

ANYTHING BUT TRIVIAL: TRANS-CONTEXTUAL IDENTIFICATION AND
CONTROL AMONG PARTICIPANTS IN THE WORLD'S LARGEST TRIVIA
CONTEST

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

With this research project, I endeavored to better understand the relationship that exists between identification, context, and control within communities of practice in which members identify with particular salience. Through an application of a discursive approach to the study of identification, I sought to explain how individuals engage in conscious and unconscious identity work both within and beyond the situated context of their community identities. In this way, I extended the prevailing theorizing about context and identity by acknowledging the ways our particularly salient identities can shape our various social contexts. Furthermore, I applied a critical lens in order to better understand how mechanisms of concertive control and identity regulation can also extend beyond the situated context of one's identity. In pursuit of this project, I conducted an ethnographic investigation of a community of trivia players who participate in the annual World's Largest Trivia Contest.

As a result of this investigation, I identified knowledge and competition as two predominate identity discourses in circulation within the trivia community. I was able to observe how the enactment and negotiation of these identity discourses occurred both within and beyond the situated context of the World's Largest Trivia Contest environment, demonstrating the trans-contextual nature of members' identification. Furthermore, I was able to identify how these identity discourses serve to restrain and motivate particular behaviors among participants both within and beyond the situated context of the community, demonstrating a trans-contextual system of control.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Significant consensus has been reached across disciplines to suggest that an individuals' sense of self is a product of one's many changing and emerging social/organizational identities. Furthermore, much of the existing research across both the organizational communication and organizational behavior disciplines has explained how one's multiple identities are situated within their social context (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Scott, Corman & Cheney, 1998). This is to suggest that one's immediate context signals a social actor to draw from one of their many social/organizational identities to inform their values, beliefs, and behaviors. For example, in their structural approach to studying identity, Scott, Corman, and Cheney (1998) introduce the concept of situated activities to explain "when certain identities may be more or less salient for the organizational member, and thus explain the strength and nature of one's identification with varied targets in different situations" (p. 300). In describing the nature of one's social identity, Ashforth and Mael (1989) explain that, "A developing sense of *who* one is complements a sense of *where* one is and what is expected" [italics from original text] (p. 27).

This prevailing body of research has established the relationship that exists between individuals' immediate social context and their process of identifying. Specifically, this research has highlighted the ways in which context informs members' identities. With this project, I aim to build upon this body of work by further investigating the relationship that exists between context and the process of identifying

by considering how certain group, organizational, or community identities can span social context, impacting members' sense of self across an actor's many social contexts. Thus, with this project I will theorize about how identification is not merely informed by context by considering how context is informed by individuals' various identities. In pursuit of this objective, I begin this chapter by addressing two research problems: (1) How can we explain the persistent enactment of individual's community/organizational identities across the many facets of their lives?, and (2) When individuals enact their identities across the many facets of their lives, how are their beliefs and behaviors both limited and empowered by the available discursive resources of that identity? Next, I describe the research site used for this investigation. Finally, I outline the research questions that guide this investigation and their importance to the problems that have been described.

Research Problem One: Salient Identities and Context

While theorizing on identity has maintained the importance of situated context for the processes of identification, examples of individuals enacting the resources of their community identities across the contexts of their lives abound. Consider fundamentalist religions, social activists, or impassioned members of political parties. These individuals do not simply draw upon the discursive identity resources associated with their membership to these communities when in the situated context of that community. Instead, they inscribe those discursive resources into many (perhaps all) of the contexts of their lives. I am reminded of my wife's Grandfather using the saying of

Grace before Thanksgiving dinner to espouse a border-line treasonous condemnation of the President of the United States.

A contemporary example can be found in the defenders of the confederate flag that continues to fly both officially and unofficially across the southern states of the United States of America. As a symbol of many things more than merely a confederation of states, the flag has continued to be flown now 150 years since the dissolution of the confederacy. The flag is a discursive resource for a community of people who collectively identify with the beliefs, values, and behaviors the flag represents. However, many of these individuals are not only subject to the discursive resources of their identity as confederate southerners when visiting the state house, voting, or debating politics. Instead, these individuals draw upon the logics of these discursive resources across the many contexts of their lives. This is evident in the varied ways the confederate flag is displayed by members of the community. Beyond flying above state houses, the flag can be found on t-shirts, belt buckles, can cozies, license plates, and in many other settings. This prompts the question: How do individuals identify with particularly salient communities beyond the situated context of that community?

This is an important question, because it can provide insight into the experience of identification and its vast implications for both politically relevant communities (such as confederate southerners or fundamentalist believers) and the everyday communities we all belong to that can have just as pervasive of a social impact to one's immediate environment. While prevailing research into identification in organizations and

communities has done well to highlight the importance of understanding the impact context has on processes of identification, this question unlocks the theoretical and social potential to better understand the impact our more salient identities can have beyond their situated contexts and across our social lives.

Research Problem Two: Context and Control

In addition to investigating how the discursive resources of particularly salient organizational and community identities are enacted across situated context, I endeavor to better understand how the enactment of these discursive resources both restrains and empowers individuals' behaviors and decisions across social context. Picking up with the example from the previous section, strongly identifying members of the confederate south remain subject to the inscribed values and decisional premises that accompany their identification as members of that community. The beliefs they derive through membership in that community can both limit their available decisions and embolden otherwise radical behavior.

The results of this effect across contexts can be impactful. It can impact the way individuals relate to their family and friends. It can impact the choices individuals make in terms of their education or careers. It can result in discrimination in the workplace (or, in some cases, prevent it). It can even result in violence and destruction (or the alternative). Thus, the important question I ask in this project is, "How is the behavior of saliently identifying members of a community limited or empowered in meaningful ways beyond the context of the community itself?"

This is an important question, because it allows for a better understanding of the wide-reaching implications of identity control systems. Studies in unobtrusive control and identification have long established the profound implications that can result within the context of an organization or community. Such implications can be destructive to both the individual and the organization as a whole. Considering the reach of control systems beyond their situated context is theoretically important, because it expands the way we think about the experience of control, who is being impacted by the system of control, how mechanisms of control such as surveillance and discipline operate beyond situated context, and how and where individuals can engage in resistance.

The Research Site

As a backdrop for this investigation into identification, context, and control I studied a community of trivia players that compete in the annual World's Largest Trivia Contest (WLTC). The WLTC is a 54-hour long event hosted each April consisting of hundreds of trivia questions and attracting hundreds of teams and thousands of participants. In 2014, the year of data collection, the contest hosted its 45th annual event. While the contest only runs for 54 hours each April, for many teams and participants the contest is a year-round competition. Personal experience as well as pilot interviews and researcher observations suggested that certain participants in the contest exhibit behavior consistent with particularly salient identification. Such participants express a significant internalization of perceived values and an activation of their "trivia identity" across multiple situated contexts.

This environment offered an ideal site for an investigation into member identification and member control. As noted above, pilot research and personal experience suggested that the trivia community consists of a number of members whose behavior and articulated beliefs reflected someone who identifies with the community intensely. This prompted me to question what it means to identify with a group, organization, or community intensely and how such an identification impacted participants' lives. Furthermore, this was a good site for investigation, because my history as a member of the community and the subsequent relationships I maintain within it provide me a unique access to examine the processes of identification occurring within and beyond this community. While I may never be able to gain candid access to a community of confederate southerners, I had unique access to the WLTC community.

In order to make my case, I begin in the second chapter by providing a review of the relevant literature. This review addresses six specific bodies of literature: (1) a discursive approach to studying identification, (2) identity work, (3) theorizing about the relationship that exists between context and identification, (4) communities of practice, (5) identity regulation and concertive control, and (6) trivia and identification. Finally, I conclude this review of literature by proposing the following three research questions:

Research Question 1: How do members of a community define, enact, and negotiate the discursive resources and logics of their salient identities?

Research Question 2: Are, and in what ways are, the discursive resources and logics of a salient identity enacted across social contexts?

Research Question 3: Are, and in what ways are, control and resistance a function of identification across social contexts?

These questions help to address the problems I previously identified by providing insight into the processes of identification that occur both within and beyond the situated context under investigation and their relationship to systems of control. This project begins by identifying the salient discourses at work within the World's Largest Trivia Contest community and how these discourses impact members' beliefs, values, decisions, and behaviors. Having established how these discourses are enacted within the context of the WLTC community, this investigation examines how they are enacted by individuals beyond their situated contexts. Finally, the third research question considers the relationship that exists between members' processes of identification and systems of control. In this way, I consider how control emerges as a function of identification both within and beyond the context of the community under investigation.

In chapter three, I describe the methods I applied in this investigation. Paradigmatically, I approached this study from a critical interpretive perspective. As an interpretive scholar, I approached this research with an assumption that "reality and knowledge are constructed and reproduced through communication, interaction, and practice" (Tracy, 2012, p. 40). From a critical perspective, I further acknowledged that our socially constructed systems of meaning are not neutral. Instead, I contend that our social interactions are mediated through systems of meaning that reflect systems of power and control which benefit some more than others. Within the framework of these methodological commitments, I outline my data collection and analysis method that

included a reiterative and reflexive combination of participant observation, formal interviews, and textual analyses.

In chapters four, five, and six, I outline the emergent themes of my data collection and analysis. Chapter four addresses the emergent identity discursive resources within the trivia community. Chapter five addresses how members of the WLTC community identify in ways that span situated contexts through the introduction of a term I have coined “trans-contextual identification”. Finally, chapter six describes the relationship that exists between the discursive resources of this community and systems of concertive control and identity regulation both within and beyond the context of the WLTC community. The emergent themes within these chapters are supported by, and partially told through, the experiences of my participants and my personal observations.

In the final chapter, I describe the key contributions this research makes to the ongoing study of identification. Specifically, with this project I make contributions on both a theoretical and local level. On a theoretical level, I outline four specific contributions: (1) I demonstrate how the resources and logics of identity discourses are evolving and negotiated among members of a unique community, (2) I inform the theorizing of communities of practice in terms of identification and its relationship to knowledge management by conducting an interpretive investigation of how knowledge, as an identity discourse, was defined, negotiated, and enacted, (3) I provide nuance to the way we think about context and identification by considering the way our various social contexts are shaped by our enactment of trans-contextual identification, and (4) I

extend theorizing about concertive control and identity regulation by describing processes of control as products of identity discourses within the WLTC community and considering how the trans-contextual nature of these identities broadens the reach of the control system beyond the confines of the organization.

On a local level, I provide members of this unique and often misunderstood community a forum in which to articulate their own voice. Additionally, by providing a critical lens to the interpretation of the data collected for this project, I provide the local community with a greater understanding of the discursive resources and mechanisms of control that limit members' behavior alternatives.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

I began this project by questioning what it means to identify with a group, organization, or community with great salience, and how this identification becomes uniquely manifest. How does our expression of a particularly salient identity differ from the expression of our less-salient identities? Through reflection of my past history in similar communities, including the one used for this project, I began to discover that the “salient” identification with a community becomes particularly manifest in the way members enact their identities across their many social contexts. That prompted me to begin asking questions about the relationship that exists between identification and context and how it impacted or restricted behavior alternatives. In order to better understand the relationship that exists between particularly salient identities and context, I situated this study within the existing body of literature on the subjects of identification, context, and control. Specifically, I begin by (1) explaining the theoretical approach of studying identification from a discursive perspective that I have adopted for this project. Next, I (2) discuss how individuals enact and balance their many identities through both conscious and unconscious identity work. Then, I (3) consider the important role of situated context in the process of identifying, and I tease out three approaches to the study of identity that have considered how identities can be enacted across contexts. Having theorized a link between identity and context, I next (4) frame the scope of context for the purpose of this project, by discussing communities of practice. After establishing a theoretical foundation of my approach to the study of

identification and context within communities, I (5) turn a critical eye to the relationship that exists between identity and control. Finally, I conclude this review of literature by (6) considering the relationship that exists between identification and trivia, a site of investigation for this project. Having reviewed the relevant literature, I conclude this chapter by proposing the research questions that guided my investigation.

A Discursive Approach to Identification

For this project, I approach the study of identification from a discursive perspective that is largely consistent with the study of identification in the field of organizational communication. This is in contrast to the cognitive approach to studying identification, which is more closely aligned with the disciplines of organizational behavior and management. An example of a cognitive approach comes from Mael and Ashforth (1992) who explain organizational identification as the “perception of oneness with or belongingness to an organization” (p. 104). This definition places an emphasis on one’s sense of belonging being a process of the mind, something we perceive. In contrast, the discursive approach that I apply conceives of identification as an ongoing process of social interaction that draws upon and navigates multiple systems of meaning. Below, my discussion of the discursive approach includes: (1) discourse and its relationship to identification, (2) identities as socially constructed, (3) identification as a process, and (4) identities as plural.

Before beginning this elaboration of my discursive approach to studying identification and identity for this project, it is important that I elucidate the distinction I apply to the two related but distinct concepts. For the purposes of this project, I use the

term “identification” to describe the ongoing social processes of identifying. These are both internal and external processes as members socially enact and negotiate their identities and internally make sense of such social interactions. I use the term “identity” to describe the present, though unstable and evolving, sense of self one experiences in relation to their varied social relations and group, organizational, and community memberships. A good analogy for this distinction would be the difference between the climate and the current weather. Presently, it may be raining outside. This does not mean that it will always be raining, but it is the current state of the weather (this represents identity). The current state of rain is a product of the larger ongoing processes of a climate system. This climate system is ever-evolving and is the product of a number of external forces and interactions. One is the current state of being (identity), the other is the ongoing process which contributes to that state of being (identification).

The first important element of a discursive approach to identification is discourse and its relationship to identification. In its simplest terms, Alvesson and Willmott (1992) define discourse as, “a way of communicating about and, thereby, constituting the social world” (p. 433). Central to this definition is the constitutive nature of our communication. Ashcraft (2007) elaborates this idea by describing discourse as a system of representation that generates, “a particular and socially recognizable version of people, things and events” (p. 11). Thus, discourse describes the relationship that exists between our micro-level social interactions and our macro- (societal-level discourses) and meso-level (group-, organization-, or community-level) systems of

meaning. The relationship between social interaction and systems of meaning is one of mutual determination. In this way, social interactions both reflect and are limited by dominant systems of meaning and are the means by which these systems of meaning are created.

Specifically, this project will draw upon Kuhn's (2006) theorizing about identity as a product of discursive resources. Kuhn and Nelson (2002) explain a discursive resource as a "socially constructed frame drawn from a culture or subculture that enables members to assign meaning" (p. 12). These frames contain specific discursive logics that influence individuals' interpretation of events, beliefs, values, and behaviors. Kuhn (2006) contends that individuals draw upon the "resources" of numerous and varied discourses in the construction of their identities. Larson and Pearson (2012) elaborate about the source of discursive resources by explaining that, "Discursive resources include broad social discourses such as gender and race, as well as...discourses like the values generated by a particular group" (p. 244).

Scholars draw upon Foucault's concept of subjectivity to explain how social actors are subject to the prevailing resources of meaning systems when defining their sense of self (Ashcraft, 2005; Kuhn, 2009). In this way, our identity is subject to the available resources of our discursive systems of meaning. However, Kuhn (2009) explains how this approach can problematize actors' sense of agency, "In portraying institutionalized discourses as driving subjectivity, however, these explanations risk erasing the active, choice-making subject" (p. 682). Instead, Kuhn (2009) suggests that we think of the individual as a "self-reflexive node at which a variety of cultural,

institutional, and organizational discourses meet,” thus making individuals, “the site for the confluence of discourses prescribing thought and action” (p. 682). Thus, individuals actively engage in the interpretation and negotiation of discursive resources of identity. Larson and Pepper (2003), explain that social actors are, “not simply passive receivers...but are active participants in constructing and reconstructing their identities” (p. 532). The authors explain that social actors are able to choose from various systems of meaning as they, “assess the compatibility and competition between relevant identity targets/sources” (p. 532). In this way, social actors actively engage in “reflection, resourcefulness, and resistance” (Kuhn, 2009, p. 682) (for a further elaboration of the active processes of identifying, see the section below on Identity Work).

