they are a fan of. Participants also talked about political connections: the importance of knowing key players, the formation of hierarchies within fandoms, and access to insider knowledge. Finally, they talked about the political power of fandoms as groups: their ability to choose a chart to top, push back against an imposed narrative, or have collective bargaining power. One Direction’s fandom, for example, successfully got a song that was not chosen by their management to be a single or have any radio promotion to be played regularly on radio through what they called Project No Control.

Finally, I asked participants both how fandoms fit into their larger environments and how they shape those environments. Some participants argued that fandoms are a reflection of the overall environment and that they can change it over time, while other fans argued that fandom is an escape from society and often shapes individual lives. Participants mentioned fandom affecting things like the economy (ticket sales, merchandise, music sales, etc.), tourism (visiting new places like Korea or the UK, buying merchandise related to the bands, museums such as Graceland in Memphis about Elvis), the media (how news is tailored for fans), and politics (artist endorsements, spreading knowledge about political movements). Perhaps more obvious, they mentioned how fandom affects pop culture: not only by changing style and language but also by

pushing the boundaries of what the mainstream is ready for. One explained “it definitely drives social and cultural phenomenon,” another argued “we have a voice, that voice can sway public opinion. More artists are changing what they’re doing or adapting what they’re doing based on public outcry.” Participants talked about how fandom has both learned from its environment and offered new ideas about how to “do” virtual connection: how do we grapple with online interaction? The power of being part of a large group or collective came up as an example of fandom affecting its environment: fandoms have saved TV shows from being cancelled or created hit singles from album tracks never intended for radio play. Finally, participants often mentioned how the greater environment has formed stereotypes about fandoms as groups of hormone-crazed teen girls. I will further explore fandom’s interaction with identities, including gender, in the next section.

(Political) Identities

Organizations often play a role in shaping our identities and/or treating people of different identities in different ways. I asked participants about gender, sexuality, race, nationality, and socioeconomic status and how these interacted with or affected fandom. Practices such as gatekeeping and other forms of inclusion/exclusion of various identities are political: who gets to participate in fandom? How are members treated differently? What hierarchies and norms are created?

First, I asked participants about gender. Some felt strongly that fandom is for everyone and that everyone (all genders) in fandom are treated the same. Others, however, argued that fandom is an inherently gendered word and that some things will appeal to one gender or another. One participant pointed out that there are some predominately male fandoms but that we don’t belittle them in the same way or often don’t even use the word “fandom” when describing

them as we do with female-dominated fandom³. (For example, one could argue that sports fans are part of a “fandom,” but we rarely refer to them as such). Other male fandoms are often considered “nerdy” such as Star Trek. One participant argued that maybe male fandoms aren’t as loud, but another disagreed, arguing that reflecting society at large, men tend to be louder and not make space for others. Several participants agreed that male fans are more likely to be described as “appreciative,” having a “legitimate interest,” or having “good taste” rather than “obsessive.” One participant argued that while some fandoms are female dominated and some are male dominated, whoever is “other” will struggle more.

The predominant stereotype, many participants argued, is that music fandoms are seen as groups of young girls. The word fandom often evokes the idea of a “fangirl:” someone who obsesses over boys and boybands, screams, has raging hormones, etc. Participants pointed out that boybands especially are marketed as “pretty boys” with different “personalities” and they are meant to be sex symbols (for girls). They also talked about how fandom is spoken about by music critics or other members of the media: often female fans are belittled or disregarded, and the objects of their fandom are often seen as inferior art because of its audience. One fan argued that people love to hate what teen girls love and that there is a predominant idea that teen girls can’t have legitimate wants and desires. Another said: “[There is the belief] that young girls and young women don’t and can’t have a correct opinion [...] I get annoyed when people talk about The Beatles as dad rock. They’re like, that’s dad music. It’s like, no, Beatles fans were literally teen girls. Teen girls have had the best opinions about music since the dawn of time. And I think people belittle that a little bit, especially with fandom culture. It’s like, oh those girls are just

³ While I do not want to reinforce the gender binary, almost all of my responses were given in binary terms. A few participants did use non-binary language, and one participant specifically mentioned noticing several non-binary and trans fans in the Beyoncé fandom.

obsessed.” Several participants admitted to assuming that other fans are girls and that they are actively trying to unlearn their own gendered thinking.

Male fans, a few participants pointed out, are frequently assumed to be gay if they are part of a predominately female fandom. Similarly, there is often speculation that young male artists with female fandoms, such as Shawn Mendes, are gay, and speculations about an artist’s sexuality take away from the focus on their music. Many fandoms are predominately heteronormative and in several there is a culture of sexual attraction to the artist. One female participant explained: “I was so insecure about being a queer woman and liking One Direction because I was worried it would diminish my queerness in other people’s eyes [...] but I feel like that’s because of how One Direction as a whole was gendered and sold.” When asked about sexuality and its relationship to fandom, most participants first identified the artist as an advocate for LGBT communities or as role models/representation in the LGBT community. Participants argued that some artists and their fandoms focus on creating an encouraging space by waving pride flags at concerts or starting hashtags on social media, and in general creating a space for queer fans where they feel supported. Some participants argued that specific fandoms might attract people of specific sexualities and others argued that many fandoms are still hostile or discriminatory towards queer fans. One participant argued that anything other than increased straight representation is political. Several participants argued that these perceptions around gender and sexuality in fandom are slowly changing over time and that there is already more diversity of gender and sexuality in fandoms.

