The Function of Hosts: Enabling fan-celebrity interactions at pop culture conventions

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Dr. Jackie Raphael's research is predominantly within the themes of celebrity culture, social media, endorsements, branding, iconic status and bromances. Dr. Raphael on the Editorial Board of Waterhill Publishing, and on the Advisory Board of Centre for Media and Celebrity Studies (CMCS). As a member of CMCS, Dr. Raphael has organised and chaired conferences globally. She also created and is the producer of Celebrity Chat, a scholarly YouTube series. Dr. Raphael has published various papers and books including *Bridging the Gaps Between Celebrity and Media, Becoming Brands: Celebrity, Activism and Politics,* and the upcoming *Credibility and the Incredible: Disassembling the Celebrity Figure.*

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[1] Approval for the research came from The University of Notre Dame Australia in Sydney.
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Abstract

Celebrity seminars are a common fixture of contemporary popular culture conventions, sought after for their ability to offer close contact with celebrity figures and organised to facilitate in-person fan-celebrity encounters. Following a well-established formula the seminars constitute 'pre-staged encounters' (Ferris 2001); managed events enabling fan-celebrity interaction within controlled situations. Celebrities offer anecdotes and answers to selected fan questions that are regulated by hosts. These three agents constitute the main 'players' or agents in a ritualistic social situation governed by inherent rules and behavioural expectations (Goffman 1963). This paper examines the interaction between celebrities, fans and hosts during question and answer seminar sessions to explore the role of the host, as a facilitator of fan-celebrity interactions.

It offers an Australian perspective through its focus on six celebrity seminars held at the Supanova pop culture expo, Gold Coast in April 2016. Qualitative ethnographic methodology was employed with observation of participation interaction at seminars. Fan-celebrity interaction, as moderated and facilitated by the host, will be discussed from the perspective of dynamics of power, control and desire. In particular, the multifaceted role of the host within the fan-celebrity encounter is examined in detail.

Keywords: conventions; celebrity; hosts; fandom; popular culture

Introduction

Contemporary popular culture conventions are often tailored to meet the needs of a variety of fandoms; from comic book collectors, to cosplayers, and cult film and television followers. For fans of specific celebrity figures, conventions also offer the opportunity to interact with their favourite celebrity, either at autograph or organised question and answer (Q+A) sessions (also called seminars). In particular, Q+A seminars are sites where fans are guaranteed some form of interaction with the celebrity figure; seeing the celebrity 'in the flesh', hearing them speak, or asking a question. However, the degree of fan-celebrity interaction is often reliant on an additional figure: the host.

Increasingly, the popular culture convention has been gaining attention in mainstream media as large-scale events such as Comic Con are used to launch big budget blockbuster films and cult television series. However, the host of convention panels is not as closely explored. This paper aims to examine the role and function of non-celebrity hosts at the Australian Supernova pop culture expo. These hosts work for the convention and regularly host seminars designed to enable fan-celebrity interaction.

Supanova

Supanova is a touring pop culture convention that has been running in Australia for the past 17 years. Visiting major cities in five states across the nation, the convention offers a mix of merchandise, cosplay, celebrity autograph and photo sessions, and celebrity Q+A seminars. In particular, the seminars offer fans an opportunity to see celebrities in close proximity and interact with the celebrity. The format is familiar; celebrities appear on stage and answer fan questions in an interaction that is controlled and moderated by a host. They constitute 'pre-staged encounters' (Ferris 2001) in which all parties conform to established behavioural norms that on the one hand enable interaction, while simultaneously imposing restrictions determined by both logistic and economic factors. Within a one-hour session, a limited number of fan questions are answered; while fans who purchase VIP packages received privileged access to the celebrity through designated seating closer to the stage. Within this interaction, the host is constructed as an intermediary agent who assumes a variety of roles.