This approach to discourse is what Alvesson and Kärreman (2000) described as, “the study of social reality as discursively constructed and maintained” (p. 1126). Alvesson and Kärreman contrast this approach to discourse with what they call “the study of social text” (p. 1126). They explain that the use of discourse from the perspective of the study of social text views the “‘talked’ and ‘textual’ nature of everyday interaction in organization[s]” as “local achievements, distinct from other levels of social reality” (p. 1126). Thus, the study of social text uses discourse to describe day-to-day interactions separate from their relationship to any broader system of meaning. This approach is less useful for this project, because it struggles to explain how competing sites of identification can be products of broader competing systems of meaning.

The second element of a discursive approach to identification stresses the socially constructed nature of identity. This follows from the mutually deterministic relationship that exists between social interactions of individuals and the resources of the broader meaning systems. Alvesson, Ashcraft, and Thomas (2008) explain that social construction theorists understand identities as negotiated “through ongoing, embodied interaction” (p. 11) and subject to larger social systems of meaning. From this approach, identities are created by drawing upon social discourses and using social interaction to, “create, threaten, bolster, reproduce and overhaul” (p. 11) the definitions of our identities. Thus, while communication reflects the broad system of meaning that guides our process of identifying, it also constitutes that system.

One criticism of the socially-constructed approach to discourse is its over emphasis on social interaction at the expense of the material world (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2006). This critique confronts an essentializing of social construction which ignores how the physically lived experience of identification is unique for each individual. Thus, despite its socially-constructed nature, I contend that identification remains an embodied process. Merleau-Ponty (1962) introduces the idea of a body subject in order to challenge the Cartesian ideal of a mind-body bifurcation. An embodied approach allows us to better understand how our lived social experiences occur within a material world. In the proposal of their communicology approach to organizing, Ashcraft and Mumby (2004) explain that communication is a situated and embodied practice. Individuals’ social interactions are guided by their lived physical experience as well as the (limited) systems of meaning they draw from. They explain how this view allows us

to retain Foucault's concept of discourse as forming the "conditions of possibility" (p. 22) by conceiving those conditions of possibility within the context of material circumstances. Within the context of the current investigation, I recognize that the social construction of identity is experienced uniquely by each individual. For example, each individual brings into the trivia community being investigated both their past lived experience and their physical presence which necessarily alters their process of meaning creation. Thus, collectively, Ashcraft (2013) explains that all social identities are a product of language, narratives, and embodied practice.

The third element of my discursive approach is that identification is an ongoing process. Cheney, Christensen, and Daily (2013) explain how early research in organizational identity was limited in its measure of identity at one specific point in time. In contrast, a processual approach to understanding organizational identification acknowledges the unpredictable, dynamic, and contextually dependent nature of identity (Alvesson et al., 2008; Ashforth, 1998). Alvesson et al. (2008) explain that identification is the, "ongoing efforts to address the twin questions, 'Who am I? and—by implication—'how should I act?'" (p. 6). Bullis and Bach (1989) produced one of the earliest pieces of scholarship in organizational communication that sought to understand how identification is accomplished over time. They documented how new graduate students demonstrated increased and decreased experiences of identification in response to various turning points during the early months of their socialization within their new department. Since their work, other scholarship has begun to take a more longitudinal

approach to observing the experience of identification consistent with this approach (Bullis & Tompkins, 1989; Disanza & Bullis, 1999; Kuhn & Nelson, 2002).

The process of identifying occurs as organizational members continually engage in social interactions that reflect and redefine dominant systems of meaning. This is similar to the structural approach to identification proposed by Scott et al. (1998). Their model identifies a duality between an organizational identity, which contains a set of evolving social resources, and the social interactions in which these resources are employed and negotiated. This serves as an ongoing process of influence and redefinition. Ashforth et al., (2008) explain that, “A process model of identification should account for this dynamism, explicating the intense episodes that require conscious, deliberate decisions that serve to either solidify or transform identities, followed by periods of largely offline identity processing and stability” (p. 340).

The fourth element of this discursive approach is that identities are multiple. Prevailing literature on identification indicates that not only is identity dynamic, but it is also plural. That is to say, social actors possess multiple sources of identification. Burke (1941) explains how one’s individual identity is the result of our multiple collective relationships. He introduces this idea when he contends that, “The so-called ‘I’ is merely a unique combination of partially conflicting corporate ‘we’s’” (p. 307). In this way, Burke explains, “the individual is composed of many ‘corporate identities.’ Sometimes they are concentric, sometimes in conflict” (p. 307).

Many scholars recognize that these different identities do not always tell a coherent story of one’s self. Literature on multiple identities distinguishes between

integrated and fragmented identities (see Alvesson et al., 2008). In the case of integrated identities, the systems of meaning that reflect multiple identities complement one another. However, in the case of fragmented identities, conflict emerges as social actors are required to reconcile competing or contradicting systems of meaning. Larson and Pepper's (2003) investigation into a corporation they call JAR demonstrates how organizational actors are compelled to negotiate the competing assumptions of multiple identity referents. JAR had experienced a number of corporate changes, fundamentally changing the assumptions of the organizational identity. In response, organizational members had to find ways to reconcile the competing value options of their identifications with the "Old JAR" and the "New JAR".

The discursive approach to identification I have adopted for this project emerges from four fundamental assumptions. As expressed above, these four assumptions include the relationship between discourse as a mutually deterministic system of social interactions and meaning systems and identification, identification as a product of embodied social construction, identification as a process, and identities as plural. The plural nature of identification demonstrates the need for social actors to negotiate their sense of self relevant to competing discursive meaning systems. This process of negotiation is often theorized as "identity work".

Identity Work

Identity work describes the ongoing process of identification and reproduction of identity that individuals engage in as they negotiate their many, and often competing, sites of identity (Alvesson et al., 2008; Collinson, 2003; Knights & Willmott, 1989;

Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Alvesson et al. (2008) define identity work as, “the ongoing mental activity that an individual undertakes in constructing an understanding of self that is coherent, distinct and positively valued” (p. 15). Alvesson and Willmott (2002) further describe this mental construction of understanding when they explain identity work as the “forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a precarious sense of coherence and distinctiveness” (p. 626). Despite the emphasis placed on cognitive processing by both of these definitions, identity work is largely a discursive practice which is both constrained by the resources and logics of meaning systems and enacted through one’s embodied interaction with social actors. Below, I describe how identity work can take the form of both an active response to conflicting sources of identification and a passive ongoing process by which organizational members draw upon and negotiate their sense of identity(ies).

Much theorizing has established the need for identity work when a conflict arises between two or more sites of identification (Alvesson et al., 2008; Ashforth et al., 2008; Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Ashforth et al. (2008) refer to this phenomenon as ‘identity conflict’. They define identity conflict as, “an inconsistency between the contents of two or more identities, such as a clash of values, goals, or norms” (p. 354). The authors contend that identity conflict is inevitable given the multiple sites of identification within our organizational and community environments. For example, they highlight how competing interests and values might emerge between one’s more local group-level identification and one’s broader

identification with the organization as a whole (e.g. Lammers & Garcia, 2009). Beyond the container of the organization, Wieland (2010) explains how social actors must also negotiate their many social identities both within the organization and beyond in terms of associations as a family member, friend, community activist, consumer, etc.

While early theorizing on identity work has favored the self-aware manner in which social actors respond to competing identities by consciously engaging in identity work, recent scholars have begun to theorize about how identity work is accomplished more passively through our daily discursive enactment of meaning systems (Wieland, 2010). Wieland (2010) distinguishes between active and passive identity work. She explains,

Scholars studying identity construction have tended to privilege identity construction as an active, internal process by which one establishes a distinct personal identity (Watson, 2008). Although this shows us something about how identity construction occurs, studies have downplayed the ways that identity construction also occurs through its ongoing accomplishment in situated practice...I see identity as emerging both through self-aware reflections about whom one is and through everyday practices of doing work and life (p. 505).

Wieland argues that too great of a focus on active identity work, “obscures the messiness, irrationality, and inconsistencies involved in identity construction” (p. 508).

Passive identity work, however, is accomplished through our more routine, unconscious social interactions. By accounting for passive identity work, Wieland argues that we can better understand the “discursive and material structures” (p. 524) within which we construct our sense of self.

For this study, I embrace Wieland’s theorizing of identity work as both an active and passive process. Thus, in this project, I am mindful of the ways in which

participants draw upon the meaning systems of their identity both consciously and unconsciously. Thus, I am mindful of both active and passive examples of identity work that emerge as participants enact their identities both within and across contexts.

Context and Identity

As scholars began to theorize about identification and identity as being plural and dynamic, situated context emerged as a critical feature of the process. As an example of this, in 1998, Scott, Corman, and Cheney argued that “much identification research seems to make a tacit or even explicit assumption that identification is stable and almost trait-like. Virtually all empirical studies of identification report a general and presumably stable measure of the construct that ignores specific contexts or changes over larger periods of time” (p. 319). In response, Scott et al. (1998) proposed the concept of “situated activity” to describe how processes of identification and the resulting identities are situated across the various and multiple contexts of our social lives. By accounting for the context of the varied situations in which we engage in processes of identity work, we possess greater insight into how (and why) we identify.

As an extension of Scott et al.’s focus on the importance of situated context, scholars who have adopted a discursive approach to studying identification, as utilized in this project, have also highlighted the essential importance of context. For example, Kuhn (2006) asserted the importance of the locales of identifying when examining the identity resources available across two distinct organizations, “Since most organizations have (more or less) defined settings of operation, and because talk integrates selves and systems into surrounding locales, the central issue is understanding the ways locale-

specific Discourses are appropriated by situated actors in identity formation and system reproduction” (p. 1342). Thus, Kuhn (2006) is asserting that “talk” (and other social interaction) is an integrated part the locale within which processes of organizing are conducted. As such, locale-specific discourses emerge, possessing identity resources that are unique to that situated context. Wieland (2010) also argues that situated context is an essential consideration when understanding the way actors interact to (re)produce their identities through identity work, “Fashioning a self involves drawing not only on one’s position as worker but also as family member, citizen, and consumer, among others, and as such involves a negotiation of the demands of work and other parts of life. Such negotiations are always situated, however, and are shaped by the values and expectations that are preferred in a given locale” (p. 505).

With this project, I build upon this existing theorizing that identifies the important relationship that exists between processes of identifying and situated context. However, I also build upon this theorizing by considering how identifying and identity work are conducted beyond situated context. While existing scholarship (Kuhn, 1996; Scott, Corman & Cheney, 1998; Wieland, 2010) has identified the importance of understanding local context in order to make sense of processes of identifying, with this research project I also consider how our varied identities (particularly the more salient ones) impact our varied social contexts. In order to do so, I begin by considering three fields of identity research that have, in various ways, considered how our identities might span social context. These three fields of identity research include studies of professional identity, deep structure identity, and narrative self-identity.

Professional identity. The concept of professional identity describes how some organizational members derive a greater sense of their self-concept from the work they do, rather than from the organization for which they work or the place in which they do it (Lammers & Garcia, 2009). In these cases, organizational members define themselves by the broad institutional discourses that unite them with others who perform the same trade instead of the organization in which they perform that trade. In this way, one's sense of professional identity may span across one's various situated organizational contexts (or locales (Kuhn, 2009)). Below, I highlight some of the more-relevant features of professional identity as it relates to this project and the relationship that exists between context and identification.

Lammers and Garcia (2009) use the concept of professional identity to describe how one's "institutionalized occupation" (p. 357) influences the individual's sense of self external to the organization in which they perform that occupation. To make this point, Lammers and Garcia draw upon the tradition of institutional theory. Lammers and Barbour (2006) explain that institutions are, "constellations of established practices guided by formalized, rational beliefs that transcend particular organizations and situations" (p. 364; cited in Lammers & Garcia, 2009). In this way, institutions act like discursive systems of meaning that both reflect and constrain social interactions that exist beyond the organization. Lammers and Garcia (2009) explain the value of studying this dualistic relationship by stating that, "Studying professions as institutions facilitates the examination of a micro–macro link between discursive practices within an

organization and larger-scale structures beyond nominal organizational boundaries” (p. 363).

Lammers and Garcia (2009) make the case for professional identity through their observations of veterinarians working for a call center. They described the guiding question of their research as, “How does profession, as an institutionalized occupation, work as an extraorganizational influence in the workplace?” (p. 363). They uncovered six facets of veterinary information practice which pointed to a prevailing professional (as opposed to situated organizational) identity shared amongst members of the veterinary profession. This research is meaningful to this study, because it demonstrates that organizational members draw upon the discursive resources of their professional identity across their varied situated contexts.

Barbour and Lammers (2015) explain how studies into professional identity draw upon the same concepts, belonging and attachment, that others have used to describe identifying in organizational settings (Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley, 2008). In their article which reviews the extant research on the topic of professional identity, Barbour and Lammers (2015) define belonging as “being a member of a social group” and attachment as a “sense of oneness with others in the group and the group itself, commitment to the group, and valuing the group such that separation from it has a cost” (p. 3). Barbour and Lammers argue that applying the concept of belonging at a professional identity level of abstraction (as opposed to organizational identity), “requires the substantive content of beliefs about particular realms of work. The content of beliefs is particular to specific professions and develops based on how those

professions are currently institutionalized.” Since members of a professional “social group” do not have the regular interactive opportunities of a more-local group, the sense of belonging and attachment must be a product of beliefs about what it means to belong to a specific group of professionals. This approach of defining belonging and attachment of professional identity through a coherent set of beliefs broadens the concept of how distanced individuals can identify as a collective across social contexts, making this approach useful for this project which investigates the relationship that exists between processes of identification and context.

Studies that have investigated the concepts of belonging and attachment in the professional identity literature have largely been quantitative and grounded within typical workplace environments. Barbour and Lammers (2015) point out that a number of scholars have adopted Hall’s (1968) measure of professionalism as well as other measures of attachment in order to assess professional identification. Furthermore, these sort of measures have been applied across a number of workplace professions including physicians (Scott, Ruef, Mendel & Caronna, 2000), nurses (Blau, 1985), journalists (Russo, 1998), veterinarians (Lammers & Garcia, 2009), and many others. However, little research has been used to apply the same logics of institutional identification used in the theorizing of professional identity among communities of practice. With this project, I expand the theorizing of professional identification by providing a more-interpretive lens and by considering a community of practice (theories of communities of practice are developed in the next section) that is outside the realm of a traditional “work-place” environment.

Deep structure identity. The concept of deep structure identity emerges from the organizational behavior discipline to describe an organizational identity that extends beyond organizational context (Rousseau, 1998). Rousseau (1998) coined the term deep structure identity in order to describe an organizational identity that is more enduring and supersedes context. Rousseau contrasted the concept of deep structure identity from its alternative, situated identity. A situated identity is one which becomes active only within a given context. It is enacted in response to certain social cues such while working or discussing one's association with their organization. In contrast, examples of organizational members who might demonstrate a deep structure identity with their organization could be found in literature on strong organizational culture, such as Tourish and Tourish's analysis of culture and control at Enron. They describe a culture so strong that a member's sense of self becomes tied directly to their association as a member of Enron.

In the case of deep structure identity, one's sense of belonging to a given referent and the subsequent values, beliefs, and behaviors that accompany such an association are more persistent. Such an identification supersedes context as the individual maintains their sense of belonging across different roles, over time, and in different social settings (Fiol, 2002; Rousseau, 1998).

Existing research on organizational identity both within the situated versus deep structure and discursive literature have identified a number of factors that contribute to the development of a greater sense of identity (deep structure). These factors include tenure (Cheney et al., 2013; Meyer et al., 2006; Rousseau, 1998), exposure to

socialization practices (Myers & Oetzel, 2003; Rousseau, 1998), organizational attractiveness, prestige, distinctiveness, moments of crisis, and member uncertainty (Fiol, 2002).

An additional, and particularly relevant, factor that has been identified as contributing to deeper structure identification is a distinction between situations of obligation and discretion. Van Dick et al. (2006) argue that a situation of obligation is an exchange-based commitment. This is the case of how most typical employment begins, with an exchange of one service for another. However, the authors suggest that over time some organizational members' choice to maintain an association with a single organization becomes more discretionary. As an example, consider a blossoming graduate student who is eager to join any faculty that would accept them. At this early stage, the relationship can be described as one of obligation. However, over time, this relationship may become more discretionary as that same individual is presented with alternative opportunities, but elects to remain within the same department. These discretionary relationships are more likely to encourage the development of deep structure identities. This is relevant to the current research, because membership within the trivia community being investigated in this project is largely discretionary, though it comes with certain obligations and expectations.