As they did with gender, when asked about race and fandom some participants argued that fandom is open to everyone and that race was not related (emphasizing that online you can’t always tell what race someone is) while others disagreed, arguing that you can’t ignore race in

anything. Many participants identified their fandoms as predominately white and one identified this as being a potential result of historic (and current) exclusion of people of color in some music spaces. A participant of color shared that she felt that being a member of a fandom was a “white” thing and that she worked to be conscious of code switching or other changes she made to herself when engaging in fandom. Other participants mentioned that there is a lack of representation of people of color as popular music artists, and that people often relate to people like them. Zayn Malik from One Direction and Beyoncé were both identified as artists who provide representation and who fans of color may be drawn to. Participants also again highlighted POC-led movements to support POC in fandoms and fight for more diversity, such as the movement for Harry Styles to acknowledge and support Black Lives Matter. Some fandoms are more diverse and inclusive than others and participants argued this could be regional or artist driven. They identified that there is a lack of accountability about behavior in fandoms and many are still unwelcoming or discriminatory to POC.

Almost all participants identified participating in fandom as a privilege. They pointed out that wealthier fans are able to buy more (or any) concert tickets, music, merchandise, meet and greets and VIP experiences. Wealthier fans typically live in cities that the artist will come to on tour or have the means to travel long distances to go to concerts. Fandom is also a privilege because of the amount of time it takes up and one fan described fandom as a hobby. A high socioeconomic status allows for increased opportunities such as access to higher statuses within the fandom or increased power in hierarchies. However, other participants argued that both the nature of fandoms being online and the use of streaming as a way to consume music act as equalizers. They insisted that someone can still be a fan without being wealthy, however some of these participants still acknowledged that wealthier fans are able to do more. Many participants

felt that of the different factors I asked about (gender, race, sexuality, nationality, and socioeconomic status), socioeconomic status played the biggest role.

When asked about nationality, participants often pointed out that fandoms usually include people from all over the world. However, they did identify several constraints as to how international fans may be treated differently. They talked about whether artists even come to international fans' countries in the first place, and if they do, are those fans able to go? They also talked about whether artists or other fans made an effort to connect with international fans, perhaps by (attempting) to use the local language. Participants identified power or dominance that fans from the same country as the artist often have over other fans. They may feel they have "ownership" or are superior in some way. One participant, at the end of this series of questions about identities, astutely remarked that "if it is divisive in "reality," it will be divisive in fandom.

Conflict

Divisions between individual fans, between fandoms, or between fans (and non-fans/"haters") and artists lead to conflict. Some participants explained that sometimes instead of creating a more supportive community for each other, goals within fandom can be a source of conflict if they turn more individualistic or competitive despite fans' mutual love of an artist. For example, the goal of increasing proximity to the artist either online or in person at a meet and greet or other similar situation can be seen as a competition with other fans. Participants talked about the sometimes-toxic environment that was created by people being out for themselves. Other times, participants explained, groups or factions of fans develop within a fandom that have their own specific goals, which can also lead to conflict.

Some conflict is artist-driven: if an artist is considered to be doing or saying something "problematic" it can create conflict among fans. For example, there was a large conflict within the 5 Seconds of Summer (5SOS) fandom when the band chose to collaborate and tour with The

Chainsmokers, a duo who many fans considered to be misogynistic, with some fans arguing that 5SOS should not align themselves with that band while others disagreed. Conflict also arises when artists are considered “rude” or seen as “not caring” about their fans, when they choose to exit groups and “go solo,” or when they take a political stance that some fans don’t agree with. One participant explained that an artist she follows chooses to make physical space for POC fans at the front during her live performances and this created a conflict among white and POC fans.

Other conflicts occur within fandom. Participants talked a lot about drama, taking things out of context, aggressiveness, some fans “claiming” band members as their own, exclusivity, or disagreements about interpretations or meanings of songs or other art. Interviewees also identified judging each other’s tastes as a main source of conflict: what is the best song, who is the best band member/writer/guitar player or “ship” (pairing of two people that fans think should be together romantically). Within fandoms, there is also competition about how to be a fan: participants identified conflicts about not being big enough fans, not showing support “correctly,” not being a historic or original fan, or being a “lazy” fan. Some explained that fandoms they are a part of have matured over time and there is a sense that they know “how” to be fans now and impose rules about fan behaviors. One participant explained that when new fans join a fandom, older fans may think “Why did you come in here? Who was here from the beginning? Who has ownership over this?” Finally, there is often conflict between fandoms: arguments about which artist is better, who has broken more records, etc.

Culture

In addition to the political lens which highlights power dynamics, another important theme that is analyzed by organizational theorists is culture. To support my effort to define fandoms as organizations, I asked participants questions about the cultures (or lack thereof) that are present in the fandoms they belong to. First, I asked participants about symbols. Initial

answers that were given often included the artist's logo, the font they often used, or official album artwork. One participant mentioned "TPWK," which stands for "Treat People With Kindness" and is a catch phrase that Harry Styles puts on merch and often includes in press releases or in social media posts. Many fans also talked about "eras:" periods of time usually revolving around a specific album promotion, release, and tour that have a specific concept, mood, and aesthetic to them. They claimed that the color schemes, music videos, language, and other aspects of these eras tend to have symbolic meaning. This also highlighted the fact that symbols can fluctuate over time. Some participants mentioned symbols that are important to the artist themselves becoming important to the fandom: for example, Taylor Swift's favorite number is 13 and she and fans alike have been known to draw a 13 on their hands or find significance in the number. Participants also explained that specific inside jokes, quotes, memes, gifs, or emojis can develop symbolic meaning within the fandom. Using these symbols is a way of signifying or marking yourself as a fan to other fans.