Fan-celebrity Interactions

Fan-celebrity interactions are theorised as one-sided parasocial relations (Horton and Whol 1956) that develop as a direct consequence of celebrities' onscreen presence. Regular exposure of fans to celebrities through media products such as television encourages and

increases degrees of intimacy and attachment between fan and celebrity. Bielby and Harrington's examination of soap opera viewing suggests the use of close ups enable emotional ties between viewer and onscreen character to form, facilitating attachments akin to in person social ties (1992). At the same time, the genre's focus on emotional storylines encourages 'the formation of bonds with these characters' (Ferris 2001, 30). Over time, knowledge of the characters on a show expands to include interest in, and knowledge of, the cast who bring them to life. As Kerry Ferris observes, fans 'inevitably approach the distinction between the characters they love and the actors who play those characters, and they may also come to desire firsthand knowledge about, and even contact with, the actors themselves' (32). Knowledge and familiarity with a show and its characters then constitute a major motivating factor in fan-celebrity interaction. This desire for interaction can manifest as both consumption practices and active behaviour. Consumption practices enable fans to learn more information about a celebrity through reading magazine articles or viewing interviews. Yet, information is often 'official' or presented in formulaic packages that serves to enhance the celebrity's public persona but provides little insight into the private.

In contrast to consumption practices, face-to-face encounters offer fans varying degrees of access to the celebrity and the potential to discover the real individual behind the 'manufactured mask of fame' (Holmes and Redmond 2006, 4). These face-to-face encounters are often governed by degrees of power and influence that are social and commercial in nature. Ferris defines two modes of fan-celebrity encounter, unstaged and pre-staged (2001), which are influenced by internalised and externalised factors of control. Unstaged encounters occur in unplanned circumstances in which the celebrity is sought by the fan away from organised public appearances. Without physical restrictions such as barriers separating the fan from celebrity, this form of interaction is governed by internalised rules of social interaction and (perceived) acceptable levels of behaviour (Goffman 1963). On the other hand, pre-staged encounters take place under organised, controlled and restrictive situations in which the celebrity is 'at work', performing their public persona, and actively seeking fan attention. Fan access to the celebrity is limited by structural factors – celebrities appear on stage while fans sit in the audience – as well as financial investment – fans paying more for VIP passes are given privileges over other fans.

Additionally, 'trophy seeking' (Ferris and Harris 2011, 14) motivates fans to obtain autographs or photographs from celebrities in order to retain physical evidence of the moment of encounter. As most pre-staged photograph opportunities are paid occasions, acquiring such trophies reflect a fan's commitment to the celebrity, as well as their ability to financially

invest in the privilege. Relations between fan and celebrity during pre-staged encounters is thus governed by institutional, corporate and social power that place both agents within a dynamic that commodifies the celebrity whilst offering fans a means to fulfil their desires for greater access and understanding of celebrity figures.

Hosts

Within the pre-staged fan-celebrity encounter, scholars have focused on the dynamic between the fan and the celebrity to reveal the desires and relative power relations inherent within organised public appearances (Ferris 2001; Ferris and Harris 2011; Rejinders et al 2014). Scholarship on hosts, tend to reflect upon media – that is radio or television – hosts. In particular, radio hosts are examined for their ability to (vocally) command authority (Moran and Aveyard 2013), foster a sense of imagined community (Fitzgerald and Housley 2007), and encourage democratic participation (Gunders 2012). Additionally, their cultural and political power (Fitzgerald 2007), and position within the mediascape is interrogated.

In the wake of the Australian 'Cash for Comments' scandal in 1999 (where influential talkback hosts were revealed to provide endorsements to specific companies), Graeme Turner questions the ethical conduct, and indeed ethical principles of hosts who are not ethically bound journalists 'but (ethically free) 'entertainers'…' (2001, 349). Turner queries the application of an ethical framework within an entertainment-based media, while revealing the power (both cultural and political) such 'entertainers' possess.