The concept of deep structure identity makes an important contribution to this project by describing how one's organizational identity can span situated contexts; meaning that the person continues to identify with the organization even when not at/around work. This provides a different level of abstraction than the theorizing of

professional identities described previously, which have studied *extraorganizational* forms of identity. For the current project, I examine how both broader conceptions of one as a “trivia player” as well as one’s membership within the trivia community and on a specific trivia team serve to span context.

Similar to the literature on professional identity, much of the literature on deep structure identity emerges from a more cognitive/normative approach to understanding identity that is distinct from the discursive approach applied in this project. Rousseau builds off of an understanding of identification as a process by which individuals, “expand the way they think about themselves to include larger and larger sets of social objects” (p. 217). For Rousseau and other like-minded scholars of organizational behavior, identifying is a cognitive process that is influenced by members’ feelings, behaviors and interactions.

Though distinct, this cognitive approach is not incongruent with the discursive approach to identification described above. Both approaches understand identifying as a context-dependent process that is a product of social interactions. Rousseau (1998) explains that, “Participation in contemporary corporate life frequently entails psychological changes in our concept of ourselves and others...people working together will come to identify with each other and their larger organization.” (p. 218). In Rousseau’s explanation, the cognitive construct of identification is a product of social interaction that would be consistent with the discursive approach to understanding identity. Additionally, from the discursive literature, Cheney and Tompkins (1987) underscore the relationship between the social and cognitive when they explain, “This is

not to say that one's association with an organization or other target is ONLY words, but that the connection is at least words" (p. 6). Drawing upon concepts of deep structure identification from a discursive approach rather than a cognitive approach does not necessitate a re-thinking of the theory, only changing the angle from which one examines the concept. Whereas the cognitive approach foregrounds the ongoing mental process of identifying that occurs as a result of social interaction, the discursive approach instead foregrounds the relationship between these social interactions and broader systems of meaning.

Narrative self-identity. A third concept I draw from in order to provide nuance to the way we think about the relationship that exists between processes of identification and context is Sveningsson and Alvesson's narrative self-identity (2003). Narrative self-identity describes how one's experience of identification is an embodied and individual process. In contrast to the plural and competing organizational identities, the authors suggest that individuals may also possess a narrative self-identity that is "more stable or slow moving" (p. 1166). This more-stable sense contributes to one's ongoing process of identity work, allowing individuals to interpret and prioritize their other competing "identity positions".

To make their point, Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) conduct a case study of a single manager who they refer to as "H". H and fellow organizational members identify three role/identity expectations that H is to fulfill. Each of these identity roles has different and competing demands and expectations of H. Additionally, these different roles have varying degrees of congruence with what the authors interpret as H's

narrative self-identity. H's narrative self-identity represents her more enduring sense of self and the corresponding values and meanings. In their article, Sveningsson and Alvesson tell the story of how H presented herself to her management team as the farm girl she grew up as. Given her background living in a remote farm house in the countryside, H seeks to create a management team that is locally grounded and rooted in "curious reflection" and "partnership" (p. 1185). This is in contrast to the traditional managerial roles that are typically seen within her organization, but it reflects the discursive identity resources of her narrative self-identity. Thus, H's narrative self-identity provides a more stable (though still evolving) lens through which H can make sense of the managerial roles of her organization, negotiate the varying demands of the roles, and even demonstrate resistance through an ongoing process of identity work. Sveningsson and Alvesson explain that H's narrative self-identity sheds light on how H "relates to [the roles] in terms of a seemingly more coherent sense of self-identity and puts a personal touch on the job" (p. 1178).

As an enduring sense of self that one uses across contexts to interpret and negotiate multiple and competing sources of identification, narrative self-identity is one most tied to the concept of embodiment. Embodiment describes how the socially constructed nature of one's process of identifying is mediated through the physically lived experience of the individual. In the case of H, her physically lived experience on a farm in the remote countryside has informed her sense of self and the values and assumptions she makes about leadership and management.

A criticism that emerged in response to Sveningsson and Alvesson theorizing about the narrative self-identity is that it fails to account for the role of others in crafting or altering our prevailing narrative (Alvesson, 2010). Roberts (2005) points out that an attempt to craft a narrative self-identity, “is repeatedly problematized by the objectifications of self by others” (p. 637). In this criticism, Roberts highlights the important role played by our social relationships in crafting and articulating our narrative perception of self. Alvesson (2010) cites Czarniawska-Joerges (1994) to explain how the creation of a narrative self is more of an interactive process than an individual/cognitive one. Czarniawska-Joerges theorizes “identity construction as a process of narration where both the narrator and the audience formulate, edit, applaud, and refuse various elements of the ever-produced narrative” (p. 198). Thus, by looking at the various ways in which individuals draw upon the discursive resources of their narrative self-identity across social interactive contexts, this project can provide nuance to the relationship that exists between context and identification.

Since theorizing about identity has evolved to include our many social and organizational identities, context has emerged as an important part of the identification process. Scholars have recognized the importance of understanding the situated contexts within which we engage in identity work, and the impact it has on the ways we identify. With this project, I extend this theorizing to consider how we identify across contexts, and how our contexts can be shaped by our particularly salient identities. To do so, draw upon three approaches to studying the process of identification across contexts from three different levels of abstraction: professional identity (extraorganizational), deep

structure identity (organizational), and narrative self-identity (local). By drawing upon these three approaches, I can apply a complete approach to the study of identification and context.

Communities of Practice

In the previous section, I identified three theoretical approaches to the study of identity that have sought to better describe how our identities can be enacted across various contexts. Two of these approaches, professional identity and deep structure identity, addressed our identities as members of a specific community (extraorganizational and organizational respectively). However, as I noted in that section, the prevailing bodies of literature for both professional identity studies and deep structure identity studies have focused almost exclusively on paid employment workplace environments. While understanding how our salient identities can span context within workplace environments is useful, it is also limited. Processes of organizing, doing “work”, and identifying occur in communities beyond the confines of our workplace environments as well. Additionally, since non-workplace sites of organizing avoid contingencies of compensation, they can provide a unique insight into processes of identification. As noted in the discussion about deep structure identity, factors of obligation and discretion have been found to have an influence on processes of identification for organizational members (Van Dick et al., 2006). By moving outside the confines of the workplace environment with this project, I am able to provide nuance to the way we think about extraorganizational and organizational identification that

spans situated context. In order to accomplish this, I draw upon theorizing of communities of practice.

Theorizing about communities of practice emerged out of research into knowledge management (Wenger, 1998) in order to understand how communities store and access knowledge through communication networks. Since knowledge management occurs across diverse communities in which organizing takes place, communities of practice are not limited to only workplace environments. Instead, Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) describe communities of practice as a set of people who “share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (p. 4). This definition highlights the importance of a uniting passion or objective and ongoing interaction that results in a deeper access to knowledge. Wenger (1998) identifies three characteristics of a community of practice: (1) a mutual engagement with a specific problem or purpose which includes the sharing of knowledge, (2) negotiation of joint enterprise providing purpose to the community members, and (3) a shared repertoire of discursive resources which includes “stories, jargon, theories, forms, and other resources from a stock of understood information and techniques that can be utilized by members” (Iverson & McPhee, 2002, p.262). Thus, based on this definition and these factors, communities of practice can include both workplace and non-workplace sites of organizing. Furthermore, Wenger’s (1998) description of a shared repertoire coincides with the theoretical approach to discursive resources established earlier in this chapter.

An important component to the theorizing on communities of practice is the practice itself. Numerous scholars have pointed out the prevailing ambiguity that remains as the literature attempts to provide meaning to the term “practice” (Handley, Sturdy, Fincham & Clark, 2004). Handley et al. (2006) quotes Brown and Duguid (2001, p. 203) in defining practice as “undertaking or engaging fully in a task, job or profession,” but they emphasize the social nature of practice as something the community engages in together. Handley et al. (2006) extend this emphasis on the social aspect of practice to describe how engaging in practice serves as a process of identification, they explain,

By participating in a community, a newcomer develops an awareness of that community’s practice and thus comes to understand and engage with (or adapt and transform) various tools, language, role-definitions and other explicit artefacts as well as various implicit relations, tacit conventions, and underlying assumptions and values.

In this way, Handley et al. describe practice as a form of identity work in which new members (as well as existing members) learn, utilize, adapt, and transform available identity resources.

Theorizing of practice, as identity work, has also identified the importance of situated context. Wenger (1998) theorized that practice is something that takes place within a specific space, and that space is an important factor in the social interaction of the practice. While this is certainly true, Wenger’s theorizing may be too restrictive by contending that practice is something that can ONLY take place within a specific situated context. Handley et al. (2006), explain the confining way practice has been linked to situated context,

Wenger portrays a picture of the compartmentalization of practices (one for each community setting), arguing that learning (and therefore, identity) is fully situated with little possibility of transfer or translation across contexts. Yet, if knowledge is to transfer across communities then Wenger's portrayal of the compartmentalization of practice is highly problematic" (p. 647).

In this statement, Handley et al. (2006) argue that it is problematic to assume that the processes of practice cannot transfer or translate across context. With this project, I seek to better understand how processes of practice, as a form of identity work, span situated contexts.

Theories of communities of practice provide a good backdrop to the study of a number of organizational processes, including identification, in environments beyond the workplace. By more broadly defining communities based on their processes of organizing, research into communities of practice can provide insight into important organizational processes that might be harder to observe in workplace environments. For example, as Van Dick et al. (2006) noted, deep structure identifying may occur more frequently when members feel free to exercise discretion in their choice to identify with an organization. By considering non-workplace communities of practice we can, perhaps, investigate more discretionary organizations. Furthermore, this project will build upon the theorizing of communities of practice by considering how the discursive identity resources that are negotiated through practice can span the situated context of the local space the practice is conducted in.

Control and Identity

Research on identification in organizations and communities has also considered how identification with one's community can lead to control over the values, beliefs, and

behaviors of community members. As members of a community internalize the broad systems of meaning that accompany their identification with a given community, they are subject to the logic, assumptions, and expected behaviors prescribed by that meaning system. This is of particular importance, because it can result in the unconscious control of members' decisions and behaviors. In this section, I will elaborate about how the establishment of a pervasive culture system regulates members' identities and contributes to systems of concertive control. Additionally, I will describe the inherent relationship that exists between control and resistance.

Culture and identity regulation. Scholars have linked the importance of organizational culture to the control and regulation of members' identification. By discussing the impact of culture on members experience of identification, we can observe how the broad meaning systems that inform the process of identification can restrict members' beliefs and behavior and how the manipulation of an organization's culture can subsequently influence members' beliefs and behaviors strategically. Efforts to influence members' identification with an organization's culture have been described as identity control or identity regulation (Alvesson et al., 2008; Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). Alvesson, Ashcraft, and Thomas (2008) describe identity control as, "the role of organizational elites and discursive regimes in orchestrating the regulation of identities and the resulting political and material consequences" (p. 16).

Manipulation of an organization's culture emerges as an unobtrusive form of control in which organizational leadership limits member behavior indirectly through the control over the decisional premises prescribed by an organization's culture, where

decisional premises refers to the underlying assumptions individuals draw from when choosing one course of action over another (an elaboration of the theorizing of decisional premises can be found in the section below on concertive control). Deetz (2003) explains that, “the willing assent of employees is engineered through the production of the normalcy of specific beliefs and practices” (p. 35). Critics have referred to this strategy of control through culture as cultural engineering (Alvesson, 1996; Kunda, 1992). Cultural engineering requires that members must both identify strongly with the organization and be able to derive decisional premises on the basis of the culture. Below, I define organizational culture and demonstrate how culture serves as a form of control in organizations.

Organizational culture includes the relatively stable commonly held ideas, meanings, definitions, and values held by organizational members (Alvesson, 1996). These components of an organizational culture have their roots in social practices, and they help to guide social behavior. Over time, organizational culture becomes taken-for-granted and regarded as natural, neutral, and legitimate (Deetz, 1986). Thus, even though the behavior of organizational members becomes largely influenced by the organizational culture, members are seldom aware of the culture as a product of social interaction.

Tourish and Vatcha (2005) describe one strategy of identity control as appealing to the self-image of organizational members, in their case study of the culture of Enron. Organizational members at Enron were often induced to believe that their association as members of Enron classified them as the “best of the best.” It was reinforced in

members that Enron only selects the best candidates, so identifying with the culture of Enron was desirable for members' self-image and influenced the disastrous results now associated with Enron. Alvesson and Willmott (2002) also identify established processes for training and promotion, defining of members directly and through the definition of others, control over vocabulary, hierarchical location, control over rules, and the defining of context within organizations as strategic processes meant to intentionally regulate member identification through the manipulation of an organization's culture.

Additionally, many scholars contend that social actors have an innate desire to identify with collectives. Tourish and Vatcha (2005) explain that identification with a collective allows members to "find meaning and purpose and a sense of belonging". However, by identifying with the culture of one's organization, one adopts the established values, meanings, and behaviors that accompany that culture. This comes with a necessary sacrifice of individual autonomy. Organizational members begin making decisions that reflect the interests of the prevailing culture, sometimes at the expense of the individuals themselves. As Tourish and Vatcha (2005) explain, "If cultures can therefore be controlled by those at the top, the overall impact on people is likely to be enormous" (p. 468).

Much of the prevailing literature on identity regulation through cultural control in organizations has sought to understand how management intentionally manipulates organizational members into identifying closely with strategically controlled cultures. However, strategic managerial control is not necessary for a strong organizational

culture to emerge or for that culture to control member behavior in a significant way. It is possible for an organization's culture to emerge organically. In this way, social interactions contribute to the emergence of systems of meaning that define the culture of an organization. Through identification with the collective, organizational members still become beholden to the premises defined by the organizational culture. We see this process at work in regard to the phenomenon of concertive control.

Concertive control. Theories of concertive control explain how modern groups and organizations exert control over their members in increasingly less overt ways in self-managed team environments. Specifically, concertive control describes systems in which organizational leadership “empowers” organizational members to make their own decisions, but maintains control over the premises upon which members make those decisions. In systems of concertive control, organizational members are not regulated by a direct supervisor, technical surveillance, or Weber's iron cage of bureaucratic rules and regulations. Instead organizational members regulate one another and themselves by imposing and enforcing values and decisional premises that are communicated from organizational leadership. Concertive control systems rely on a significant degree of identification from organizational members. It is through identification that members accept value premises and willingly reiterate them. Tompkins and Cheney (1985) argue that this team-based environment actually produces greater control since members are surveilled and disciplined by all other team members rather than a single supervisor. Additionally, this form of control is more insidious, because it provides an illusion of autonomy.

Systems of concertive control replace the rational-legal logic of bureaucratic control with a logic of negotiated consensus aimed at achieving the organization's mission (Barker, 1993; Barker & Cheney, 1994; Barker & Tompkins, 1994; Papa, Auwal & Singhal, 1997; Simon, 1976; Tomkins & Cheney, 1985). The organization's mission is communicated in the form of values and decisional premises expressed by organizational leadership. This can be expressed through mission statements, signage, verbal messages, or important organizational symbols. Thus, the logic of negotiated consensus gives organizational members a sense of freedom to make their own decisions, but only through the rigid set of premises described by organizational leadership.

The concept of decisional premises undergirds systems of concertive control. Simon (1976) emphasized decisional premises as a shift in the unit of analysis away from worker roles or acts and toward processes of drawing conclusions from premises. In doing so, Simon identifies the premise, not the decision or behavior, as the smallest unit of analysis (Simon, 1976; Tompkins & Cheney, 1985). He believed that a complete set of premises would leave organizational members with only one true alternative for each decision, making their behavior predictable and controllable.

Much literature has tied identification with the theory of concertive control (Barker, 1993; Barker & Cheney, 1994; Barker & Tompkins, 1994; DiSanza & Bullis, 1999; Kunda, 1992; Papa, Auwal & Singhal, 1997; Simon, 1976; Tomkins & Cheney, 1985). As a form of unobtrusive control, systems of concertive control rely on identification with a group or organization to induce an individual to make choices that

favor the interests of the collective over personal interests. From this perspective, identifying with a group or organization accompanies the adoption of decision-making premises (Tompkins & Cheney, 1985). Barker and Tompkins (1994) tested the relationship between identification and concertive control by combining field observations and interviews with a questionnaire meant to measure organizational identification. Their findings support the belief that identification plays a pivotal role in systems of concertive control.