I also asked participants about the language that they use in fandom. Many referred to "stan twitter lingo" and gave examples like "period," "local," and "ship;" terms that are used widely on Twitter and can be used in multiple fandoms. However, language can often become more specific. A BTS (a K-pop group) fan told me that in that fandom, the term "comeback" is used whenever a new song is released, and not only after a break in production. Several One Direction fans mentioned the term "carrot," originally coming from an interview in which Louis Tomlinson, a member of the band, said "I like girls who eat carrots." Over time, "carrot" came to mean a fan who is new and only has superficial level information about the band (because their knowledge is based on this sole interview) and doesn't participate as much in fandom, understand references that are made, or know more details about the band members. Participants

also mentioned memes, in-group jokes, fanfiction, specific lyrics, and “deep cut references” as things that influence language in fandom, as well as the use of abbreviations and adopting slang from the countries of the band or artist (i.e. Korea or the U.K.). Interviewees emphasized that often fandom language includes the use of exaggeration and exclamations. One participant explained that some words can develop a more weighted or specific meaning, giving the example of the word “imagine” and the meaning it has developed as a result of the John Lennon song.

Another aspect of culture is the development of stories or traditions within organizations. Origin stories, anniversaries, and birthdays were the most often identified examples participants gave. Some also explained that fans’ similar personal stories are important: almost all One Direction fans I interviewed mentioned searching “One Direction Funny moments” on YouTube in the early stages of their joining the fandom. Other fandoms talked about telling the story of first concerts or the first choreography that fans learned. Important stories or traditions can also come from ideas about what songs mean, important clips or quotes from documentaries or interviews, and important moments in the artist’s life. Fans themselves also created stories through the supplemental content or projects they produced, including fan art, fanfiction, or the anniversary of topping a chart. When asked about important characters or figures in the fandoms they are a part of, participants mentioned the family of the artist, friends (and enemies/competition), staff members (such as photographers or bodyguards), associated artists (like co-writers or designers), members of the media, former band members, and romantic partners.

When asked about the values and beliefs present in their fandoms, participants identified a variety of measures. They talked about more general values of kindness, friendship, respect, fairness, hard work, artistry, and individuality. One described her fandom as “American,” another as “sexy,” and yet another as “freaking weird.” One fan explained that her fandom

valued “fun, [being] carefree, youth, romance.... superficial stuff.” But others disagreed: they mentioned values of self-love, independence, being yourself, equality, diversity and inclusion, and being intercultural as part of fandom. Many participants identified causes important to the artist as values within the fandom such as feminism, supporting mental health, or being anti-war.⁴ Overall, participants highlighted that loving, supporting, and protecting the artist and seeking out relationships or connection with the artist and other fans were important values of fandom. One participant argued that a value of her fandom is the ability to sometimes critique the artist but still be a fan. Most of these values could be classified as “positive” but a few participants importantly pointed out that values within the fandom often also related to power and were a reflection of the society at large, again citing ideas about how going to more shows or having more merchandise makes one a “better” fan.

In alignment with these values and beliefs, when asked to describe the culture of their fandoms generally, interviewees gave similar responses. They described the culture of fandoms they are members of as loving, supportive, devoted, understanding, welcoming, helpful, fun, enthusiastic, chill, nostalgic, creative, crazy, maturing, and tight knit: “the love and support that you get through fandoms is really unmatched.” Again, while most of these descriptors are positive, one participant argued that some fandoms can feel intimidating, confusing, or exclusionary at first and that that has led her to choose not to be a part of those fandoms: “There are aspects to fandom that are kind of intimidating and confusing. Once you learn how to navigate it and once you’ve been in one for long enough where you have made your connections in them, they’re so fun.” A few other participants mentioned that different cultures can develop

⁴ A couple participants categorized the values of the fandom as “liberal” or “progressive.” Because of the way I found my participants, mostly either through my own personal connections or connections of connections, my sample is by no means representative, and I do not intend to argue that music fandoms are always liberal.

within a single fandom, often divided according to the social media platform. For example, one participant identified himself as a “Twitter Swiftie” and said that Taylor Swift fans who predominately used Tumblr have a different culture from the Twitter fans.

Change and Lasting Impacts

My final section of questions related to how fandoms change over time, including technology and (im)permanence of membership, and what impacts fandoms have on participants, including on mental health, sense of self, individuality, learning, and self-growth. Participants identified several different changes and developments of fandoms. Some were artist driven: fandoms change as artists evolved and grew up, when bands split up or go on hiatus, and as artists change how they interact with fans. Fandoms also change from within, participants argued: they mature, “become more woke,” the demographics change, and the platforms used to interact with each other change. Significant changes can either intensify and unite the fandom or have the opposite effect: one participant explained how the death of a Grateful Dead member led to fans growing closer to each other. Increasing in size, participants argued, also has dramatic effects on fandoms: leading to factions within the fandom and often more expensive ticket prices and fewer opportunities to connect directly with the artist.

Because technology was often mentioned in by organizational theorists in the literature I read, I wanted to include it in my study. I asked participants about how technology affects fandom. They argued that it allows for connection: through technology fans can meet new people from far away and can introduce others to fandom, broadening the community. While platforms change over time, fans use those different platforms to distribute information, sell merch, learn more about the artist they are a fan of and have a chance to interact directly with artists. Technology allows fandoms to be more inclusive and accessible to a wider variety of people and it allows for greater fan expression (such as using photoshop to create fanart). Several

participants argued that everything is online and fandom would not exist without a space online. One also explained that because of greater access to technology we may have more exposure to parts of the world we had not previously know: when we are then exposed to K-pop, for example, we are more likely to be intrigued and join that rather than ignore it.

An important factor of organizations is that they can be entered and exited, so I asked participants if their membership in fandom was permanent. Most agreed that it is possible to exit a fandom (and some revealed that they had done so). They argued that they would leave a fandom for several reasons: if the artist is “problematic” or begins to engage in behavior they don’t condone, if they lose interest or their interests change over time (they clarified this is not always a conscious decision but a gradual process), if the artist “pivots” or changes their style drastically and the fan does not want to follow, if there is fandom drama, or if the platform they use to engage in fandom is shut down. They explained that in some cases they will always be a fan but may not always be a member of fandom, they may have waves of commitment. One participant explained: “I think of [fandom] as like a friendship. There are seasons and sometimes you’re together all the time. And then maybe there are some months or years where you don’t talk, but then you just catch up again.” A few participants, however, disagreed and argued that they were die-hard, forever fans, and that they “can’t see [themselves] revoking [their participation in fandom].”

