

# Made of Awesome: The Online Culture of Nerdfighteria

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# Research Questions

- What is the culture of Nerdfighteria?
- Do Nerdfighters feel a sense of stigma because they are “nerds”? If so, how does is this expressed in the culture?

# Thesis

- The community of Nerdfighteria has a true culture with shared beliefs, values, and symbols.



# Literature Review

- Stigma
  - McKenna and Bargh (1998)
  - Kaplan and Liu (2001)
- Subcultures
  - William and Copes (2005)
- The Internet and Communities
  - Baym (1998)
  - Kahn and Kellner (2004)

# Theory

- Geertz *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973),
  - culture is a “pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life”

- Blumer *Symbolic Interactionism* (1969)
  - “human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them”
- Goffman *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (1963)
  - stigmatized group has no “capacity for collective action, nor a stable embracing pattern of mutual interaction”

# Methods

- Participants
  - 18+ years old, consider selves Nerdfighter
  - Convenient and snowball sampling
- Questionnaire
- Coding



# Demographics

- 9 people
- 18-20 years old, mean=19
- 67% female
- U.S., Canada, England
- Participants' education
- Parents' education



# Nerdfighters

- John and Hank Green, January 2007
- FAQs



# Findings

- Shared Values and Beliefs
  - “I realized that there are TONS of people just like me. I finally had a group of people who I related to.”

- Acceptance of All Members

- “The importance of not forgetting to be awesome. (This generality is useful in addressing a mass audience of different faiths, political beliefs, nationalities – don’t forget to be awesome allows the community to encourage itself to do good things, without specifying what those good things might exactly be. One Nerdfighter might petition their congressman in favor of the “sanctity” of marriage – another might actively campaign for marriage equality.)”
- “Values shift from person to person and it is the same within the community of Nerdfighteria. Majority of Nerdfighters, however, tend to be mutually accepting of all faiths, mannerisms, and beliefs.”

- Acceptance of Non-Members

- “There are so many people that don’t even know that Nerdfighteria exists and that’s depressing to me. As for decepticons[non-Nerdfighters]: What did we do to you to make you dislike us?? Is it because a lot of us don’t want to be “jocks”? Just open your heart to us. We’re quite a lovely bunch. Let’s be friends...maybe. You bring the cookies.”
- “Everyone has the right to believe in what they want to believe in, and I understand that not everyone is going to share the values and ideals presented through Nerdfighteria,”

- Acceptance and Decreasing World Suck



- Fostering Self-Esteem and Group Pride
  - “This phrase is a mantra carried among Nerdfighteria in order to keep moral[e] high and is a continuous reminder to be the best possible person you can”.
  - “DFTBA embodies the true goal of Nerdfighteria: try your hardest to do something kind or awesome whenever you’re given the opportunity. It reminds us that being awesome, helping others, is rewarding in itself and often so simple, but easy to forget or lose sight of.”

- Enthusiasm



# Discussion

- Kaplan and Liu (2001)
- Geertz (1973)
- Blumer (1969)
  - DFTBA
- Goffman (1963)



# Strengths and Weaknesses

- Geertz (1973)
  - Researcher is a member
- Bias
- Non representative sample



# Don't Forget to be Awesome!

Questions?