Indeed, within the Australian mediascape, talkback hosts are media figures in their own right, with varying degrees of fame. While not all are celebrities, the structure of the radio programme and their relationship with the listening audience places them in a position of authority. In particular, the techniques used by radio hosts encourages civic engagement through the interrogation of relevant issues and, through the use of personal address, 'connects public issues … to the lived experience of private citizens...' (Gunders 2012, 55). Additionally, the host constructs themselves as an intermediary between the listener and broader socio-political structure, their discursive efforts bringing the potential for change. However, the image of the host as effective intermediary is as much a consequence of the structure of radio programming as it is of actual intervention. Gunders notes the format of reporting 'a news event in such a way that is demands a response', following 'with a relevant news actor apparently responding to those demands and the concerns of callers', offers a neat resolution to the story. The resulting impression 'enhances the image of the host as able to effect change' (57) for listeners, and furnishes the host with elevated authority.

While the ways in which radio hosts engage with their callers have been studied (Fitzgerald and Housley 2007; Ewart 2016), Kate Ames offers a view of how hosts engage in conversation and banter with each other during chat format radio programmes. Emphasising the performative nature of hosting, Ames identifies how hosts' 'doing being a radio host' (2012, 113) on community radio, and their management of host/host and host/caller banter, reveals the social and moral norms of the listening community. Ames' exploration of the interaction between hosts and callers thus demonstrates the importance of host 'performance' in fostering the growth of specific listening communities and the establishment of codes of behaviour therein.

Likewise, Moran and Aveyard (2013) assign hosts to the top of a vocal hierarchy in the format of radio (and later television) quiz shows, *Pick a box* and *Wheel of Fortune*. Through various features such as number of 'speech occasions' (110), control (of questions and correct answers), and use of generally accepted speech patterns known as the 'public voice' (111), the host of radio quiz shows possess greater degrees of 'cultural power' (111) than contestants and studio audiences. While contestants are afforded more speech opportunities and the ability to negotiate, 'and even contradict…' (111) the verbal format of the programme, the audience's presence 'could never be more than symbolic' (113). For the most part silent, the audience's voice is only heard when granted opportunities by the host. The host thus possess the greatest degree of cultural power and authority within the format of the show.

In the context of popular convention seminars however, the figure with the most cultural power is generally the celebrity figure whom fans have gathered to see. Fans can be characterised as audience members who have little authority and are indeed mostly silent. The dynamic between host and celebrity thus requires further exploration as, while the celebrity may possess greater cultural power, it is the host to whom practical control of the room is assigned.

Like radio hosts, Television hosts are characterised a part of the hierarchy of a programme's formatting. In her exploration of Australian political discussion programme *Q&A*, Belinda Eslick highlights audience sentiment that equates host Tony Jones with the unbalanced power hierarchy of the programme. The format invites audiences to put questions to a panel of politicians, however 'there is rarely a sense of a genuinely inclusive, back-and-forth conversation between panel and audience' (2016, 128). The production elements of 'spot-lighting' place central emphasis on the panel and host, and when 'not asking questions,

audience members are presented as quiet observers' (128). Like the host of quiz shows, the format of political discussion programmes places the host at the top of the hierarchy.

Television hosts maintain this authority partly through the structure of the programme, but also through the construction of a sustainable persona that operates both within the context of the 'shows', as well as within the broader mediascape. Tony Jones is not only the host of *Q&A*, but also a political journalist and columnist. His activity outside the context of *Q&A* reinforces his authority to manage discourse on political issues on the show. The formation of a viable and sustainable persona thus affords television hosts similar levels of exposure as celebrity figures from other fields. Indeed, Stephen Colbert's onscreen persona as host of the *Colbert Report* was so successful, he maintained the performance during a Congressional hearing into migrant workers (Bishop 2015).