Out of curiosity, I asked participants about fandom’s effect on mental health, perhaps because of my own and my friends’ experiences. Several interviewees initially mentioned artists who are vocal about mental health issues and also how specific songs can resonate or have personal meanings to different people. In general, participants argued that fandom can have both positive and negative effects on mental health. On the one hand, fandoms provide a group of

people to go to when you need support or to feel less alone. Fans talk with each other about unrelated issues to fandom, they use fandom to elevate their mood or as a distraction, and for many it is a place to find community when they are otherwise marginalized in their lives outside of fandom. One participant even said that fandom had helped them in their grieving for the death of a family member and another shared that they often saw fans saying things like “you brought me out of a dark place, this saved my life.” On the other hand, however, participants mentioned the negative effects of fandom on mental health: people can be really rude or tear others down and there tends to be a fair amount of fighting within fandoms. Also, several acknowledged that when you idolize an artist, you may build them up and then become upset that you will never meet them or otherwise experience negative emotions.

I also was intrigued by how fandom influences identity. Many participants agreed that their participation in fandom made up part of their sense of self: they argued that it was part of how they connect with others, even sometimes determines who they become friends with, and that in “real life” they are known by their friends as a fan. One said he even put being a fandom member in his social media and dating app bios. Another told me that recently she had considered her most important identities and ranked them: fan was fourth. One participant explained that the age that people often are when they are in fandom is a time when many people are developing an identity so the two are often connected. Other participants, however, disagreed and argued that outside of fandom they are separate people: “Fandom me and regular me are different, there’s a line.” While fandom made up a part of their lives, it was not a defining feature of their identity. Another admitted that she didn’t like to reveal to others that she is a member of fandom.

Because fandom often played a role in participants identities, I wanted to know if they felt more individual because of fandom or if they felt pushed to conform. Somewhat surprisingly, despite the amount of talking we did about norms and codes of conduct, most participants argued that they felt more individual. They explained that they felt supported by other fans in whatever they wanted to do, and that through fandom they learned to be themselves, to express themselves, and they were exposed to new things. On the flip side, some acknowledged that they are sometimes pushed to conform by being influenced by (or blindly following) the artist, the prevailing idea of what it takes to be an “ideal fan,” or larger societal forces. A few participants explained that within fandom they might feel more constrained, but outside of fandom it is something that differentiates them from others and makes them more individual.

Finally, I asked about what participants have learned from fandom and what the lasting impacts of fandom are. A few shared more “concrete” things, such as learning about the history of a music genre, about UK and US politics, becoming “woke” and learning jargon, how to respect artists’ privacy, or learning to play guitar. But they also shared about making new friends (some referred to fandom connections as forever friends or family). They talked about fandom teaching them to meet new people, to become less shy, to trust that people have their back, and to feel seen and heard. They also learned the power of belonging to a large group and of connection and community. Many shared that fandom allowed them to develop different ways of seeing, and that they learned there is no wrong way to appreciate art. Fandom changed them as viewers and creators of art, leading them to take more critical lenses to spaces and communities they are a part of. One explained: “I grew up in a very homogenous area of the country and being part of fandom really let me see how other people receiving the things I saw, how other people with different experiences were loving the things I loved through a very different lens.” Many

others also agreed that fandom made them more open to diversity, that it opened their world and encouraged them to “love and accept everyone.” They learned that people are complex and can share a love of one thing but have completely different views on other things, they learned empathy, they learned to appreciate differences of opinion and know that they could come together despite those differences. One explained that they learned to appreciate other people’s intense loves and also that fandom members are everywhere, you never know who might be a fan.

Perhaps most importantly, participants explained how their membership in fandom encouraged them to engage in self-reflection and growth. They shared that they felt empowered by fandom and they learned that it is okay to like something even if the people around you don’t; they learned how to love something unapologetically and express passionate feelings: “If you like something, you shouldn’t care what other people think. Fandoms are also really judged in real life so if you’re part of one, you are making a conscious decision to be against that norm.” One participant argued that her participation in fandom taught her what she wanted from her relationships with men. Another explained that fandom taught her lessons about herself and that she was now secure in the knowledge that she will grow and change and love new things but that’s okay. Some even said that fandom shaped their entire high school experience, that they used fandom events as markers for time periods in their life, and one even claimed that she came to Scripps College because of her involvement in One Direction fandom (She was introduced to feminism through One Direction fans on Tumblr and then decided to attend a women’s college). Overall, many participants concluded that fandom “made [them] feel really good.”

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Overall, my findings supported the argument that music fandoms are organizations. In Hatch's (2011) definition, organization is what happens "when people work together to accomplish some desired end state or goal. It can happen through intentionally designed activity, spontaneous improvisation, or some combination of the two, but it always depends upon coordinated effort" (1). In their definitions of organization, my participants agreed that organization revolves around a shared interest or goal, but several of them used more formal language to describe it: they talked about structure, hierarchy, roles, and systems. When asked to identify organizations they belong to, most of the organizations that participants mentioned fit this more formal definition, organizations like schools, places of worship, or workplaces that likely not only have shared goals but official structures, hierarchies, roles, etc.