Resistance. When establishing the link between identification and systems of control, one should not lose sight of member agency as a source for resistance against this control. Scholars have argued that control and resistance are inseparable concepts (Alvesson, 1996; Mumby, 2005). Alvesson (1996) describes power not as repression, but as a struggle. Additionally, Mumby (2005) advocates for a dialectical approach to control and resistance to explain how the two are “mutually implicative and coproductive” (p. 21). In this way, there can be no system of control without member resistance.

Mumby (2005) foregrounds discourse as at the heart of the control/resistance dialectic. Mumby identifies the role of discourse in attempting to “shape and fix” meaning in a way that limits behavioral alternatives for organizational members in a system of control. In contrast, resistance represents discursive efforts aimed at destabilizing systems of meaning which limit member’s beliefs, behavior, and interactions.

Resistance in systems of control can take many forms. Prasad and Prasad (2000) distinguish between different forms of resistance as formal or informal/routine. They describe formal forms of resistance as “organized collective opposition that typically takes the form of organized worker protests, strikes, grievances, output restrictions, etc” (p. 377-388). In the case of formal resistance, the battle to define discursive meaning systems is highly visible and overt. In contrast, Prasad and Prasad (2000) characterize informal/routine resistance as “less visible and more indirect...unplanned and spontaneous, occasionally being covert in nature” (p. 388). In their research, Prasad and Prasad describe organizational members’ use of informal/routine discursive resistance during an undesired transition to a new computer technology in a healthcare organization. The organizational members’ strategies of resistance included the interruption of training sessions with questions which challenged the transition, the circulation of articles about problems with the new technology, and simple refusal to adopt the new system. Each of these forms of resistance served as social interactions that challenged the logic of the meaning system being imposed by the organization.

Ashcraft (2007) also demonstrated discursive resistance as theorized above in her investigation into the discourses of differences among airline pilots. She observes how the traditional image of an airline pilot as prestigious and heroic was in decline as captains were being pressured to empower other members of the flight crew to vocalize feedback and make decisions, representing a challenge to the captain’s masculine authority. Despite posing a threat to pilots’ sense of masculinity, pilots resisted by reframing this transition in a way that maintained a masculine identity. These discursive

strategies of resistance included reframing the transition as a personal choice and representing the change as a demonstration of their status as a benevolent father.

Trivia and Identity

This project seeks to examine the experience and implications of trans-contextual identifying. As a backdrop for this study, I examine how participants in the WLTC identify with their teams and the trivia community as a whole. The word trivia originates from a Latin term meant to include the three liberal arts (Artes Liberales) – grammar, logic, and rhetoric – that were taught as topics of basic education. In the 1960s the word regained popularity as part of a pop culture movement in which people engaged in competitions of posing and answering questions taken from popular media. Wengle (1986) explained how this interest in the “trivial” began to explode in the second half of the 20th century. This explosion included trivia games in nearly endless genres, television game shows, and more local trivia competitions.

Academic literature addressing the phenomenon of trivia has been brief, but it points to why trivia is a meaningful site of identifying. Trivia has been used in two ways when theorizing about identity and social relationships. First, as part of social scientific investigations into personal and group confidence, trivia contests have been used as an experimental environment. Scholars have appreciated that trivia is perceived as a reflection of the quantity and quality of what we know. This leaves trivia tied up in our sense of self-worth and the worth of our associations. A second strand of theorizing has sought to understand how trivia is used to author and communicate the most salient parts of individuals’ identity and to maintain connections to the experiences that have formed

one's self-identity. Below, I investigate each of these bodies of literature and relate them to the current investigation.

First, trivia has been used to research individual and group confidence (e.g., Krizan & Windschitl, 2005; Kruger, Windshittl, Burrus, Fessel & Chambers, 2008; Menon, Kyung & Agrawal, 2009). These scholars do not undertake the theoretical implications of trivia directly. Instead, they use trivia questions and contests as an environment within which they investigate the levels of confidence social actors place in themselves and their group members. Krizan & Windschitl (2005) provide an example of this research. They randomly formed four college-aged participants into two groups of two. Once formed, the groups were told that one member would be competing against a member of the other group to answer trivia questions in two categories. One of the categories was perceived to be an easy category (e.g. Pop Culture), while the other category was perceived to be difficult (e.g. 50's Movies). This research emphasized the concept of "focalism" which asserts that team members only focus on the attributes of fellow team members when determining feelings of optimism or pessimism for the successful completion of a task. The authors argue that this optimism/pessimism is based only upon the perceived talents of ingroup members, discounting the perceived talents of the outgroup. Like-minded research has used trivia in a similar manner, as a means of testing social actors' confidence in themselves and in their fellow group members (Kruger, Windshittl, Burrus, Fessel, Chambers, 2008; Menon, Kyung & Agrawal, 2009).

Using trivia as a test of optimism/pessimism and team cohesion speaks to the importance of trivia knowledge to social actors' feelings of self-worth. The breadth and depth of one's knowledge is perceived to be a reflection of one's intelligence, memory, and interests in areas that are constructed as important. Thus, evaluations of oneself or one's group hinge in some respect upon their performance at answering trivia questions. By using trivia to test these variables, these researchers draw from and reinforce a meaning system that favors trivia knowledge as a component of one's self-concept.

A second line of scholarship approaches the subject of trivia more directly. In particular, two articles address the relationship between trivia knowledge and the authoring of one's self-concept. The first of these is a cultural analysis of the movie *Diner* (Hoffman, 2005). *Diner* is the story of five 20-something men reuniting for the wedding of one of their cohort, Eddie. Eddie, however, considers calling off the wedding when his fiancé cannot "pass" his "Colts Quiz", a series of trivia questions about Eddie's beloved Baltimore Colts. Hoffman (2005) asserts that trivia becomes a central theme in *Diner* as the characters use their knowledge of the trivial to author their identities. For example, to Eddie, knowledge of Colts history and lore is not merely trivial, instead it reflects a system of meaning that prioritizes the values, feelings, and beliefs that are salient to Eddie's identity. As such, our trivia knowledge becomes about more than just how much we know, but what we choose to know. In this way, trivia knowledge works as a reflection and ongoing construction of our social and personal identities.

Hoffman (2005) further makes this argument by turning to the case of Herbert Stempel, a contestant and eventual whistleblower on the game show *Twenty One*. Hoffman argues that producers knew the allure of their show came from the construction of contestants' identities, and she suggests that this was the motivation for why the producers sought to fix the game's outcome. Furthermore, she argues that, "At the expense of all other facets of their life and personality, that identity came chiefly through contestants' own particular area of expertise" (p. 29). In an effort to fix the outcome of an episode, Stempel was asked by producers to incorrectly identify the Oscar winner for Best Picture in 1955, *Marty*. Stempel took particular exception to having to answer this question incorrectly, because it was a movie he had seen three times, loved, and related to on a personal level. Stempel's identity was tied up in his knowledge of this bit of trivia as an experience he had lived and used to craft a part of who he was.

This sense that our trivia knowledge is intimately tied to the lived experiences by which we have crafted our sense of self was the subject of an essay written by John Wengle (1986). Wengle argued that society's increased interest in trivia was a defense against "widespread feelings of self/identity dissolution" (p. 346). Wengle explains that "an individual's sense of identity depends on his (sic) ability to feel himself (sic) both embedded within some larger, enduring cultural whole and yet also separate, unique unto himself (sic)" (p. 346). Wengle makes the case that the years preceding this boom in trivia interest had produced a society that had eroded social actors' connection with an enduring cultural whole (Gehlen, 1980). In response to this erosion, people turned to trivia to reconnect with the collective lived experience that had authored both their trivia

knowledge and their identities. He argues, “The pursuit of trivia serves to link the individual to his world, not through the mobilization of ‘big’ meanings, but rather through the minutiae of existence”. When responding to trivia questions, we are reconnected with the initial experience through which that knowledge is derived. Subsequently, we are reconnected with the cultural whole. This can be seen as a link between one’s trivia knowledge and one’s narrative self-identity (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Wengle’s argument of trivia as returning to lived experience can be witnessed in the plot of the 2008 film *Slumdog Millionaire*. This film depicts a character baffling producers of a trivia-based game show by successfully answering questions by recalling specific lived experiences.

From these two approaches to trivia within the academic arena, we can see how trivia, as a cultural phenomenon, is tied to our social and individual process of identification. Trivia contributes to the positive or negative evaluations of ourselves and our groups, trivia is a frame through which we both author and communicate the salient parts of our identity, and trivia is a means by which we reconnect with the social interactions that have contributed to our identity construction. Thus, what and how much we are perceived to know is intimately tied to our sense of self and the identity we project.

Having established the importance of one’s sense of knowledge and the perceived value of one form of knowledge over another, it is meaningful to consider Foucault’s theory of knowledge and power (Alvesson, 1996; Foucault, 1984). Foucault suggests that knowledge and power are intimately linked. For Foucault, knowledge

always constructs that which is natural and, in contrast, that which is deviant.

Furthermore, Foucault suggests that contradictions to a prevailing system of knowledge are disciplined into conforming to the assumptions of that knowledge system. This discipline takes the form of social pressures of compliance through surveillance and normalizing judgments. In its most insidious form, knowledge is internalized by individuals as natural. When this occurs, individuals are likely to surveil their own behavior and discipline any deviance. We can witness Foucault's system of knowledge, power, and discipline at work in the example of Eddie's "Colts Quiz". The suggestion here is that knowledge about the Baltimore Colts is given natural status, and a lack of knowledge about the Colts is disciplined as deviant. Thus, the accumulation of trivia knowledge and the asking of trivia questions is a process which contributes not only to identity but to power. As a site of knowledge, trivia disciplines knowledge that is normal or deviant.

For this project, the trivia contest itself serves as an environment in which both identity and power are accomplished through the practice of trivia. By performing trivia together, social actors are defining their own identities on the basis of their expertise, they are also responding to a system of power. This system of power both communicates what knowledge is favored in two ways. First, by favoring one subject of trivia over another (through the selection of questions), the contest favors knowledge within different fields. Additionally, by disproportionately rewarding knowledge that is possessed by the few more favorably, this trivia environment creates power through the possession of scarce knowledge.

Research Questions

For this project, I endeavor to better understand the dualistic relationship that exists between context and identity. In doing so, I hope to build upon the prevailing theorizing about identification and context by investigating how the discursive resources and logics of particularly salient identity are enacted across contexts. In order to do so, I begin by identifying the key discursive resources and logics at work within a community. Thus, I begin this study by posing the following research question:

Research Question 1: How do members of a community define, enact, and negotiate the discursive resources and logics of their salient identities?

After having uncovered the predominant discursive resources and logics in circulation within the community, I sought to understand how strongly identifying members of the community enacted these discourses in the various other facets of their social lives. In this way, I could see how members of the community enacted their identities across their various situated contexts, and I could seek to better understand how the meaning systems they draw from as part of their trivia identity informed their other various social contexts. Thus, I proposed the following research question

Research Question 2: Are, and in what ways are, the discursive resources and logics of a salient identity enacted across social contexts?

Finally, as previously established, research into the study of identification has tied the experience of identification with a collective as a potential source of control. Thus, I sought to uncover how the prevailing discursive resources and logics at work within the trivia community informed members' behaviors and decisions. Additionally,

I sought to better understand the mechanisms of control that were at work within the community as well as the efforts made by members to resist this control. Furthermore, by foregrounding trans-contextual identification as a focus, this analysis is also able to observe how systems of control span situated context. Thus, I propose my final research question:

Research Question 3: Are, and in what ways are, control and resistance a function of identification across social contexts?

CHAPTER III

METHOD

Previously, I noted that this project examined the experience of trans-contextual identity among participants in the World's Largest Trivia Contest through a discursive approach to the study of identity. To accomplish this, I approached the topic from a critical interpretive perspective. Below, I outline the methodological commitments of this research and how they informed my methods.

Methodological Commitments

For this research project, I applied a critical interpretive lens to my data collection and analysis. Adopting a critical interpretive perspective implies a series of methodological commitments. Below, I further explicate what this approach includes in terms of ontological and epistemological assumptions. Next, I explain how these assumptions inform commitments to an approach that is both inductive and reflexive.

Ontological assumptions. Ontology describes assumptions about the nature of being (Miller, 2002), existence, and reality. My application of the interpretive approach understands reality as local, plural, and a product of social interaction. By being local, reality is experienced uniquely by each individual. An individual's reality is the product of their many lived social interactions and the various situated meaning systems they draw upon. In this way, reality is a unique and embodied experience for each social actor, and is thus plural. Since realities are locally experienced, there is no one single reality. This represents a rejection of any universal Truth. Ultimately, then, reality is a product of ongoing social interactions between individuals.

An important issue to an interpretive ontology is the relationship between a researcher and the participants of the research. A more normative ontology would suggest that reality exists independent of either the researcher or her/his “subjects”. Thus, a normative researcher may attempt to separate her/himself from those under investigation in order to observe a “true” state of being. Even the use of the word “subjects” makes clear a relationship of subjectivity between the researcher as an observer casting “gaze” and the “subject” being the passive one being “gazed” upon. An interpretive approach rejects this dualism between researcher and participant. Cheney (2000) borrows from the theorizing of Max Weber (1968) explaining that interpretive scholars “regard our ‘subjects’ as relative equals—as people who themselves have theories about the social world and who can react in meaningful ways to our own” (p. 19). In this way, the participants are active creators of meaning and reality.

By adopting a critical frame of interpretivism, I further contend that social constructions of reality are not neutral. Instead, socially constructed systems of meaning always benefit certain social actors at the expense of others. These systems of meaning then compete for greater legitimacy in our local interpretations of reality. Mumby (2000) identifies that power and politics are products of the creation of meaning systems. Mumby describes how the study of organizational communication often observes how meaning structures arise in a way that makes them appear “natural”. Organizational communication studies researchers (Collinson, 1992; Deetz, 1992; Mumby, 1988, 1989) have attempted to explicate the dynamics of discursive processes through which structures of meaning and identity ‘spontaneously’ arise” (p. 70). Subsequently, an

unavoidable product of this meaning creation is an assumption that power dynamics are also natural, and they become taken-for-granted.

Given that power structures are often presumed to be natural, it is the project of the critical scholar to uncover and trouble these taken-for-granted assumptions of a community that benefits some at the expense of others. This approach to critical scholarship emerges from early social theorists who sought to uncover how social relationships were grounded in power such as the study of Marx (1967), the Frankfurt School, and Gramsci's (1971) theory of hegemony. Many of these scholars embraced "emancipation" as the objective of critical scholarship. Emancipation, however, has come to mean different things to different theorists. Alvesson and Willmott (1992) offered a definition of emancipation for critical theorists to include:

the (often painful) resistance to, and overcoming of, socially unnecessary restrictions, such as the fear of failure and sexual and racial discrimination...that includes the transformation of gender relations, environmental husbandry, the development of workplace democracy, and so forth. (p. 432)

The authors later identify a criticism of this approach to emancipation as being unrealistic for critical scholars. In future work, Alvesson and Willmott (2002) draw upon the work of Habermas to describe emancipation in terms of communication competence. Thus, emancipation does not necessarily necessitate revolution or transformation. Instead, for this project, I pursue emancipation through the identification of distorting discourse and the pursuit of communication competence.

Epistemological assumptions. Epistemology describes the study of the nature of knowledge and knowledge creation (Miller, 2002). As expressed above, the interpretive approach views knowledge as a local phenomenon, a product of the lived experiences of social actors. Individuals interpret their present lived experiences through the lens of their previous lived experiences.

An important consideration in the study of knowledge and knowledge creation from an interpretive perspective is the environment in which knowledge is created. More normative approaches to studying human behavior have observed the role of communication in artificial social environments. The experiments described above in which trivia questions were used as a measure of one's knowledge and a test of one's optimism reflect this contrived environment. Such approaches can be problematic, because they fail to investigate meaning creation as situated within a given environment. Cheney (2000) suggests that, "One imperative [of the interpretive approach] is that research ought not to occur primarily in artificially controlled settings but rather in settings as naturalistic as possible" (p. 21). Thus, rather than seeking generalizable "truisms", interpretive research pursues a localized understanding of social relationships. Organizational communication scholarship that has pursued this approach has often engaged in observational field work in order to localize their findings (e.g., Alvesson, 1996; Ashcraft, 2007; Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004; Bullis & Tompkins, 1989; Kuhn & Nelson, 2002; Kunda, 1992; Larson & Pepper, 2003; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). For this project, I investigate how meaning is made in the naturalistic environment of the trivia community of the WLTC.