Within the format of (non-political) factual programming, hosts function as figures for identification through whom audience gain access to different life experiences (Healy and Huber 2010). In this context hosts are both proxies and guides for audiences unable to experience events, or explore questions. Yet, the hosts' authority is no less diminished. In her exploration of makeover shows *What Not to Wear, Ten Years Younger* and *Style by Jury*, Alison Hearn equates the host with 'the imagined authoritative gaze of the television image industry' (2008, 499). The host becomes a proxy for hegemonic standards of beauty, which the programme seeks to enforce. Other makeover formats call for less confrontational roles, with the host cast as a counsellor concerned for participant's well-being; 'constantly asking…how they feel and what they need' (500). Yet, even within this more 'caring' role, the host is imbued with a higher degree of power within the format of the show, who 'gently' enforces (or encourages) hegemonic norms.

While relatively fewer, accounts of hosts of popular convention panels also identify the host as an extension of the power dynamics imposed on the fan-celebrity encounter. Ferris and Harris' exploration of pre-stage fan-celebrity encounters characterises 'convention staff' as controllers (2011, 18). The host is not specifically identified, and while he/she may not be present, the 'staff' are considered as an extension and personification of the hierarchy inherent within the location and logistics of the encounter. Similarly, Lynn Zubernis and Katherine Larsen's description of conventions in their exploration of *Supernatural* fandom does not identify hosts, but reinforces the centrality of the microphone and access to it (2012).

Fewer studies have analysed the *contribution* of the host within the dynamic, which this paper remedies. It offers an Australian perspective on fan-celebrity encounters at a popular culture convention held in 2016. The majority of popular culture consumed in

Australia originates from a UK/US context (Screen Australia 2015). However, spatial distance from these localities results in fewer opportunities for unstaged celebrity encounters, restricting fans to viewing celebrities onscreen. This paper examines the Australian fan's response to pre-staged fan-celebrity encounters through exploration of six celebrity seminars.

Method

Ethnographic data collection is employed, using passive observation of participant interaction at celebrity seminars. Ethics approval is granted by the Human Research Ethics Committees of the University of Notre Dame Australia and Curtin University. Both authors took audio recordings and/or notes during the seminars with a focus on interactions between celebrities, fans and hosts. The notes are then compared during debrief sessions to find a consensus on impressions. Interactions are informed by the relative roles occupied by each agent. These roles are categorised according to the function of the agent within the interaction. Roles are described below, with particular attention to the mediating function of hosts.

Summary of Seminars

The authors attended Q+A seminars during the convention. Of the six seminars, only one had a local celebrity, John Jarrett, promoting the series *Wolf Creek* (McLean 2016). The other seminars are for Dawn Wells, best known for *Gilligan's Island* (Amateau 1964-67); Shawn Ashmore from *X-Men 2* (Singer 2003), *The Following* (Williamson 2013-15) and *Quantum Break* (Lake and Kasurinen 2016); Daniel Sharman from *The Originals* (Plec 2013-), *Immortals* (Singh 2011) and *Teen Wolf* (Davis 2011-); Adrianne Palicki from *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D* (Whedon 2013-), *John Wick* (Stahelski and Leitch 2014), and *G.I. Joe: Retaliation* (Shu 2013); and Burn Gorman, Naoko Mori and Gareth David-Lloyd from *Torchwood* (Davies 2006-11).

Identifying Roles at the Seminars

The celebrities, fans and hosts all play pivotal roles in the convention experience. These three agents have an interesting dynamic across all the seminars, which have been expressed in Table 1. A part of this dynamic is the use of banter, storytelling and two-way communication. Within this environment fans are given an opportunity to interact with a celebrity, but only if they are chosen by the host. This gives power to the host, yet the audience and the celebrity set the tone of the seminar through their level of enthusiasm and engagement. Thus, the various roles are co-dependent in making these events successful.

Roles				
Celebrity	Performer	Promoter		
Fan	Interviewer	Audience	Critic	Consumer
Host	Controller	Interviewer	Co-Performer	Fan

Table 1: Roles each person plays in a convention seminar.