While they did not always agree that fandoms were organizations and sometimes argued that fandoms are "looser" or "less cohesive," what they described to me as fandom usually fit the above definition: they identified several common goals including supporting and connecting with the artist and creating and engaging with a fan community. The behaviors they described as part of fandom touched on all of the behaviors Grey (2013) mentioned in his more expansive view of organizing: "joking, arguing, criticizing, fighting, deciding, lusting, despairing, creating, resisting, fearing, hoping or, in short, organizing" (2). One way participants' responses deviated from the definition given above is that some acknowledged that instead of having a common goal, fandom members sometimes are individualistic and in it for themselves, especially when competing for resources like tickets or follows on Twitter. However, as Grey mentions, arguing and fighting are a part of organizing. If we think about more "traditional" organizations like

workplaces, there are certainly many individual goals within a workplace, and there are members of organizations who ignore the common goal in favor of achieving their own goal.

Morgan (2006) argues that as researchers, we highlight and hide different aspects of organizations: some things are noticed, and others are ignored. Many participants repeatedly brought up a predominant stereotype about music fandoms: what is noticed is “obsession,” sexual attraction or intense hormones, and a presumed membership comprised exclusively of young girls. What is ignored is the love, devotion, connection, community, learning, and organizing that goes on within fandoms.

The first lens I used to look at fandom was the lens of power: organizations, according to Hatch (2013) are “sites for enacting power relations.” Using this lens in my research revealed prevalent forms of domination in music fandoms. Morgan (2006) argues that domination allows the elite to further themselves at the expense of others. Participants gave several examples of domination: “official” music industry forces setting rules or arenas, elitism that mirrors societal norms and hierarchies, unspoken codes of conduct that can result in cancel culture, and gatekeeping. The power lens especially highlights these “codes of conduct:” all organizations have rules, even if they are not “officially” stated. In many organizations, including fandoms, rules are taught and reinforced by organizational members, who, by policing each other and reacting to other members’ actions, establish what is considered to be appropriate behavior.

The political lens, within the larger framework of power, also offers interpretations of fandom as organization. Organizations can be both political arenas and agents. As arenas, they are a space where conflict occurs: participants revealed that there is a large amount of conflict in music fandoms, often about how to be a “good” fan and judging each other’s tastes and preferences. Some conflict may be instigated by the artist, but it still occurs within the fandom

without the artist's involvement: if the artist does something some fans see as "problematic," if a band splits or goes on a break, or if the artist takes a stance on an issue that some fans don't agree with. As agents, music fandoms often join artists in supporting a cause and many participants argued that their fandom makes a conscious effort to create a space in which all fans feel included and welcome. Some participants also explained that fandoms work together to push the artist in a certain direction (asking Harry Styles to support Black Lives Matter) or push for another outcome they are interested in, like promoting a specific song to get radio plays and become a single (Project No Control).

Power, used both in these conflicts and domination, comes from a variety of sources. Bolman and Deal (2008) identify nine sources of power: position power (authority), control of rewards, coercive power, information and expertise, reputation, personal power, alliances and networks, access and control of agendas, and framing: control of meaning and symbols (203-204). Participants mentioned examples of all of these, perhaps with the exception of coercive power (although one could argue that physical jostling for positions in lines or general admission pits is an example of coercive power). Proximity to the artist or managing a "big account" on social media are ways participants described of having position power and control of rewards. These individuals are able to set agendas, frame events and positions of the fandom, and dictate the behaviors of others. "Famous" fans, participants explained, can choose which information to spread and they can police others, dictating behaviors and enforcing the unspoken codes of conduct.

Personal power, alliances, and reputation were also all mentioned as sources of power by participants: they talked about certain fans having "clout" and being respected by the fandom and therefore more influential. Access to knowledge or information and expertise was revealed to be

highly important in fandoms: being able to speak the language fans use and share understanding of inside jokes is very important. Many participants argued that this often meant that fans who had been in the fandom for a longer amount of time had more power. Finally, most participants argued that power hierarchies often reflected greater society with individuals with higher socioeconomic statuses, specifically because of access to more money and time, had more power within fandoms.

Another form of political activity includes building coalitions: participants explained that fandoms often build coalitions with each other and fans will disregard their differences in opinion within the fandom to “fight” with another fandom. Several participants also remarked about the collective bargaining power that can be achieved from belonging to such a large group. Those who had been members of very large fandoms often spoke with both pride and wonder at the feats they had achieved. Power, whether it be through domination, conflict, collective action, individual status, or coalition building, plays an incredibly important role in music fandoms and provides further evidence of how fandoms operate as organizations, even if this power is not visible on the surface.

While the power lens highlights hierarchies and inequalities within fandoms, the culture lens draws our attention to other aspects of fandom: “Culture forms the superglue that bonds an organization, unites people, and helps an enterprise accomplish desired ends” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, 277-278). When I asked participants about culture, they gave examples of beliefs, language, stories, traditions, and symbols; all elements that contributed to shared meaning and values within fandom. While participants did reveal some negative aspects of culture such as values that allow for power imbalances and increase competition and bullying, most of the aspects of culture they talked about were positive. Participants described fandom culture as

loving, supportive, devoted, understanding, welcoming, helpful, fun, enthusiastic, chill, nostalgic, creative, crazy, maturing, and tight knit. Morgan (2006) argues:

[The culture metaphor] shows that the challenge of creating new forms of organization and management is very much a challenge of cultural change. It is a challenge of transforming the mind-sets, visions, paradigms, images, metaphors, beliefs, and shared meanings that sustain existing business realities and of creating a detailed language and a code of behavior through which the desired new reality can be lived on a daily basis.

(138)

Fandoms are working towards establishing a new reality that can be lived in on a daily basis: participants shared with me their efforts to create a space that is more inclusive, affirming, positive, and hopeful. An important finding of my research is that, in “informal” organizations, especially those without a physical space (i.e. an office), passion, devotion, and emotions are crucial to the organization. While organizational members (fans) don’t meet in person with each other every day, the organizational culture binds them together and fosters commitment, leading members to actively participate and create content to “feed” or sustain the organization (fandom). While some may perceive this type of organizational culture as naïve, aspiring to create these spaces can also be seen as radical and empowering. It pushes against the dominate frames of organizations that are set (generally) by straight, white, wealthy men. I will expand on this more when I talk about identities.