From a critical perspective, knowledge is mediated by systems of meaning that reflect inherent inequalities. Thus, knowledge, like constructions of reality, is never neutral. This is evident in the discussion of Foucault's theory of knowledge and power noted above. Mumby (2000) describes this as the "politics of epistemology" (p. 71). From this perspective, researchers are interested in the "values and interests that underlie knowledge claims" (Mumby, 2000, p. 71). Knowledge is always tied to the legitimating of some and the disciplining of others by deeming them (or their behavior, ideologies, etc.) as deviant. Mumby (2000) explains that "no knowledge is value free, but rather rests upon a set of assumptions about how the world works and the appropriate methods for uncovering this process" (p. 71).

By acknowledging the political nature of knowledge claims, critical scholars must be aware of their own work and how it contributes to the "politics of epistemology". Since the product of our research contributes to knowledge which can never be value free, we must be aware of the assumptions that guide our research and reporting and how they support a specific view of how the world works. In order to account for these ontological and epistemological assumptions about the nature of reality and knowledge, I engage in a practice that is both inductive and reflexive. Below I expand upon these commitments and how they influenced my data collection, analysis, and reporting.

An inductive approach. An inductive approach to research provides a "bottom-up" view of the relationship between data and theory. While recognizing that all researchers carry assumptions into their research, this bottom-up view describes how a

researcher strives to begin the research process without any specific preconceived notions, making connections within the data to inform an interpretation of what is occurring within the research environment. This is in contrast to a deductive approach (top-down) to research which begins with theories (sometimes hypotheses) to explain the phenomenon under investigation. These theories are then either supported or disputed (in the instance of hypothesis testing) or are used as a rigid framework within which to interpret observations. Tracy (2013) relates this distinction to an emic vs. etic distinction that is often made in qualitative research. She explains that an emic approach is “described from the actor’s point of view and is context specific” (p. 21). In contrast, an etic approach is one in which “researchers describe behavior in terms of external criteria that are already derived and not specific to a given culture” (p. 21).

Inductively, this project began with social observations that sparked further analytical inquiry. Beginning without any preconceived analytical notions, I observed interesting behaviors being performed by members of the WLTC community who identified particularly strongly with their community. From there, I began to ask questions about what prompted this degree of identification and how it manifested throughout participants lives. This prompted a series of pilot interviews that helped shape the theoretical and analytical direction of this project (more about both the pilot interviews and the analytical direction of this project below).

An inductive approach is most appropriate for this research project because of its attention to the local and socially constructed nature of reality and knowledge. By allowing theory to emerge within the social interactions of research environments, an

inductive approach recognizes the role played by participants and researchers in creating meaning. This is in contrast to a deductive approach in which meaning is already created and applied to the social context being investigated.

In this project, I used an inductive method to begin making preliminary observations to inform the future development of my data collection and analysis. As described below, this process began through my personal experience within the trivia community and pilot data I had collected before proposing this project. These initial observations have informed the research direction and questions I have posed above. Furthermore, these observations have contributed to the data collection and analysis choices I describe in greater detail below. Additionally, I engaged in inductive practice by utilizing an emergent critical interpretive approach to data analysis (details on this approach are described below). In this way, data was analyzed through the observation of emerging concepts and themes, and these concepts and themes informed future data collection and analysis.

A reflexive approach. As a participant in the construction of reality and meaning during this research project, I sought to exercise thoughtful reflexivity. Tracy (2013) establishes self-reflexivity as one of the three core qualitative concepts of the interpretive approach and defines it as, “the careful consideration of the ways in which researcher’s past experiences, points of view, and roles impact these same researchers’ interactions with and interpretations of, the research scene” (p. 2). Cunliffe (2003) explains the relationship between interpretive ontology and epistemology and the need for reflexivity. She asserts that reflexivity involves “questioning the distinctions we

make between what is fact or fiction, the nature of knowledge, and ultimately our purpose and practice as researchers” (p. 985). Thus, reflexivity involves a researcher entering what Reason and Rowan (1981) describe as a state of “high-quality awareness” (p. 169) in order to understand how their philosophical commitments influence the research process as a whole (cited in Lincoln, 1995). Similarly, Cunliffe (2003) asserts that researchers must not only analyze the “truth claims” (p. 984) of their participants but also their own truth claims. Below, I describe the need for researcher reflexivity in response to a concern over researcher bias and researcher intervention. I then explain how I engaged in reflexive practice through the use of unstructured interviews, emergent interpretive analytical methods (both interviews and analytical methods are explicated in greater detail later in this section), researcher disclosure, and participant data checks.

The ontological and epistemological assumptions I outline above express how both reality and the process of knowledge creation are products of social interactions. As a participant in the social world, these assumptions are just as applicable to the reality and processes of knowledge creation of any researcher. This has three important implications. First, it represents a rejection of the “objective researcher”. Like all social actors, researchers carry embodied lived experience into their interpretation of social interactions. Subsequently, a researcher’s philosophical predisposition colors the entire research project including (but far from exclusively) the asking of foundational questions, observations in the field, and analysis of data. A second important implication is the researcher’s intervention within the community under investigation. The act of research is a socially interactive process. Thus, a researcher’s presence in the

field in any context contributes to the social construction of meaning within the community being investigated. This has methodological implications, as it informs the findings that emerge during data collection, as well as ethical implications, as a researcher's presence alters the way meaning is constructed. These ethical concerns bring me to the third important implication, which is the relationship of power that emerges between a researcher and research participants. Kauffman (1992) explains that "An important difference between participants in an ethnographic interview is that one of them—the researcher—will write about the interview for the purpose of dissemination" (p. 187). In this way, Kauffman argues, a researcher's role engenders authority and higher social status. Additionally, by writing for dissemination, researchers "exercise the power of representation" (p. 187). As noted above, all systems of meaning are political, and the representation of our participants is no exception.

Because these three issues clearly necessitate researcher reflexivity from (at least) an interpretive/critical perspective, I made four important choices in the design and undertaking of this project. First, both my formal and field interviews were semi-structured (see below for further explanation of data collection methods). Semi-structured interviews make use of open-ended questions and allow participants to guide the direction of the conversation to topics they deem most important. Thus, semi-structured interviews optimize the role of participants in the meaning-making process. Semi-structured interviews do not eliminate my role in the process, nor are they meant to. As a participant in this interaction I still posed follow-up questions, prompts, and verbal and non-verbal reactions to participant comments. The objective was not to

control for my contribution to the meaning-making environment (something I regard as impossible), but to ensure the role of the participant in the construction of meaning.

Second, as part of reflexive design, I engaged in member validation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Lindlof and Taylor (2011) define member validation as “taking findings back to the field and determining whether the participants recognize them as true or accurate” (p. 279). For the purposes of this project, I shared with participants transcripts of our conversations that were used as data. I encouraged participants to elaborate upon the information contained within the transcript and data analysis, inviting them to further contribute to the construction of meaning.

Additionally, all participants will receive a copy of the completed project. This process has allowed participants to ensure that their voice is being “accurately” represented within analysis of this project. Additionally, by providing participants with a copy of this completed project, they will be able to observe interpretations of their behavior and ideals from a different perspective. This shift in perspective may provide participants with a nuanced understanding of their relationship with the WLTC community.

Additionally, it may spark a forth going dialogue as participants dispute my interpretations, hopefully leading toward a more-informed understanding for both participants and the researcher.

A third effort of reflexive design included researcher disclosure. Researcher disclosure describes a researcher’s openness about how their personal assumptions contributed to the research project. Cunliffe (2003) suggests that researcher disclosure includes explaining of personal biases, textual strategies that include writing from the

first person, and disclosing of stories that occurred during the researcher's fieldwork experience (sort of like taking down the fourth wall). This is an effort I have already begun by adopting a first-person style of writing and establishing my methodological commitments. This disclosure continues in the next section as I explain my personal relationship with the trivia community and throughout this research project. Researcher disclosure can be a problematic practice, since even the decisions about what ought to be disclosed are a product of the researcher's assumptions. However, these disclosures do provide a better sense of the context through which my writing is meant to be interpreted.

A final effort of reflexivity in my design was the use of emergent critical interpretive analytical methods (elaboration of my analytical approach below). Despite the inherent predispositions that inform the interpretations of all researchers, I made an effort to approach this project without theoretical predispositions. Instead, I allowed theory to emerge from the data and dialectically contribute to the ongoing process of data collection and analysis. One should not confuse this approach with the blind analysis of data. Certainly, all research is guided by a series of questions in need of answering. However, when approaching the data to seek these answers, no prevailing theory was applied to the data analysis. This is apparent in the emergence of a new concept, trans-contextual identification (more on this in the following chapters), as a best fit to describe the emerging themes rather than a strict adherence to existing theoretical concepts.

In addition to the philosophical assumptions that all researchers bring into a research project, my relationship with the trivia community necessitates a greater emphasis on reflexive practice. For this reason, I will share about my history as a participant in the World's Largest Trivia Contest and the implications it may have on this research project.

Personal Experience and Pilot Data

In addition to the methodological commitments I have outlined above, this research project is informed by both my personal experience with the trivia community and pilot data that I had collected to inform the evolution of this project. Below, I describe my history with the community of participants in the World's Largest Trivia Contest and the anticipated implications of this relationship upon this project. Additionally, I describe the pilot data that was collected and analyzed prior to the project being designed.

My “trivial” history. To varying degrees I have been a member of the trivia community of the World's Largest Trivia Contest since I was fourteen years old, beginning in 1999. The first three years I participated in the contest, I played casually with a group of friends who shared an interest in trivia, but experienced no significant identification with the trivia community outside of the 54 hours of the contest each April.

In 2002, I joined a team called Festivus for the Rest of Us (FFTROU), named in homage to the fictional holiday that was made famous on television's *Seinfeld*. Like my first team, this team was also comprised of individuals who were similar to me in age

(high school age). However, FFTRou took more seriously its desire to compete with the best teams each year. In my first year with FFTRou, we finished in 104th place out of approximately 400 teams. In the subsequent years we finished 80th, 40th, 14th, 30th, 20th, 8th, 3rd, 2nd, and 3rd before finally winning the contest in 2012. In 2013 and 2014 (the year of data collection for this project) we again placed 2nd. As part of the desire to establish an identity within the trivia community as a competitive team, members of FFTRou demonstrated an emerging identification within the trivia community that spanned social and relational contexts. Members of my team changed the way they consumed media, made purchasing decisions, and socialized in order to reflect the values and behaviors of their trivia identity. As a member of this team, I too began to demonstrate what I would now interpret as a trans-contextual identification with the trivia community. This is evident in the nature of this research project demonstrating an application of my trivia identity within my organizational and professional context.

As an active participant in the community under investigation, I played the role of what Adler and Adler (1987) describe as a complete-member-researcher and Tracy (2013) describes as a complete participant. Being able to assume the role of a complete participant comes with a number of benefits (Adler & Adler, Riemer, 1977, Tracy, 2013) and has been used previously to contribute to meaningful theory development (Haenfler, 2004; Hayano, 1982; Krieger, 1983, 1985; Ronai, 1998). However, investigating a community to which I belong—and in which I admittedly take great pride—also posed a number of meaningful methodological challenges. Below, I detail the implications and concerns of my membership within this setting of inquiry.

Three meaningful benefits accompany collecting and analyzing data within what Riemer (1977) calls “familiar social situations” (p. 471). The first of these benefits is that it facilitates entrée into the research environment. I already maintained relationships with a number of the individuals who participated in this research, and social connections with participants I had yet to meet were facilitated by my existing relationships. Additionally, my personal history with the trivia community helped me know what social environments would be ideal for conducting observations, and my personal connections assisted in gaining entrée to those locations. Ronai (1998) explains this advantage of insider status when gaining entrée to research environments by reflecting on how she was able to leverage her experience as a former exotic dancer to gain access to a community of dancers for her dissertation research.

A second benefit is that my history with trivia facilitated a rapport between myself and the participants. As Riemer (1977) suggests, knowing the “language and symbolic meanings of those being studied” (p. 474) helped me establish trust, and it aided me in asking informed questions. Haenfler (2004) demonstrates the value of insider cultural knowledge when conducting research in a familiar environment. Haenfler applied insider knowledge when studying the subculture of the straight edge community within the punk rock world. As a subculture within a subculture, the straight edge community relies heavily on symbolism that an outsider would struggle to understand, let alone demonstrate fluently. In my own research, I was able to “speak the language” of a member of the trivia community. This allowed me access to cultural issues that an outsider might have more difficulty articulating. In contrast to Haenfler’s

experience, Kunda (1992) expressed a difficulty in obtaining trust when conducting observations of a hi-tech firm as an outsider. In his experience, outsiders were branded and often treated differently than those who had earned insider status.

A third advantage is a more “accurate” interpretation of data. The use of the word “accurate” should not be misinterpreted as an assertion that there is a single truth to be uncovered within the data. Rather, accurate is used to connote that my experience within the community provided me with more contextual tools with which to interpret both observations and interview transcripts. For example, every regular participant in the World’s Largest Trivia Contest knows that the first answer to every contest is always “Robert Redford”. An outsider conducting observations may be able to observe that “Robert Redford” was the answer to the first question, but not know that this knowledge also serves as a symbol of insider status. It is a tradition known to regular participants of the contest that others do not know. Subsequently, those who get the question wrong are identified as members outside of the community. This becomes a relevant experience for two reasons. First it identifies members who are not yet part of the community, branding them as naïve or “newbies”. Second, it provides an opportunity for socialization. By signaling that one does not know that the first answer is always Robert Redford, existing members are able to explain this to new members and tell the story of why Robert Redford is always the first answer (an elaboration of this very example is made in the following chapters).

While the advantages described above helped to enrich my process of data collection and data analysis, complete participant status poses challenges as well. As

noted above, all researchers bring philosophical commitments into their research, introducing bias. This effect is heightened in familiar situations where assumptions have already been made on the basis of previous experiences. To cope with these concerns, I pursued a heightened sense of awareness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of not only my philosophical commitments, but also my assumptions of what it means to identify as a member of the trivia community. I sought to accomplish this by applying both an insider and outsider lens to data analysis. When analyzing field notes and interview transcripts, I approached the data twice, once from a mindset as an insider and once from a mindset as an outsider. This allowed me to trouble taken-for-granted assumptions I made as an insider while still capitalizing on my insider status. Since I used preliminary data analysis to inform future data collection, this approach allowed me to shape the direction of data collection and analysis accordingly. For example, in my initial analysis of the data as an insider, I noted the various social contexts across which participants were enacting the logics of their trivia identities. However, it was not until I re-read the data from an outsider perspective that I observed how these logics were not merely being enacted across contexts, but were informing those contexts, influencing others within them. As one who often draws upon the logics of my identity as member of this community, it was more difficult to observe how these varied social contexts were shaped by these discursive logics until I adopted an outsider perspective. Ultimately, this observation became a significant part of this project.

Investigating familiar environments also requires the balancing of one's identity as a researcher and a member of the community being investigated. Adler and Adler

(1987) explain the difficulty that can accompany the bifurcation of self a researcher may experience when bringing a researcher identity into an already familiar environment.

The authors explain that this transition forces researchers to “look at the setting through a fresh perspective, to develop relationships with people they did not associate with previously, to change the nature of their preexisting relationships, and to become involved with the setting more broadly” (Kindle Location 1018). Thus, a researcher is forced to experience a comfortable environment in new and, perhaps, less comfortable way. This can result in what Adler and Adler (1987) describe as “near-schizophrenic” states of multiple foci as researchers balance their identity as a member of the community and as a researcher.

Adler and Adler (1987) suggest two ways to cope with the experience of this conflict. Their first suggestion is a greater commitment of time. They contend that having to balance these two roles “entails putting considerably more time into the setting” (Kindle Location 1022). This additional time serves the purpose of allowing a researcher to purposefully interrogate environments that would otherwise be taken-for-granted as though they were being witnessed for the first time. To attend to this suggestion, I applied dual lenses to the interpretation of events or statements that I identified in interviews or observations as meaningful to this investigation as described above. The first of these lenses was from an outsider’s point of view, asking myself, “What does this phenomenon mean to someone from the outside looking in?” The second lens I applied was from my informed “insider” point of view. From this perspective, I asked myself, “How does my existing knowledge inform my

understanding for this event/statement?” This allowed me to also capitalize on the insider knowledge that can enrich my observations. This dual view required additional time in the field, longer interviews, and considerably more time spent analyzing data, but it was an important component of my reflexive practice.