Roles of the Celebrity

'Celebrity as performer' refers to their need to be a storyteller, comedian, role model and sometimes singer, while on stage. They often try to create banter with co-stars (if on a panel), the host or fans. With many of these seminars recorded and shared online, they are also expected to have original material for their various appearances. 'Celebrity as promoter', refers to their advertising of current, past and future work. Sometimes a celebrity is required to promote a specific show and will try to maintain the focus on that.

Roles of the Fan

The 'fan as interviewer' refers to the selected fans that get to ask questions. They have pressure to ask something original and gain a good response from the celebrity. Yet, some fans see it as an opportunity to stand out, express their fandom or try to make the celebrity laugh. Fans can also be the most critical of the celebrity responses, or questions from other fans. These are defined as 'fans as critic'. On the other hand, the audience as a whole plays a pivotal role in creating the atmosphere, which is defined as 'fan as audience member'. If they frequently laugh at jokes and applaud this creates a much more positive and supportive environment. Lastly, 'fan as consumer' refers to those who have paid to attend these events and need to be rewarded for their commitment.

Roles of the Host

The 'host as controller' refers to their level of power in selecting who gets to ask a question, but also their significance in creating some form of security or barrier between the fans and celebrities. They also facilitate the event and can decide how much time they will have to ask their own questions before selecting fans. The 'host as interviewer' relates to the pressure they have to be well informed and prepared with quality questions for the celebrity. The 'host as co-performer' refers to them creating banter with the celebrity and often working as a warm-up act. Lastly, some hosts are not just doing their job but are actually fans of the celebrity

and/or their work creating the category 'host as fan'. This is evident through the questions they ask, their level of enthusiasm, and depth of knowledge.

The Function of Hosts

Examination of the dynamics of fan-celebrity encounters in the literature generally considers the host to be an extension, or personification, of the infrastructures of control implemented during pre-staged fan-celebrity encounters (Ferris and Harris 2011; Reijnders et al 2014). However, closer examination of the host reveals not only the multifaceted nature of their role, but their key function in enabling celebrity and fan to interact, and on occasion to enact their respective roles. As a crucial part of the convention, when a host fulfils their four key roles outlined above, the result is facilitation of interaction, enhanced experiences, a strong performance, and clear promotion.

Facilitating Interaction

The setting of the room imposes several restrictions that limit fan-celebrity interaction. Firstly, fans are seated, en mass, in the audience while celebrities are seated on stage. Fans sit in semi-darkness while the celebrity is well lit and can be seen by all. Proximity within these settings is commodified, with fans willing to pay more for VIP passes given access to seating closer to the stage. The 'fan as consumer' here exercises their right to experiences owed in return for their financial investment. As this investment is often significant, certain advantages are expected such as closer proximity and the ability to skip the queue. The privilege here is not only manifest in priority entry but increased opportunity for unmediated access. Organisers set up screens and run a feed of the action on stage. This enables all fans in the room to see the celebrity in close up. However, only fans who had bought passes and lined up are presented with the opportunity to witness the celebrity 'in the flesh'.

In this context, the host has free range to move through the room – license not even the celebrity possesses – alternating between the stage and the floor. This freedom extends to communication with the organisers, as is demonstrated when the host requests for the lights to be dimmed after Jarrett remarked about the brightness. In this instance, the celebrity relies on the host to communicate his request to event organisers, establishing the 'host as controller' and as an intermediary. This invests the host with a degree of authority the celebrity lacks. The host, as an intermediate agent between celebrity and organiser, possesses the authority to control the physical conditions of the setting, as well as use of allocated time.

Naturally, this control extends to fan-celebrity interactions as well. For the most part, it is the host's function to circulate throughout the room and select fan questions, allowing them use of the host's microphone. Thus, the host possesses the power to control which fans are given the opportunity to speak, constituting a major player in the unbalanced power dynamic of the pre-staged encounter. On the other hand, hosts also have the ability to rectify some of the hierarchy of privilege associated with commodified access. This is demonstrated by their wide coverage of the room, moving between front and back and side-to-side, for fan questions.