While culture often focuses on how organizations operate internally, the organization as organism metaphor asks how organizations fit into their external environment. Fandoms, participants argued, both reflect dominant social norms of the larger environment and shape the environments they are in. Most obviously, they impact pop culture and are a space to learn how

to navigate connection and coordination that is primarily based online. Participants also mentioned less obvious parts of the external environment that fandoms can influence: the economy, tourism, the media, and politics. This is further evidence that fandoms can be seen and understood as organizations: they develop their own internal cultures and have effects on external environments.

An important theme that began to emerge while discussing culture was that of gender. Acker (1992) argues “organizations are lean, mean, aggressive, goal oriented, efficient, and competitive but rarely empathetic, supportive, kind, and caring. Organizational participants actively create these images in their efforts to construct organizational cultures that contribute to competitive success” (482). What participants described to me about music fandoms, with a few important exceptions, veered towards empathetic, supportive, kind, and caring as Acker describes. Participants often talked about how masculine framing influences how they are portrayed or seen from outside fandom: most participants identified a predominant stereotype of fandoms as groups of young obsessed or crazed girls. They talked about the language that is often used to describe fandoms and the contrast between the “legitimate interests” of male fans compared with the “obsession” of female fans. Female participants especially remarked that they often feel embarrassed by or belittled for their music interests; that their wants and desires in music are not valued.

While a significant number of participants wanted to believe that membership in music fandoms is wide open and inclusive to varying genders, sexualities, races, socioeconomic backgrounds, and nationalities, others acknowledged that this is not the case. They acknowledged that homophobia and racism still play a role in fandoms and that fans of differing marginalized identities experience fandom differently. However, they also often detailed ways in

which fandoms are pushing to change organizational culture and power structures that foster these imbalances. Perhaps music fandoms can be (and are) a start of moving towards the intersectional feminist organizational change that Acker (1992) argues in favor of, and to create an affirming space for fans who previously have felt shunned or excluded. By looking at fandoms as organizations, we can begin to learn how we might create positive organizational change.

Finally, I wanted to learn through my research how music fandoms change over time and what the lasting impacts of music fandoms are. Generally, participants agreed with Christensen (1988) that: “Organizations are seldom static. They are generally dynamic, ever-changing phenomena that are created, influenced, and transformed by all members” (55). They identified shifts over time, such as the fandom maturing, interests changing, or changes that were a result of the artist growing and evolving. They also agreed that, like other organizations, fandoms can be entered and exited. Some participants revealed reasons for leaving fandoms: often either because values of the fandom and artist no longer aligned with their personal values or simply because they too are changing and growing and therefore no longer as interested or invested.

Many organizational theorists have identified rapid changes in technology and the new digital world as a factor that will require new organizational logic. Fandoms, which exist primarily in this digital space, have found ways to develop power structures, culture, and facilitate deep connections through online interaction. As more and more organizations begin to exist primarily online, they will need to negotiate how to operate. In this sense, learning from fandoms, while perhaps at first a strange idea, is on a deeper level quite helpful – and valuable.

Organizations often have an impact on members as people. We may be a member of a church and identify as Christian; we may work at a bank and identify as an accountant; or we

might identify as a student of the school we attend. Similarly, many (though not all) participants agreed that their membership in fandom influenced their sense of self and made up a part of their identity. In addition to having an impact on our sense of self, participants also revealed that fandom had both positive and negative effects on their mental health. Finally, we learn a lot from the organizations we are a part of. Participants shared that they learned how to see things differently, how to be more open to diversity and create diverse spaces, and how to love something unapologetically. They also learned about themselves and increased social skills like confidence, empathy, and how to make lasting connections with others.

My research identifies numerous ways in which fandoms and fandom members act as organizations. I have created the following list summarizing key factors in organizations that I found to be present in fandoms:

- Working together to accomplish goals, may include formal structure but not required
- Internal conflict due to differences in goals or opinions
- Domination: elites furthering their interests at the expense of others
- Organizational rules (even if unspoken) are reinforced by members
- Politics: organizations can be both political agents & arenas
- Many sources of power, including: expertise, reputation, and control of agenda and framing
- Coalition building
- Creation of shared meaning
- Interaction with (both influencing and being influenced by) the external environment
- Members who have different experiences based on their gender, race, class, and other demographic characteristics
- The ability to enter or exit the organization
- Impacts on members' sense of selves

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

I myself did not originally think of music fandoms as an example of an organization. After reading and talking primarily about workplace dynamics and outcomes, other types of organization did not come as easily to me, especially organizations that lack physical meeting spaces and official rules or guidelines. But it's precisely these organizations that we can learn from: they offer new insights by highlighting and hiding different aspects of organization. It is because music fandoms are not commonly considered to be organizations that they become a powerful area in which to conduct analysis: they remind us what we might often take for granted about organizations.

Organizational theorists argue that we are always organizing: defined as any form of working together to establish a goal. Growing out of scientific management and the Industrial Revolution, different methods of analysis have been used to look at organizations over time. One method, proposed by Gareth Morgan, uses "organizational metaphors" or lenses to consider organizations. I used his lenses of organization as domination, politics, culture, and organism, to guide my research and help formulate my interview questions. I also added topics that I felt were relevant and important to this research: identity and lasting impacts, weaving in some specific questions that I personally was interested in, such as fandom's impact on mental health.