Adler and Adler’s (1987) second suggestion is to develop strategies of delineating between the two roles. The authors warn that many complete member participants tend to favor their status as a member of the community over that of a researcher. Given my significant identification with trivia and the trivia community, I attended to this suggestion by allotting time for myself to be both a participant and a researcher. For example when conducting observations during the 2014 contest, I utilized two laptops. One laptop was used during the contest as a resource, allowing me to participate in the “playing” of the contest. The second laptop was used for documenting field notes while acting directly as a researcher. As I shifted between laptops, I was able to note a shift in the way I thought and felt about the events that occurred around me. As a researcher, I could feel myself becoming a little emotionally-distanced from the swings of highs and lows that one goes through when experiencing success or failures when competing in the contest. This distinction allowed me to clearly delineate myself as either a participant or an observer at different moments in time, but it also highlighted how the plural nature of identities informs our beliefs and behaviors.

As a final means of coping with the concern of role conflict, I embraced my dual role as a source of data for the current investigation. Since my project is interested in the experience of trans-contextual identification, I drew upon my own feelings of role

conflict and “near-schizophrenic” states as a source of reflection. To do this, I maintained a research journal that was separate from my standard data collection. This journal was reserved for my personal thoughts and reflections on the process of data collection and analysis. Topics for this journal included (but were not limited to) struggles balancing researcher/member status, moments when research breakthroughs were experienced, and moments when research progress felt stifled.

Pilot data. In addition to my personal history with the trivia community, I collected a set of pilot data prior to proposing this project in late December 2013 and January 2014. This pilot data was made up of participant observation and interview data, and I have used it to inform the direction of this project. Specifically, I conducted observations at an annual team-building/strategizing event for FFTROU on December 23, 2013. This event included a formal dinner in a reserved back room of a restaurant. Approximately 20 of the approximately 35 FFTROU team members attended, arriving in formal dress to socialize and dine together. Before, during, and after dinner there were informal conversations that served as social interaction in the enactment of identity meaning systems. Examples of such conversations included the retelling of stories and updates of trivia preparation. In addition to these informal conversations, formal speeches were given by two of the eight team captains during dinner.

In addition to attending and observing this dinner and documenting notes afterward, I conducted interviews with four members of the trivia community. Three of the four participants were members of FFTROU and one participant was a member of another regularly competitive trivia team. These interviews were each approximately

one hour in duration. These interviews were semi-structured, guided by an interview protocol but flexible in topic. As the project evolved, these pilot interviews were included among the data collected for analysis.

Data Collection and Analysis

Following from the critical interpretive perspective described above, I utilized a qualitative method of data collection, analysis, and reporting for this project. A common feature of qualitative analysis is thick description. Geertz (1973) explains of thick description, “The aim is to draw large conclusions from small, but very densely textured facts; to support broad assertions about the role of culture in the construction of collective life by engaging them exactly with complex specifics” (p. 28). In this way, I used qualitative research to better understand the lived experiences of social actors in a way that “honors participants’ local meanings” (Tracy, 2013; p. 5). To qualitatively collect data for this project, I conducted an ethnography consisting of observations, formal interviews, and textual analysis.

Lindlof and Taylor (2011) describe the goal of ethnography as, “describing and interpreting the observable relationships between social practices and systems of meaning, based upon first-hand experience and exploration of a particular cultural setting” (p. 134). My approach to ethnography reflects what Marcus (1998) calls “multi-site ethnography” which follows the same groups of people across multiple sites (cited in Van Maanen, 2006). This is in contrast to some traditional views of ethnography as isolated or distinct from broader social environments (Van Maanen, 2006). Van Maanen (2006) argues that this approach to methodology makes the burden of ethnography

“heavier, messier, and less easily located in time and space” (p. 16). However, this lack of tidiness better represents the messy process of meaning making.

The value of ethnographic data collection is in the thick description and detail through which a researcher is able to describe an environment and experience. Lindlof and Taylor (2011) explain, “The more empathetic detail that goes into an ethnographic description, the richer our understanding will be and the more valuable that account will be for its readers” (p. 135). Additionally, ethnography allows for a more embodied research experience than alternative data collection techniques. In a rejection of Cartesian dualism, ethnography allowed me to observe the research environment through a complete sensory experience.

Observations. The first component of data collection I used in this ethnographic study was observation. I employed this method through first-hand experience and participation as a member of a trivia team participating the World’s Largest Trivia Contest. This experience and participation took place in a number of different sites and settings. Most immediately, I was a first-hand observer and participant during the 2014 edition of the annual contest. This site included the immediate preparations for the contest, kick-off events such as the annual trivia parade, the contest itself, and the awards ceremony that followed the contest. In addition, I was a first-hand party to a number of events and ceremonies used in preparation and celebration of the contest. These included team conversations that took place in person and in online environments including email, message boards, practice contests, team-building events, and a number

of informal trivia-related environments. My ethnographic observations took two forms, participant observation and informal ethnographic field interviews.

Participant observation. Participant observation involves the experiencing and documenting of events as they occur within a social setting. Alvesson (1996) explains that observations reduce a researcher's "dependence on the perceptions, understandings, and accounts of respondents" (p. 76). Through formal interviews, reality is interpreted through the filters of both the participants and myself as the researcher. However, since observations do not require participants to interpret events or recall experiences, observations reduce participant interpretation.

For the purposes of my observation, I assumed two different observer roles. Tracy (2013) refers to these types of observation as a "complete participant" (p. 107) and a "focused participant observer" (p. 111). A complete participant is someone who is already affiliated with the community under investigation. As a complete participant, I participated as a full member of the community while collecting data. This role allowed me more candid and emotional access to the experience, and it allowed me insights into "motivations, insider meanings, and implicit assumptions that guide actions but are rarely explicitly articulated" (Tracy, 2013, p. 107). When collecting data in general public environments or within the context of my own trivia team, I was able to comfortably assume the role of a complete participant. Agar (1994) warns that complete participation can lead to a researcher becoming so enmeshed within their environment that it is difficult to notice what makes that culture distinct or unique. In an effort to minimize this effect, I also conducted ethnographic observations in settings where I was

not as welcomed as a complete participant, such as within environments of other teams. The biggest difference I experienced between settings in which I was a complete participant and settings in which I was not was the increased awareness of my identity as a researcher for both me and the participants. When acting as a complete participant, I was able to flow between social interactions more organically. However, in other settings of observation, participants often inquired about how they could accommodate me, treating me more like a guest, someone who is out of place. This distinction allowed me to observe the differences that exist across research settings, and it helped me cultivate a balance between my role as a participant and as a researcher.

When conducting observations of trivia environments of teams that compete with my own, I adopted an observer role that Tracy (2013) calls a “focused participant observer”. A focused participant observer is one who “enters a scene with an explicit researcher status and clear agenda of what data to gather in the scene” (Tracy, 2013, p. 111-112). Since each team experiences trivia in a unique – and sometimes secretive – way, I did not have the same insider status in every environment. Thus, when conducting observations within the environment of FFTRou, I was a complete participant. When conducting observations of other trivia teams, I adopted the role of focused participant observer.

While performing observations, I documented observed events through the taking of field notes. Van Maanen (1988) described field notes as, “shorthand reconstructions of events, observations, and conversations that took place in the field” (p. 123). When possible, I took field notes as I was observing. This allowed me to

document events as they occurred in real time with an optimal degree of description. When real-time field notes were not possible, I allotted time immediately after the observation to document the mental observations that were made. I also made use of photos, videos, and audio recordings to supplement field notes

Field interviews. In addition to participant observations, my observations included field/ethnographic interviews (Spradley, 1979). Field interviews are more spontaneous than the formal interviews described above, and they occur in the field setting. Tracy (2013) distinguishes field interviews from formal interviews as interviews that are instigated by the researcher in response to certain events or prompts during observations and would not occur otherwise. During observation, I witnessed rituals and behaviors that connoted particular meaning to members of the community. I used field interviews in these instances in order to elaborate upon the implications of that behavior, providing a richer context through which to understand those implications. Thus, field interviews occurred in response to immediate events and were not guided by any sort of interview guide.

Formal interviews. The second component of my ethnographic data collection was formal interviews. Formal interviews are distinguished from field interviews by having been planned and coordinated rather than occurring during impromptu opportunities. Tracy (2013) explains that such interviews, “provide opportunities for mutual discovery, understanding, reflection, and explanation...[they] elucidate subjectively lived experiences and viewpoints from the respondents’ perspective” (p. 132). The interview process allowed me to dig deeper into the various subjective

realities of interview participants (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Because participants' subjective realities are largely a product of their constructed identity, interviews were of particular importance to this research project. Additionally, interviews were particularly useful when applying a reflexive interpretive method that used multiple forms of data collection. Tracy (2013) explains that an interview allows participants to elaborate upon observed events and test hunches. This way, I was able to get a fuller explanation of observed events that did not immediately make sense when observed within the field. Additionally, formal interviews provided me with greater information when interpreting social interactions in the field, acting as reflexivity checks of my assumptions. I asked participants questions designed to test whether they shared my assumptions and how their interpretations vary from my own.

All formal interview participants were current participants in the World's Largest Trivia Contest that have played on or currently play on teams that have placed within the top-ten of the contest. In total there were 25 participants who presently represent seven different trivia teams, five of which are former championship teams. Some of the participants have played with multiple competitive teams in their history. All participants self-identified as being highly-dedicated players who identify strongly with the WLTC community. These participants were sought intentionally in order to represent the specific population of participants in the WLTC who may exhibit traits of trans-contextuality in the way they identify with the trivia community.

In order to obtain participants for formal interviews, I used a combination of convenience and snowball sampling. As a form of convenience sampling, there were a

number of participants with whom I maintain an existing relationship. These participants are convenient, because I had previously obtained entrée with these participants, and I share rapport with these individuals. Furthermore, the existing relationship shared with these individuals made them more accessible to coordinate with. Being more than simply convenient, these participants were also meaningful for the specific topic under investigation as perennial top-finishers in the annual contest. Additionally, my existing relationship with these participants helped me to mine out the sort of insights that are more difficult to uncover while also building an initial relationship.

In addition to convenience sampling, I also engaged in snowball sampling. Tracy (2013) defines snowball sampling as method in which, “Researchers begin by identifying several participants who fit the study’s criteria and then asking these people to suggest a colleague, a friend, or a family member” (p. 136). For my purposes, both participants and potential participants were asked to refer others to be contacted. Tracy (2013) warns that snowball sampling can sometimes skew data to reflect only one type of group or demographic. In an effort to mitigate this effect, I strategically sought participation from players across seven different teams all representing perennial top-ten (or better) contenders.

The formal interviews were semi-structured and open-ended to allow for a flexible and organic interview environment. Tracy (2013) describes a distinction between structured and unstructured interviews. She explains that highly structured interviews have a specific set of questions that are asked in a specific order to each

participant. In contrast, highly unstructured interviews pose broad prompts to respondents, allowing them the freedom to respond in their own way. The semi-structured interviews I conducted provided interview participants with freedom to create their own meaning while allowing me to guide the interview process to topics relevant to this investigation—issues of identity and control. Because identifying is a process of discursive meaning creation, providing an optimal space for meaning creation in the interview environment is important. Kuhn (2006) explains how interviews help to uncover the discursive resources that people draw on when constructing their identity, “identities are considered discursive constructions realized and negotiated in interaction, and the interview is one relevant forum for this” (p. 1344). This is consistent with the approach to discourse used in this project of a duality between systems of meaning and social interaction. Each interview was guided by an interview guide (see Appendix A) that contains a set of flexible questions to serve as a conversational catalyst or guide stagnant or off-topic discussions. Examples of these prompting questions include:

- Tell me a little about yourself and how you began to participate in the contest.
 - How many years you have been playing?
 - How did you get started?
- In what ways is your experience with trivia unique from other participants?
 - Is the experience different for Men/Women?
 - Is the experience different for people of different ages or experience?
- What is meaningful to you about being a trivia player?
 - Do you think of yourself as a “trivia player”? What does that mean?

-What do you get out of playing trivia?

- How does trivia affect your life outside of the 54-hour contest every April?

-Can you share some specific experiences?

*A full copy of the interview guide can be found in the appendix.

During the interview process, I wore the metaphorical hats of both an inquisitive researcher and a deep identifier within the trivia community. While my identity as a member of the trivia community informed my data collection and colored my data analysis, it also offered me unique access to data in two ways. First, my existing insider status allowed me to make connections that could be more difficult for someone outside of the trivia community. Additionally, as a member of the trivia community, I was able to solicit insights from participants during the interview process that an outsider may not have been able to elicit. Though my insider status granted me greater access in many situations, my role as an adversary in the trivia competition to participants from other teams could have invited discursive closure in certain environments. For this reason, I proceeded with particular caution in providing assurance to participants that no data would be collected for strategic purposes. Ultimately, this concern appeared to be mitigated through assurances of a non-strategic interview and the reference of other participants, and only in a couple of settings did I develop a mild sense that discursive closure was occurring.

The duration of the formal interviews ranged from 45 to 90 minutes. When possible, the interviews were conducted in locations of trivia significance for the participant. Such locations included the environment their team plays the contest from

or an environment in which they prepare for the contest. These locations were encouraged for three reasons. First, Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggest that social interactions should be studied in the environments in which they take place. By situating these interviews in a location of trivia significance, the participants were in a setting in which they commonly enact their trivia identity(ies). Second, by selecting a location of trivia significance, participants were able to draw upon the resources of their environment to explain/demonstrate how they directly enact their trivia identity in an embodied physical way. Third, this environment possessed cues that helped the participant remember events/narratives relevant to the conversation. When trivia-relevant locations were not available or when the participant was uncomfortable meeting in a trivia-relevant environment, meetings were planned at locations most convenient for participants. These locations included coffee houses, restaurants, and a bar. These were public environments comfortable for both the researcher and participant. Additionally, ten of the interviews could not be conducted in person. These interviews were instead conducted over Skype (three interviews) or over the phone (seven interviews). With permission from each participant, the interviews were recorded with the use of a digital audio recording device. The recorded audio was transcribed and supplemented with the hand written notes that were taken to identify communicated messages that otherwise would not be observable in the transcripts such as verbal emphasis and non-verbal communication.

A number of steps were taken to ensure the confidentiality of formal-interview participants. First, participants were provided with a handout explaining their rights and

their role in the research project. This handout indicated that participation in the interview process demonstrated their consent to contribute to this research project.

When recorded, participants were asked to indicate a willingness to be recorded before the interview formally began. Between recording and transcription, the audio files were stored on my password-protected computer. Transcriptions and all subsequent documentation made use of pseudonyms to protect the identities of participants. At the conclusion of the research project, all audio recordings and correspondence with the participants will be destroyed.

Textual analysis. As a supplement to observations and formal interviews, I collected and analyzed relevant texts. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that texts can give valuable insights into the contexts in which they were produced. In this way, texts can contribute to providing a greater explanation for the cultural and historical context that contributed to the emergence of the trivia community.

Lindlof and Taylor (2011) suggest that the principle characteristics of textual analyses are “collecting, reading, and interpreting” (p. 217). For collection of textual resources, I targeted the digital textual communication sites of the trivia community and my own trivia team as well as official public documents circulated by trivia organizers and news reports about the annual contest. In addition to digital texts, I collected official documents released by trivia organizers including newsletters and a copy of the 2014 *New Trivia Times* which is a document provided to each team that registers for the annual contest. The *New Trivia Times* includes contest rules and instructions,

advertisements from event sponsors, and a number of pictures that are used as sources for questions throughout each contest.

Data analysis. For this project, I engaged in a process of emergent critical analysis to analyze the collected data. With this approach, I sought to allow themes to emerge within the data free from bias. Furthermore, the emergent themes were used to guide future data collection and analysis. By bringing the emerging themes of data analysis back into the field during future data collection, the researcher allows participants to reengage in the process of meaning construction. This approach to data collection is most appropriate for this study for three reasons. First, it is congruent with the inductive process of data collection and analysis described above as a component of my methodological commitments. This approach allowed themes to emerge organically within the situated data that is collected. Second, this approach to data analysis is congruent with the approach to discourse I describe above. This approach is rooted in symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1986) which suggests that meaning is a product of social interactions. This is in contrast to an approach like discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1992) which is rooted in semiotics and focuses more directly on the use of language. As noted in the review of literature above, the emphasis on discourse in this project is conceived of as a duality of mutual constitution between social interactions and broad meaning systems. Language is only a single function of the social interactions considered to contribute to discourse in this study. Finally, this approach is epistemologically in tune with social constructionism. An important component of the

constructivist approach is the “subjective interrelationship between the researcher and participant” and their co-construction of meaning (p. 26).