Enhancing Experiences

The host's power and control provides the structure for fans and celebrities to enact their role, and often enhances the interaction. A recurring trend is hosts asking fans to state their name before asking a question. This personalises the experience for both the fan and the celebrity. It enables the celebrity to use the fan's first name, instigating moments of contact described by Reijnders et al as 'direct, unmediated experience[s]' (2014, 151). These moments of contact are significant, particularly in a media saturated environment where celebrity images proliferate precisely because they are unmediated, personal and occur within the everyday space. They thereby gain 'an important symbolic value' (151) for those motivated to enhance emotional involvement with the celebrity, seek higher fan status through privileged encounters, or fold the encounter into larger personal narratives. Fans also derive value from the fact that a celebrity has met them, offering some sense of reciprocity that elevates the interaction beyond the parasocial. Hosts often enhance the experience by stating that a fan has been patiently waiting a long a time or pointing out that they have dressed in a particular costume. This rewards the loyal fan and informs the celebrity of their level of enthusiasm.

Furthermore, hosts often need to re-interpret or summarize questions to assist celebrities and fans to better understand each other, especially across cultural divides or in unusual situations, as the following exchange highlights:

Fan (to Sharman): Do you feel blessed to have such a good jaw line?
Host: Well done for putting that into a question.
Sharman (after slight pause): Yeah, well done.

Sharman then proceeds with a lengthy answer relating to a family member's perception of his appearance and its impact on his self-image. The majority of questions up to this point focus

on Sharman's work and are fairly 'serious', so the shift in focus to appearance carries the potential to make the celebrity feel uncomfortable. The host's interjection between the fan question and celebrity response diffuses some of the awkwardness by making light of the question. Simultaneously, it gives Sharman time to construct a reasonable reply, thus satisfying fan desire for more detailed responses, and providing the fan with insight into his personal life. The host thus, facilitates interactions and contributes to maintenance of a lively and pleasant atmosphere. Part of this facilitation extends to actions that place the host in a protective role, in which celebrity figures rely on the security of the host.

While the celebrity figure is the main attraction of the seminar, it is the host who is the most active participant, and to whom celebrities defer as the leader of the social encounter. Viewed through the lens of Goffman's theory of rule-based social behaviour (1963), the host naturally assumes a role of authority that is imbued with a certain level of responsibility and governance. Both fans and celebrities defer to this leader and conduct their interactions in accordance to the established norms of pre-staged fan-celebrity encounters. In these norms some key roles for both fan and celebrity are enacted.

'Fans as audience members' are expected to enter and leave when requested, as well as laugh and be silent when appropriate. The 'fan as interviewer' cannot pose their questions until the host approaches with the microphone, and must raise their hands and wait to be selected. For celebrities, being a 'promoter' of their work involves responding to host questions (usually) at the beginning of the session, and giving detailed replies to fans during the Q+A. Entering and leaving when requested, and following host instructions is also required. In this context, the host's role as moderator provides the framework for behaviour that both fans and celebrities operate within, forming a set of guidelines that enable smooth social interaction. Deviation from this set of interactions highlights the importance of the host as moderator, as demonstrated in this example:

> Host (to Ashmore): I have a choice to put to you. Here are two fans, do you want to hear from the person on the right or the person from the left first?
> Ashmore: That's really hard… I'm going to go with right because that's how I read.