My findings generally supported my claim that fandoms are organizations as seen in the list at the end of Chapter 5. Why should we care about defining fandoms in this way? As I indicated above, one reason to consider fandoms as organizations is to provide a new perspective that, like Morgan's metaphors, draws our attention to some things while obscuring others. A second reason, and a meaningful part of this research for me personally (and hopefully for many of my participants and any fandom members who read this), has been to consider and value an

important aspect of my life through an academic lens. Fandom is often disregarded by non-members as superficial; often devalued because of its association with young girls and femininity; and considered to be an unwarranted distraction at best and an obsession at worst. By conducting this study, I hope to have counteracted this disregard and devaluation and instead helped to legitimize music fandom.

Additionally, as organizations are rapidly changing it is all the more important to recognize more “non-traditional” forms of organization so we can learn from them. We can expect, as we see from this study of fandoms, that some features of organization are always true, even if they develop in different ways. We can also expect that there will be features of newer organizations, including virtually based organizations, that we have not yet identified or do not yet understand. For this reason, it is important to continue to ask questions and challenge our assumptions so that we may have the tools to understand and improve organizations in the future.

Using the qualitative method of in-depth interviews, my project sought to let those within the organization – those “running” it – tell their own stories. I hoped to allow them to reflect on their experiences and guide my research: I was more interested in creating meaning from the inside rather than imposing meaning from outside – from “experts.” This research method was valuable because it gave space for fandom members to include more personal anecdotes and it decreased the likelihood that my research would be shaped solely by my own assumptions or perceptions of music fandoms.

There were several limitations to my study, mainly due to time constraints and my level of research experience. Initially, I hoped to weave in literature and analysis from the field of “fan studies.” I am still interested to see how fan studies and organizational studies fit with each other and how they can both learn from and teach each other, but that ended up being beyond the

scope of the current study. Hopefully future research will address this and also increase the number of participants and reflect a more diverse collection of perspectives including increased variation in age, gender, sexuality, race, nationality, socioeconomic status, political affiliation, etc.

In addition to the specific possible benefits from defining fandoms as organizations, this research project has reminded me (and I hope it reminds you) that we are always organizing, and that while not always “official,” the different organizations we are a part of have cultures and power relations and impact our lives in meaningful ways. We can turn to these organizations to create inclusion and to use collective power to create radical change. This research has also reminded me of the power of connection: almost all participants talked about meaningful bonds they formed with others, whether for an hour long wait in line or a lifetime. Many of my own friends are people who I have connected with through fandom. As organizations change and we move towards a digitized world, it is incredibly important that we find ways to maintain meaningful connection with each other. Finally, this research has consistently reminded me of my own love of music and fandom, and as one of my participants said, to “love unapologetically.”

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Appendix A

Consent Form: Interview for Jacqueline Haughton's Senior Thesis**Project Title:** Music Fandoms as Organizations**Principal Investigator:** Jacqueline Haughton**Email:** jhaughto3263@scrippscollege.edu**KEY INFORMATION****My project:**

This research project is for my senior thesis as an Organizational Studies major at Pitzer College (as a Scripps College student). I am the Principal Investigator for this project and a student at Scripps College conducting a research study about music fandoms as organizations. My purpose is to provide an analysis of whether music fandoms can be considered organizations, and if so, to identify both what we can learn from fan studies to better understand organizations at large and what we can learn from organizational studies to better understand fandoms.⁵

Voluntary Participation and Right of Refusal:

To participate in this project, you must be 18 years or older. Your participation in this project is voluntary, and you may discontinue and withdraw your consent at any time, for any reason, and without penalty. I will not ask you any questions about illegal activities or immigration status and I ask that you do not reveal any such information to me about yourself or others. If for any reason you would like to stop the interview, please just let me know. You may also refuse to answer any questions that I ask, and either stop the interview or ask to move on to the next question. If you would like to record over something you just said, you may ask me to rewind the recording and record over a particular response at any time. You may also ask that I destroy all records of your participation, including deleting email correspondence and deleting audio recording files and written documents. *Participants may change their mind at any time, refuse to answer any questions, or ask to delete any portion of the interview without penalty.*

What Participating Involves:

I have a series of open-ended questions for the interview and I anticipate this taking between thirty and forty-five minutes. I will be asking participants about their experiences in organizations and fandoms; the intersection of culture, politics, and identities and fandom; and the lasting impact (or lack thereof) fandom has had on participants.

Confidentiality:

I will take every precaution to maintain your confidentiality as a participant in this research. I will not include your name or any identifying details (e.g., image, voice) in the write-up of this research project or in any of my presentations that result from this project. The digital recording of this interview will be stored on a password-protected server and transcribed within 7 days. Any identifying information that you reveal in the interview will be deleted from the

⁵ Unfortunately, incorporating fan studies proved to be beyond the scope of my study. However, at the time of interviews (and the signing of consent forms) I had not yet made this decision.

transcription. The recording will then be deleted, and the transcription will be stored on a password-protected server. No identifying information will be included on any documents associated with this study, except for this consent form. But this consent form will be stored separately from your responses.

Possible Benefits:

You are not expected to benefit directly from participation in this study.

Possible Risks and Discomforts:

Participation in this study will likely involve minimal risk to you. The questions you will be asked will be similar to what you encounter in your daily life. In the event that you experience any emotional discomfort, please let me know immediately. You may also contact Monsour Counseling Center if you are a student at the Claremont Colleges at 909-621-8202.

You may ask questions concerning the research before agreeing to participate or during the interview. If you have any questions regarding this research, you may contact Jacqueline (Jamie) Haughton at jhaughto3263@scrippscollege.edu, at 415 686 3873, or in person (please email or text to arrange a time and location).

IRB Review and Impartial Third Party:

Scripps College is the sponsor of this research study. This study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Scripps College. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant that have not been answered by the investigator you may contact the Scripps College Institutional Review Board at irb@scrippscollege.edu.