Below, I describe in greater detail my application of this analytical approach, further explicating three central components: an inductive dialectic between data and theory, memoing, and coding.

The first central component to this approach is an inductive dialectic between data and theory. A dialectical approach to data and theory describes how the two inform one another. Thus, theory emerges exclusively through the analysis of the collected data, and this theory informs the future process of data collection. By allowing theory to influence data collection (and vice versa), this approach can better adapt to the evolving nature of the social environment under investigation. In order to facilitate this dialectic, data analysis begins immediately after the first field notes, interview data, or textual reading occurs. After each stage of data collection, therefore, I engaged in tentative analysis to explore emerging concepts and themes and applied them to future data collection. For example, during an interview that was conducted early in the data collection process, a participant described how trivia was a factor when deciding upon their most recent home purchase. They explained the importance of having a home with features that were conducive to preparing for and playing in the annual contest in a variety of ways. Going forward, I used this insight to inform questions about the importance of playing space for participants and how trivia impacted their living environments. As you will find below, this line of inquiry grew into an important theme of this analysis.

The second central component of my analytical approach involved memoing. Memoing is an ongoing effort used to organize the data collection/coding process. As a function of data analysis, memoing begins during the first analytic session shortly after the first data are collected, and it continues through the analytic process. Memos are used to indicate the themes, categories, and labels that emerge within the growing body of data. Additionally, memos are used to describe connections and dissimilarities between emergent themes, categories, and labels. As the research process progresses, memos transition from being less sophisticated, “grow[ing] in complexity, density, clarity and accuracy” (Corbin & Strauss, 2007, p. 117). Thus, in short, memoing describes the active process of coding that I engaged in during the dialectic process of data analysis and collection.

I utilized the software Dedoose to create and manage my research memos. Dedoose allowed me to import interview transcripts and field notes as word processed documents. Once imported, memos were created, inserted within a document, and linked across documents as connections were made. For example, when analyzing an interview transcript that described the importance of media and resource collecting and cataloguing, I made an analytical link about the material importance of knowledge artifacts and physical playing space as identified above. Both team playing spaces and teams’ collections of knowledge resources provided tangible representations of the importance of a very specific form of knowledge.

The final component of my analytical approach describes how this ongoing process of data analysis evolved through the use of coding. This approach makes use of

three types of coding: open, axial, and selective (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Open coding was used during the initial stages of a data collection and analysis project. Corbin and Strauss (1990) describe open coding as “the interpretive process by which data are broken down analytically” (p. 12). Essentially, open coding involves the labeling and comparing of emerging themes and concepts. As similarities and differences are identified they are labeled, described, and used to inform future data collection. New data is compared with the existing labels and concepts. Corbin & Strauss (2007) explain, “If a chunk of the new data is conceptually the same as data from the previous interview, then it was be coded using the same conceptual name, but this time I’ll be asking about what else is being learned about this concept that will further extend understanding” (p. 196-197). Additionally, when new data challenged the existing themes, those themes evolved to accommodate these nuances. For example, one emergent theme of open coding was the importance of technology such as computers and networks for collecting and organizing knowledge resources. However, a later participant described his team’s resistance to adopting computers and the internet as a playing resource and his persistent frustration at the over-use of these technology resources. By challenging the data of the prevailing theme, this insight provided a nuance about different interpretations of valuable knowledge within this community. This ultimately emerged into a major theme of the analysis presented in the following chapters.

The second type of coding is axial coding. Whereas open coding works to “break data apart” (Corbin & Strauss, 2007, p. 198), axial coding is used to put the data

back together again. In this way, the emergent labels are grouped together into categories and subcategories as relationships are discovered between them. While the axial stage of data analysis occurs in the later phases of data collection and analysis of a project, the emergent categories and subcategories continue to inform subsequent data collection. Building on the previous example, after distinguishing between two different forms of valued knowledge as emergent themes within the data, I was able to interpret future data in terms of these knowledge frames. This allowed me to better understand how these distinctions informed members' assumptions and behaviors and manifested in material forms.

The final type of coding is selective coding, and it occurs near the end of data collection and analysis. While the process has largely been inductive thus far, selective coding represents the fruits of this inductive pursuit of situated knowledge. Corbin and Strauss (1990) explain selective coding as “the process by which all categories are unified around a ‘core’ category, and categories that need further explication are filled-in with descriptive detail” (p. 14). The core category is the over-arching concept that brings all of the subcategories together as coherently related to one another. In this way the core category exists at the highest level of abstraction. Corbin and Strauss (1990) explain that “the other categories will always stand in relationship to the core category as conditions, action/interactional strategies, or consequences” (p. 14). Again, building upon the previous example, I was able to identify “Knowledge” as a core category of discursive importance to this community. Under this heading, I was able to distinguish between competing definitions for valuable knowledge and interpret accordingly.

The coding for this project was also conducted using the Dedoose software package. As mentioned above, Dedoose allows interview transcripts and field notes to be imported as word processed documents. Once imported, codes were applied to segments of the text. Codes were applied to multiple locations/documents in the data, and I could easily see all of the instances a code has been applied to. Codes were merged or linked to one another as further connections were made across the data.

In the above discussion of methods, I outlined my methodological commitments, and I developed my research project within them. The project I conducted operates within the critical interpretive tradition with a special interest placed on a reflexive, inductive, and emergent approach to data collection and analysis. Data was collected ethnographically through use of participant observation, formal interviews, and textual analysis. The use of coding and memoing has allowed me to identify emergent themes and use these themes to inform further data collection and analysis. Through the use of this method I address my proposed research questions:

Research Question 1: How do members of a community define, enact, and negotiate the discursive resources and logics of their salient identities?

Research Question 2: Are, and in what ways are, the discursive resources and logics of a salient identity enacted across social contexts?

Research Question 3: Are, and in what ways are, control and resistance a function of identification across social contexts?

In the chapters that will follow, I address each of these research questions through a description of the data that was collected and analyzed. This description takes

the shape of three analytical chapters. In chapter four, I describe the experience of membership in the WLTC through a thick description of the playing spaces and playing rhythm of top-finishing teams in the annual contest. From there, I describe how discourses of knowledge and competition are enacted uniquely by participants in the WLTC, and I articulate the tensions that exist through the ongoing negotiation of these discourses. In chapter five, I draw upon the discourses established in chapter four to describe how participants enact their trivia identity in trans-contextual ways. Specifically, I describe how members draw upon the resources of the discourses of knowledge and competition, as enacted by members of the WLTC, in ways that shape their various other social contexts, including their occupation, education, family, romantic relationships, and lifestyle decisions. In doing so, I highlight how identity is not only a product of context, but context is also a product of our identities. Finally, in chapter six, I describe how the limited resources of the discourses of knowledge and competition, as established in chapter four, restrict the decisional alternatives of members of the WLTC community. Furthermore, I elaborate about how the decisional premises inherent within the discourses of the WLTC community restrict members' behaviors, and how the community engages in surveillance and discipline consistent with the theorizing of cultural and concertive control established in chapter two. As a necessary product of this control, I also describe how members engage in resistance by creating space for counter-discourses. Lastly, I theorize about how the trans-contextual nature of identifying described in chapter five contributes to a system of control that spans beyond the confines of the context of the community.

CHAPTER IV

IDENTITY DISCOURSES

In this chapter, I address my first research question, “How do members of a community define, enact, and negotiate the discursive resources and logics of their salient identities?” Consistent with the discursive approach to studying identity outlined in chapter two, I am conceptualizing identity as a product of the discursive resources and logics that are available within a specific community and are products of members’ interactions. Thus, this approach portrays how members of the WLTC both enact and reflect the resources and logics of the dominant identity discourses through their social interactions. I begin addressing this research question by describing the community of WLTC. Next, I provide insight into the enactment of members’ trivia identities through a detailed description of the headquarters of five top-finishing trivia teams and the rhythm of playing in the WLTC from the perspective of the Festivus for the Rest of Us (FFTROU) trivia team. After establishing this backdrop, I identify two predominant discourses that emerged as meaningful within the WLTC community. These two discourses are knowledge and competition. Specifically, I describe how each of these discourses takes on particular meaning within the community, the values and assumptions that are identity resources for each discourse, how these discourses delineate between ingroup and outgroup members, and the tensions that exist as these discourses are negotiated by members of the WLTC community.

Identifying with the Trivia Community

The WLTC takes on an important meaning for both its participants and its surrounding environment. Before, during, and after each annual contest, local newspapers boast about the size and prestige of the contest – a newspaper article from 2008 proclaimed, “Nearly 450 teams with about 12,000 players, some traveling from across the nation, are expected to compete in the 40th annual competition in Stevens Point, a city of 24,000 people...Some consider the contest an annual rite of spring in central Wisconsin, a holiday of sorts” (Imire, 2008). Similarly, another article from the local campus newspaper (Hanson, 2012) boasted,

Every small town has its pride. For many Wisconsin towns, a yearly summer gathering involving flowing beer and local food specialties is the tradition. Still others take pride in nationally ranked sports teams or locally grown superstars. Stevens Point, Wisconsin, is known worldwide for the craziest, most nerdy, unique, and challenging tradition there is: Trivia.

Both of these reports describe the important sense of community the WLTC engenders. Below, I describe the relationship that exists between the WLTC and its surrounding environments and how the participants within the WLTC have established a unique sense of community.

The WLTC and the local community. The WLTC and its participants are intimately related to their local environment. The contest began as a fundraiser for the local university’s radio station in 1959. Through the years, the contest has been sponsored by hundreds of local businesses, and it has served as a significant source of revenue for the city of Stevens Point, Wisconsin and its surrounding areas. One

newspaper article explains the economic significance of the WLTC (Stevens Point Journal, 2009),

Not only is this event an invaluable resource to 90FM to keep its program running, but it is also a great boost to the local economy. Hundreds of people will make their way to the city this weekend, and while here they will be taking over people's homes or apartments and spending money. They'll be heading to the grocery store to stock up on plenty of provisions from frozen pizza, soda, beer and anything else they can get their hands on. They'll be at the restaurants, bars, hotels, coffee shops and more.

While this excerpt explains the financial benefits the WLTC brings to the local community, there is also a less tangible benefit to the community as a learning resource and a unique medium of expression. One participant articulated the intangible benefit of the contest and the radio station when explaining about a time in which both were threatened by a new Chancellor of the University,

If we don't support the [contest], we're not going to have it, and there have been a couple of close calls. I remember when there was there was that one chancellor who, and I don't care if you get this on tape, but she was a drunk and a bitch, and she wanted to sell the station. And the board of trustees, and a bunch of others, and a bunch of alums, we all got together and we made a lot of noise, and it didn't happen. If the station didn't have that kind of support, we might have lost this little treasure. This is one of the only things of its kind in the whole country...It's an incredible resource for the students and for the community...We can't lose it. If we do ever lose it, we'll never get it back.

This statement is a demonstration of the ferocity with which members of the community support and defend the WLTC. The threat posed by a former chancellor of the university who endeavored to sell the radio station was not just a threat to the contest or the radio station. It posed a threat to the community, its sense of identity, and its way of life. Subsequently, it was confronted with a hostile defense from stake holders in the community.

Furthermore, as a local institution, the WLTC has a profound impact on the identity of its surrounding community, and this impact is something that has become part of the naturalized experience of residents in Central Wisconsin. One participant described this relationship, “At this point, the contest has been going on for, you know, getting closer and closer to 50 years. It's just such an ingrained sort of reality of the entire community here, that it's almost impossible not to be a part of it; you're almost an outsider if you're not involved with the contest to some degree.” In this statement, the participant articulates how the contest has become a cultural hallmark of the community in Central Wisconsin. He also hints at a dynamic in which one's relationship to the annual contest seems to delineate between ingroup and outgroup members, something that will be elaborated later in this chapter as I explain two emergent discourses that are central to the identity of this community's members.

The relationships that exist between the contest and its local community is something that participants took pride in, because it made the community unique and special. This uniqueness serves the purpose of uniting members of the community through a common link and providing a sense of individuality. One participant explains the importance of this effect,

There's kind of a uniqueness in Stevens Point. People are affiliated by their team. You go anywhere and people are always talking about trivia, and it's just so much in the culture and the atmosphere that people relive the contest, and so you hear these stories all the time because people still love talking about them. That aspect of it can be very cool.

In his explanation, this participant explains how the WLTC, as a shared experiences, provides a forum in which members of the local community can relate to one another. They are able to share common experiences and recognize similarity in one another.

Participants also expressed a point of pride that emerged from the specialness associated with the WLTC as an event. A local newspaper interview (Hanson, 2012) boasted,

We're talking 12,000 people, with a city population of a little over 25,000 that means nearly half the town participates in Trivia. While this does not account for all those trivia geeks returning from out of town, the number is still staggering. It's so huge, in fact, that Alex Trebek spoke the words "Stevens Point, Wisconsin" in an episode of *Jeopardy!*. The question referred to Trivia and was, ironically, left unanswered.

A few interview participants also recalled how meaningful it was to have the contest and community referenced on *Jeopardy!*. Furthermore, participants also boasted about how the contest and community had been the subject of an award-winning documentary titled *Trivia Town*; has been reported about in many local, national, and international news stories; and is featured in a number of books, including one authored by *Jeopardy!* legend Ken Jennings. One participant who is also a prominent social figure in the city of Stevens Point provided another example of this sense of pride, recalling how Stevens Point has contributed to the development of telecommunication technology due to its unique contest,

Stevens Point and the trivia contest are responsible for some of the phone technology that we have now. We burnt-out...junctions for phone companies during the contest, because we are so inundated with all these phones. We are smoking up the lines calling in answers. [Because of this], we were beta sites. AT&T contacted the university, specifically [Jim Oliva, the contest organizer], and asked us about testing their equipment during Trivia weekend, because we could generate the volume

of traffic that they needed. So we've touched lives that have never even heard of trivia.

This relationship between the contest and the local community contributed to the identity of many participants at an early age. One participant explains, "I think for most people who live in Point, they at least have some idea of what Trivia is." A member of the team I play for echoed this sentiment by explaining how individuals are thrust into the trivia community at a young age, "Growing up in Stevens Point, you just kind of are thrown into it. I mean it is just part of your life." Thus, for most residents of the local community, a relationship in some way to the WLTC is something that cannot be avoided.

A community of trivia players. Beyond the relationship that exists between participants and organizers of the WLTC and the surrounding community, a strong sense of community exists among many participants of the contest. This community is comprised of players from different teams, possessing shared interests and shared goals. Elements of this sense of community serve to demonstrate how membership is necessary to develop some of the discursive resources needed for ingroup status. Thus, those within this community are able to distinguish themselves from outsiders through the cultivated access to these discursive resources. One participant succinctly explains this effect, "We're different, but it's shared... You're a member of an exclusive group but there's plenty of us. It's an enigma." In this statement, this participant summarizes the importance of community among participants of the WLTC – a dialectic between being unique and being bound to others.

An important part of this sense of community is how it binds individuals, even strangers. Membership in the trivia community provides an inherent link and sense of fraternity. One participant explains,

You will be out of town, and if you see a trivia shirt, you'll stop and ask them about it. It is that sort of recognition that forms that bond. It could be you [play trivia], because you like sitting in your mom's basement for 365 days of the year taking notes, and you love it. You might play trivia, because you like drinking with your buddies. It doesn't matter why we like it. It is trivia and that is what connects us.

In this statement, the participant explains how trivia can mean different things to different members of the community, but it still provides a unifying effect among contest participants. Another participant elaborates this point, explaining, "You know, you meet somebody and you just know you're going to have something to talk about if they're a Trivia player. You know, at registration [for the annual contest], you get in line and I didn't know anybody around me, but by the time I left, you know, we're all good friends."