Ashmore's hesitancy to choose between two fans reflects, in part, his reluctance to be seen to favour one fan over the other. His explanation for why he selects the fan on the right reveals his desire to offer a neutral resolution thereby neither offending the 'second choice' nor

privileging the 'first'. It also reveals the degree to which celebrity figures rely on hosts to enable them to maintain a sense of availability to all fans, neither privileging nor excluding anyone. When a host makes the choice for the celebrity – as is the case for all seminars observed – the celebrity relinquishes all decision-making responsibilities and is able to remain fair to all fans. It is after all not the celebrity who denies the fan an opportunity to pose questions, it is the host. In this leadership position, the host possesses the authority to grant and deny fans a voice. Yet, the celebrity requires the host to enact this role in order to maintain their impartiality, and thus accessibility to, their fans. Thus, the celebrity only occupies the roles of 'performer' for all their fans equally, and 'promoter' of their work (discussed further below). They do not control the situation. On a practical level, hosts also monitor and regulate the activity of the 'fans as interviewer' by screening fan questions to ensure a progressive flow of topics. A typical expression of this form of regulation is seen in the host of Well's seminar, who rejects a fan question with the comment: 'that's already been asked'.

Hosts have a responsibility to acquire content knowledge of the seminars they moderate. However, the depth of knowledge demonstrated by many hosts exceeds professional interest, as they regularly display knowledge concerning a celebrity or body of work more aligned with the encyclopaedic knowledge of fans. Additionally, hosts engage in the sharing of celebrity information and encounters that is common among fan communities (Reijnders et al 2014). For example, a host comments to fans outside of the Wells' seminar room: "Well done. Her eyes lit up when she saw you in costume'. Away from the seminar, the host now occupies a role of 'host as fan', speaking as a fan reflecting on the minutiae of a celebrity encounter. However, he is a fellow fan of elevated status due to his dual role as a host. The host is clearly enthusiastic about the shared moment and keen to reinforce this by speaking directly to the fans. His comments thus carry with it the authority of the host, which reinforces the perception that the fans have engaged in an instance of reciprocal interaction with the celebrity. In reference to an earlier encounter, the fans had 'had a moment' of shared rapport with Wells during an autograph session. The host's excitement and recognition of this additional 'moment' reaffirms the fans interpretation of their earlier interaction. It is in these moments of reciprocity that fans seek not only to reveal the 'real' celebrity as 'nice people', but also to fulfil the desire of the parasocial for the celebrity to meet the fan and learn about them or 'befriend' them (Reijnders et al 2014).

Performing and Promoting

The setting of the pre-staged fan-celebrity encounter enables the interaction to be viewed, quite easily, as a performance. The celebrity is, after all, literally on stage with fans sitting in the audience. As the celebrity is 'at work' while on stage, their presence, actions and efforts in promoting their latest projects all constitute a form of performance. The 'promoter' and 'performer' roles of the celebrity are thus often combined.

Celebrities affiliated with singular or classic works, such as Wells, are in attendance less to promote, rather to interact with long-term fans. Wells told many stories about filming *Gilligan's Island* and screened home movies showing behind the scenes footage. Thus, the host did not have a responsibility to help promote anything new, only to ensure there was a segue to the videos shown.

Ashmore and Sharman are associated with a number of high profile works, and as such their general performance references a variety of topics, as did host and fan questions. Ashmore's seminar starts with his teaching, both the host and the audience, to do an 'Iceman' battle pose from the *X-Men* series. By including the host and the fans in this activity, the interaction makes everyone a performer. Seeming to take their lead from the introduction, fan questions are not limited to *Quantum Break*, the primary work he attended to promote. Fans also query his views on the different representations of Iceman in comics and films, and what it was like working with Kevin Bacon on *The Following*. Sharman spoke about a variety of work rather than focusing on promoting one series or film. All of the celebrities use banter in their performances to engage their audience and shared stories from both their careers and personal lives.

In the context of these celebrity performances, the host occupies a number of roles. On some occasions, the host will simply introduce the celebrity guest and the work they are promoting. They enact a 'host as interviewer' role to initiate engagement with the celebrity and provide context (and knowledge of the work) for the following fan questions. The 'fans as interviewer' will often build upon questions initiated by the host, and as such the host plays a vital role in establishing the trajectory and tone of fan questions. Thus the 'host as interviewer' can influence the 'fan as interviewer'.