Signature for Consent

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you are at least 18 years of age and have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Print Participant's Name: _____

Date: _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Principal Investigator's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix B

Interview Questions – Jacqueline Haughton’s Senior Thesis
Music Fandoms as Organizations*Defining Organization and Fandom*

1. How would you define or explain the word “organization” ? What are some organizations that you belong to? What comes to mind when you hear the word “organization” ?
2. How would you define “fandom”? What do you think of when you hear the word fandom?
3. What fandoms do you consider yourself a member of? For how long have you been a member?
4. Are there other musicians or bands that you enjoy but you don’t consider yourself a member of their fandom? If so, why not?
5. Of the fandoms that you do consider yourself a part of, why do you consider yourself a member? What qualifies you as a member, in your opinion?
6. How do you primarily engage with other fans or fandom members?
7. Do fandoms in your experience work towards a common goal? If so, what is that goal?
8. Do fans or fandom members engage in any behaviors or activities to achieve their common goal?

Power

9. Are there ways that you or other music fandom members experience domination?
10. What kinds of power do fandom members have, if any? Do some members have more than others?
11. Do some fans dictate what behaviors that the fandom as a whole engages in? Is that something that the artist does? Or does everyone just do what they want?
12. What kinds of valued resources are there in fandoms? (for example a “follow,” tickets to a show, interactions with the artist)
13. What kinds of conflict do you experience or notice in music fandoms?
14. How does fandom itself act as a political actor? Do groups of fans engage in political activity? (think of political in a broad sense – do fandoms compete with other groups for resources? For control? To build coalitions? – and not only in the way that we typically think of “politics”)

Culture

15. What symbols are present in fandom? (for example, an image or logo or word)
16. What kinds of values and beliefs are present in the fandom(s) you are a member of?
17. Is there particular language you use within the fandom(s) you are a member of?
18. Are there important stories or traditions in your fandom?
19. Are there any important figures in the fandom, other than the artists themselves?
20. How would you describe the culture of your fandom(s)?
21. How does fandom fit into the larger environment/context? (You can define environment as small or large as you want – for example, the environment could be pop culture or it could be Twitter)

22. How does fandom shape the environment it is a part of?

Identity

For this series of questions, think about how these differing identities are treated within fandom and not solely whether they can be members.

23. Does gender play a role in fandom or fandom membership? How so? Are music fandoms a “feminine” space?
24. Does race play a role in fandom or fandom membership? How so?
25. Does socioeconomic class play a role in fandom or fandom membership? How so?
26. Does sexuality play a role in fandom or fandom membership? How so?
27. Does nationality play a role in fandom or fandom membership? How so?

Change Over Time and Lasting Impacts

28. Do you consider your membership in a music fandom to be permanent? If not, have you “exited” a fandom before? Why did you do so?
29. How have the fandoms you are a member of changed over time, if at all?
30. How has technology and globalization affected fandom?
31. What kinds of lasting impacts has belonging to a fandom had on you?
32. Does belonging to a fandom make up part of your identity or has being a member of a fandom influenced your sense of self?
33. Does belonging to a fandom increase opportunities for individuality or do you feel constrained and pushed to conform?
34. Does belonging to a fandom impact people’s mental health? Or do people use fandom to cope with difficult emotions?
35. What have you learned, if anything, from belonging to a fandom?

36. Is there anything else about music fandoms and your experience that you would like to share?

Appendix C

Debriefing Form: Interview for Jacqueline Haughton's Senior Thesis

Music Fandoms as Organizations

Thank you for your participation in this study. This debriefing is given as an opportunity for you to learn more about this research project, how your participation plays a part in this research, and why this research may be important to society. Please do not discuss this study with anyone else who might also participate in the future as knowledge about the study may influence their responses and, essentially, invalidate the information obtained from them. (For this same reason, it is important that you tell the experimenter if you knew details about this study before participating).

Organizational Studies as a field typically focuses on organizations such as workplaces, large businesses, corporations, or governments. While organizational theorists often recognize that other forms of human groups and communities can be considered organizations, they don't often include non-traditional organizations as examples in literature. For my senior thesis, I wanted to study what I felt to be an important type of organization in my own life: music fandoms.

I am motivated to do this project because my own experience as a member of music fandoms has led me to consider fandoms to be organizations. As organizational scholars continue to remark that organizations are becoming increasingly temporal, transient, and global, it is all the more relevant and important to study music fandoms: organizations with members that enter and exit frequently and rarely meet in person as one large group. I am interested in what argument can be made to consider music fandoms as organizations and both (1) what organizational studies can learn from fan studies and (2) what fan studies can learn from organizational studies.⁶

This study is designed to examine what fandom members think about their membership, fellow members, and whether they agree that music fandoms are organizations. What kinds of impacts do music fandoms have on fans? Is this similar to impacts that other organizations in their life have? Do they engage in behaviors within music fandoms that are similar to organizational behaviors that have been studied by organizational theorists? By participating, you have helped me to answer these questions.

My project will add to the scholarship in organizational studies and fan studies by proposing a combination and sharing of knowledge between the two fields.⁷ This may not only help to better understand music fandoms but also it will provide a new perspective (and new phenomena) from which to consider organizations.

If you are interested in the results of this study or if you have any additional questions or comments, you may contact the principal investigator, Jacqueline (Jamie) Haughton at 415 686 3873 or at jhaughto3263@scrippscollege.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Scripps College Institutional Review Board at irb@scrippscollege.edu. If you experience any emotional distress, you may contact Monsour Counseling Center at 909 621 8202.

Thank you again for your participation!

⁶ Again, I was unable to incorporate fan studies in this particular study. Instead I focused on defining fandoms as organizations and considered what we can learn from studying them as such.

⁷ See above.