Occasionally the host also becomes a 'co-performer'. For instance at the beginning of the *Torchwood* panel the host asks the audience to vocalise different emotions before inviting the celebrities to enter the stage. As warm up act, the host literally opens the show by increasing the excitement of fans, using their personality to keep the audience entertained while waiting for the 'main act'.

Another example of a host as 'co-performer' is when the celebrity and host have developed prior rapport and create their own personal banter in front of the audience. This is the case with the cheeky flirting between Palicki and the host of her seminar. The host explains to the audience his previous interview with Palicki, where they bonded.

At other times, the host becomes a part of the wider performance. For instance, one fan asks Sharman if he likes mangoes, to which Sharman hesitantly replies 'yes'. The host then moves to the next fan and asks them 'What's your question, do you like bananas?', provoking laughter from both the audience and Sharman. Reference to the previous 'mango' question extends the joke, while simultaneously inserting the host into the interaction between fan and celebrity. The response from the fans and Sharman is the response of an audience to a performer's gag, thus transforming the host from a master of ceremonies removed from the action to one who is part of the act. At the same time, the fan who poses the initial question is also drawn into the wider performance; Sharman asking if she likes mangoes, which she confirms. He then asks why she posed the question, to which she replies that it is a question she asks everyone. This interaction reveals the performative aspects of all three agents within the dynamic of the 'pre-staged' fan-celebrity encounter.

The fan also becomes part of the wider performance when they engage in prolonged interaction with the celebrity. An example of this is when a fan asks Ashmore specific gaming questions, which he answers then poses questions back to the fan. The conversation goes back and forth for some time. In the act of generating two-way conversation with the fan, Ashmore is satisfying the desire of the fan to know more about him, but also learning more of the fan and bridging the gap between fan and celebrity. He is also establishing his credibility as a fellow gamer, thus adding authenticity to his role in *Quantum Break*. The fan's prolonged interaction with the celebrity broadens the focus of the topics discussed in the room from Ashmore and his affiliated works to other game genres. The fan has thus initiated an encounter in which both fan and celebrity are equal 'co-performers' in the social context of the fan-celebrity interaction, where the host is temporarily removed. Furthermore, the fan's questioning of Ashmore's knowledge of gaming is an example of 'fan as critic'. If Ashmore had not been well informed, it would have changed the audience's perception of him.

Conclusion

By understanding these various roles and their dynamics we are able to better analyse fandom and what makes convention seminars successful. Popular culture conventions are held globally with a large amount of financial capital invested into them in order to promote films

and television shows. From a marketing perspective, they not only help promote to those who attend the events, but now reach a broader audience through social media. These conventions also provide an opportunity for fans to dress up and share their enthusiasm with other fans and to interact with celebrities that are usually unreachable. A pivotal part of drawing fans and celebrities closer is the role of the host.

In terms of fan-celebrity interactions the host plays a multifaceted role. They are not only representatives of the organisation that limits and restricts fan-celebrity interactions, they play an active part (sometimes becoming part of the performance) and help to facilitate the interaction between fan and celebrity. On occasion, the host enables the celebrity and fan to enact their roles. The roles identified in this paper offers a means to articulate the dynamics of the three agents active within the social interactions of the celebrity Q+A seminar. They are indicative of observations at a medium sized popular culture convention in Australia and as such are not generalisable. However, they can offer some initial terms of reference for similar studies. In particular, the fluidity of the host within the pre-staged encounter suggests this agent is one worthy of further study in fan-celebrity interactions. Popular convention hosts are often under explored in fan and celebrity scholarship, generally associated with the hierarchy of production (see literature review above). This paper highlights the pivotal nature of their role in facilitating fan-celebrity interaction.

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Films, Television series and Games

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