Even within this community of trivia players, there is a further tight-knit community of players comprised of the more dedicated members of the community. It is this smaller subset of players that became the focus of this research project. These participants are bound by more than trivia itself, and they are comprised of individuals who share an intense relationship with the contest. One participant explained this close knit community,

Participant: One thing I find personally interesting is just the cult persona of trivia... You have this strange community of people who dedicate all the time, money, energy, and effort into this contest, and they speak their own language, basically, and that, to me, is just one of the most fascinating aspects of this entire event is just how it evolved into

such a close knit community of like-minded people who all understand the same thing.

Interviewer: Do you consider yourself a part of the cult?

Participant: Oh, definitely, definitely.

A participant from the team I play for who strongly identifies with this tight-knit community explained to me how he came to relate to others with a shared sense of community, “In the beginning, the only people that I knew would just be my own teammates, but over the years you meet all these other trivia teams. People from the Joe's bar crowd¹...you meet people from other teams and it makes you feel like you become more involved and engrained in that trivia subculture.” The subculture this participant describes provides for him a further sense of belonging to the community of the WLTC.

While this sense of community served to define a space of inclusion, nearly all interview participants simultaneously articulated how certain individuals simply do not fit within the community. One participant explained, “I would say that there is probably a certain type of personality, just for the baseline of even wanting to play. There have been other people that I've suggested it to and said, ‘Oh, you need to check it out.’ They are kind of like, ‘Oh, it's not really for me.’ They kind of made an excuse or something.” A participant from another team echoed this perspective asserting, “I would have to say there's certainly truth to the idea that this is only for a certain type of

¹ Joe's Bar is a local tavern that is frequented by a number of the more-saliently identifying members of the WLTC community. It is also the site of an unofficial kick-off celebration and an unofficial after-party for each year's contest.

person...There has to be something else there. There has to be some trigger that gets the urge switched back on when you start playing.”

While articulating this view of trivia being only for some, these participants were often dismissive of those who did not fit the mold of the trivia community. One participant explained, “See if you like it. If you like it, stick around. If you don’t like it, you know, you’re not going to be a good team member. So, you won’t come back anyway.” A member of the team I play for shared a similar sentiment expressing, “Show up. Try it. If you like it, great. If you don’t, head to the tavern. We’ll see you Sunday night [after the contest].” In both of these statements, participants are not interested in socializing those who do not immediately fit within the mold of the trivia identity. Instead, they take a “like it or leave it” mentality. One participant extends this mentality by explaining how those who do not identify with the community miss out on a profound experience. When asked how he pitches the contest to perspective participants he explained, “There is no such a pitch. Try it. See if you like it. If you don’t, walk away. If you do, you’re in for a life-changing experience.”

The Sites of the Trivia Community

During my investigation into the experience of a subset of trivia players that are highly-competitive and identify strongly with the community, I was invited to visit five different headquarters of top-finishing teams, including my own (Figure 1). For many teams, their headquarters is the space from which the team plays each year. Additionally, for many of the teams involved in this research project, a team headquarters provides a permanent space that is dedicated year-round to the collection,

organization, and storing of knowledge resources. As such, the site of trivia takes on a distinct character that is integral to my analysis. Visits to these five headquarters provided me with insight into the similarities and differences that existed in the spaces given meaning by the community. Below, I elaborate upon the common features of these playing spaces.

The first thing one notices when entering a team's playing space is a dedication to utility – function over form. Each of the headquarters I visited was in the basement of a home, and the space felt like factory workspaces. The rooms were “unfinished” with walls often consisting of exposed concrete or un-plastered sheetrock. The ceilings of three of the headquarters featured exposed beams. Only one of the headquarters I visited had finished floors, the others consisting of exposed concrete that was covered only with an occasional rug or carpet remnant.



FIGURE I - Festivus for the Rest of Us Headquarters 2014

Tables used as playing spaces were often either crudely manufactured or temporary and mobile. The tables within the Festivus for the Rest of Us (FFTROU) headquarters were made by a team member's father for the specific purposes they serve. They were built to accommodate workstations for dozens of team members, running approximately 20-feet long. They are wired for electricity and network connectivity. The legs are unfinished wood. The table tops are a plain white. The table space of two other headquarters consisted of rows of folding tables used because they are inexpensive solutions, they can be stored out of the way between contests, and they can be reconfigured quickly to accommodate evolving team needs. Another team built their tables along walls so that participants could efficiently make use of wall power outlets. Furthermore, one team even made use of a table tennis table as one of its primary playing spaces. In each of these instances, the design and use of tables reflects a primary interest in efficiency and effectiveness.

Each of the headquarters I visited had a functionally impressive and visually underwhelming assortment of shelf space dedicated to the storing and organizing of knowledge resources such as books, magazines, records, binders of notes, DVDs, and product packaging. In the headquarters of FFTROU, these bookshelves were also manufactured for their specific purpose. They are painted a plain white with no decorative ornate features. They are built into a corner of walls in the room. They are sturdy enough to handle a great weight of resources, and they are over-flowing with materials. In another headquarters, the shelf space was in a room adjacent to the main playing space of the team. These shelves were also built into the wall, and they were

built of unfinished wood. The shelves were deep and ran for about 15 feet along the wall with separators approximately every three feet. Another team made use of a row of non-matching bookshelves that one might purchase at a local shopping center. The six or seven bookshelves varied in height, each approximately six to seven feet tall. They also overflowed with knowledge resources. Many of the bookshelves contained stacks of materials piled perilously high atop the highest shelf.

Three of the headquarters I visited, including that of my own team, featured a primary computer workstation which was a permanent fixture of the room. These workstations each consisted of multiple monitors and wired connections. Beyond the permanent workstations, all teams made use of a combination of wired and wireless internet connections to connect each of the workstations that were brought and set up by team members in the hours leading up to the annual contest. Three of the headquarters I visited, including my own, had members who primarily brought laptop workstations making for efficient use of time and space in their headquarters. In the other two headquarters, team members would also bring and set up desktop computers. Beyond the computing technology, headquarters also featured a varied array of other technologies including televisions wired to Blu-ray players, DVD players, and VCRs; stereo systems with speakers mounted around the room; and even video projectors. The video equipment was used to access knowledge resources throughout the contest, and the stereo equipment served to broadcast the audio of the contest around the headquarters. Within my own headquarters, three flat-panel TVs were mounted near the ceiling around

the room. During the contest, the three TVs displayed the Google spreadsheet document upon which each question was typed for easy reference for all members of the team.

Each of the headquarters possessed artifacts that I describe as “knowledge resources”. These knowledge resources are the physical items in each headquarters that teams use in pursuit of the information necessary to answer each question. Within each headquarters, two specific categories of organized knowledge resources were meaningfully abundant. The first of these categories was media libraries. Media libraries consisted of the highly organized collection of resource material. These resource materials included a number of the items described as being on bookshelves above: books, magazines, records, DVDs, VHS tapes, etc. In each of the headquarters I was able to observe, the media libraries were shockingly extensive, highly organized, and publically showcased for team members to access and observe.

The importance of the organization of these media libraries was emphasized during two exchanges I observed during the evening before the 2014 WLTC in the FFTRou headquarters. In the first exchange, a team captain returned to the headquarters, where around-the-clock preparation takes place in the week leading up to the contest, to find that piles of resources had been hastily built up on the tables in the room rather than neatly put in a place where they could be easily searched and accessed. In an effort to justify his frustration with this problem, he explained how during the previous contest a stack of magazines he had meticulously organized had fallen into disarray as participants hastily shifted around resources to make space for the new additions. The result was wasted time and difficulty systematically searching through

the magazines to find necessary information during the contest. He insisted that team members re-organize the piles that had formed on the tables, and he continued to emphasize such organization throughout the rest of the weekend.

A second exchange that emphasized the importance of the organization of these knowledge resources occurred when a teammate and I were tasked with re-organizing the team's record collection the night before the 2014 contest began. Team members had noticed that a number of the hundreds of records were out of place upon the shelves, and we endeavored to re-organize them. This process began by considering the best method to organize the albums. Before beginning, we established that we would organize them by artists' names using the first letter of each artist's last name and the first letter of each band's name with the exception of the words "A" and "The". With this established we got to work. We made it half-way through the "A"s before realizing we had a problem. We found a few albums in the middle of the "A"s for the band "The Alan Parsons Project". However, Alan Parsons also has four solo albums which had, appropriately (for the previously established logic), been filed among the "P"s. We quickly realized that this could be a problem that would permeate throughout the process. What do we do with "The Steve Miller Band" and "Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers"? What about bands like "The Police", "Wings", and "Nine Inch Nails" that are most-notably known by single members of the group? What on earth do we do about the different iterations of "Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young"? This resulted in an hour-long discussion about how to rethink the organizational logic of the albums in a

way that maximized their accessibility to anyone who might find themselves tasked with locating a specific album during the contest.

In addition to the media libraries, each teams' headquarters featured a collection of knowledge artifacts that was extensive and reflected a lifestyle commitment by team members to collecting and cataloguing knowledge resources. These knowledge artifacts included broken down cereal boxes, restaurant place mats, candy wrappers, board games, and other miscellaneous items that could, one-day, be the source of a trivia answer. I noted while observing these collections that the collecting, saving, and storing such a random array of artifacts is something that non-trivia players might view as pathological. In fact, a similar compulsive storing of such items has become a cultural phenomenon called hoarding which is understood as a pathological inability to part with material objects. However, rather than being seen as deviant, this behavior is seen as normative and expected by members of the WLTC community.

Beyond the knowledge resources contained within each headquarters, there were also team identity artifacts. These artifacts were physical objects that communicated important values of the team's identity. For example, each of the headquarters I visited had a team banner displayed either outside in front of the house of the team headquarters or in their playing space. Teams also had discrete displays of the trophies that had been acquired from previous years of the WLTC as well as other marathon trivia contests they had participated in. Members at each of the team headquarters I visited also wore t-shirts, sweatshirts, sweatpants, hats, or other clothes that were emblazoned with a team-specific logo or a contest logo. Shirts also contained things like team mottos or a list of

historic contest finishes. Other artifacts have more discrete significance to the teams based upon the stories those objects tell. For example, one team's headquarters featured a neon clock that the team had won for designing the best float in a previous year's trivia parade and Nickelodeon-themed landline phones that the team had used traditionally to exclusively phone in answers. The FFTRou headquarters featured a number of artifacts like these as well. In addition to team banners that display the team's logo and celebrate the team's championship, the FFTRou headquarters features a blown up image of a magazine cover of an issue that contained a special feature on the team. This magazine cover featured one of our team members holding the team's trophies. Additionally, there is a five-foot high aluminum pole standing in reference to the Festivus for the Rest of Us episode of *Seinfeld* that has inspired the team's name, and a taxidermy monkey is brought each year and placed in an adjacent room to act as a "rally monkey" meant to bring the team good luck in the closing hours of each contest. Each of these artifacts makes the space unique to each team.

The sites in which each team participates in the annual contest are an important reflection of the resources of the resonating discourses within the trivia community. They embody a material depiction of the important values and assumptions made by each team that occupies these spaces. Reference to these sites will be made later in this chapter as I discuss the two predominant identity discourses that emerged in this project. However, the sites alone only communicate part of the discursive experience of each of these teams. The actual playing of the contest sheds more light on the discursive processes through which members enact their community identity.

Playing the Contest

During the early hours of the 2014 contest, I had a brief conversation with a new member of the FFTROU team whom was experiencing the contest for the first time. I asked them what their initial impression was. They replied, “You guys are intense. These questions are crazy, and before I even get started looking, it seems like someone is finding the answer. I don’t really feel like I’m helping much...It’s overwhelming.” Throughout the contest, this member became increasingly comfortable with the rhythm of the team, the language being spoken (if you, the reader, ever feel equally overwhelmed by use of this language, please refer the glossary located in Appendix C), and important strategies used to both look for question answers and communicate those answers to other team members. However, her initial observation is a meaningful one. The site of a competitive team’s headquarters during a contest can be an overwhelming experience to contest outsiders. Below, I describe a little more of the aforementioned rhythm of the contest in order to provide an insight into the way participants communicate with one another when actively enacting the logic and resources of the dominant discourses of the community within the context of the contest.

In its basic format, eight questions are asked during each of the 54 hours of the contest². There is a pattern for the asking of each question. It begins with the initial reading of the first question of every hour. Then, a song is played, the question is repeated, a second song is played, and the answer to the question is given. Once one

² There are a couple of exceptions. During the two midnight hours, there are 10 questions asked, and in the six p.m. hours on both Saturday and Sunday there are only four questions asked after the entire team standings are read.

answer is given, the next question is initially read, following the same pattern. This is repeated eight times each hour. Teams have until the conclusion of the second song for each question in which to call into the phone number they have been assigned at registration, report their four-digit team identification number, and recite their answer. After the eighth question in each hour, ads for contest sponsors are played, point values for the questions in the hour that preceded the one that just concluded are read, and the top-five standings as of the hour of those point values are read. Then, the first question of the next hour is read. While this pattern repeats for 54 hours, there are also moments in which teams are tasked with other trivia challenges including the identification of song snippets and a city-wide scavenger hunt. These challenges all occur as the contest continues, forcing the team to accomplish all tasks simultaneously. Reflecting the pattern of the contest's organization, patterns of team member interactions during the contest can also be observed. Below, I describe the patterned interactions of team members of FFTROU throughout the 2014 WLTC.

The interactions of team members of FFTROU during the playing of the WLTC demonstrate a systematic method of practice and habit that has been cultivated during a decade of experience playing in the contest together. The room is alive with murmuring, laughter, story-telling, and conversation. Most team members are in chairs that surround the custom-made tables with their workstations in front of them. Some members are up getting snacks or beverages from an adjacent room. The mood is relaxed, jovial. Then, with an abruptness, all members of the team fall simultaneously silent. Conversations are truncated, left hanging mid-sentence. Those seated in front of their workstations sit

upright and move their hands to their computer's keyboards. Those who were away from their workstations rapidly return to their seats. A team captain who is seated most closely to the team's stereo turns the volume dial so that the DJ's voice can be heard clearly from each of the speakers that had been strategically placed throughout the headquarters. As the DJ reads the answer to the question that had been phoned in minutes before, the team listens intently. If the team had gotten the question correct³, there is a single simultaneous choreographed clap of celebration. In the event of a particularly difficult or surprising correct answer, this single clap is eclipsed by shouts of excitement and mutual congratulations lasting only a couple of seconds. In the event that the team got the answer incorrect, there is typically no audible response. The correct answer is documented in the Google Spreadsheet that all members can access, and the team prepares for the second question to be asked.

As each question is read, one member of the team is designated with the responsibility of transcribing the question in the same Google Spreadsheet shared by team members. The wording of the question becomes immediately visible on the local screens of each participant's computer as well as the three flat-panel televisions that are mounted around the room. The only sound in the room is the clicking of keys as team members begin typing key words into search engines and databases in pursuit of answering the question. As the DJ concludes the asking of the question, the volume of the radio is once again lowered. Without looking up, team members begin to identify meaningful sources that should be checked. Questions begin to circulate to help us

³ FFTROU got 86.57% of the questions correct in the 2014 WLTC.

locate the appropriate source of the answer: “Did anyone take a note on this?”, “Someone should check this webpage”, “Can we find a video of this on YouTube?”, “Do we own this record?”, “Do we know what movie this is from?”, “Does anyone use this product?”, etc. Some of these questions are met with silence, others receive follow-up responses, steering the team in the direction of the correct answer: “I will look there”, “I took notes on this TV show”, “I remember this commercial”, etc. Team members begin finding various possible answers, and they propose them to the group. As members begin to find the same answer, they start comparing sources to make sure they are not redundant and that they are trustworthy.

As the DJ cuts in to repeat the question, the volume on the stereo is again increased. During this repeating of the question, the team is careful to identify the nature of the specific question being asked: “Do they want the first and last name?”, “Are they looking for the actor or the character?”, “Do they want the make or the model?”, etc. After the question has been repeated, the volume is again turned down.

As answers begin to emerge through the search, a consensus is sought. Confirmation of an answer from multiple sources is pursued. Not until a consensus is reached or the time limit becomes imminent is an answer phoned in, and only a team captain can approve an answer being called in. When an answer becomes confirmed, all members of the team turn to their phones to call in the answer. Since multiple teams are given the same phone number, it is not uncommon for callers to receive a busy signal as other teams are currently also trying to phone in an answer. Thus, participants dial and redial until someone finally gets a volunteer phone operator. “In!” cries the successful

team member, and the rest of the team audibly replies, “Down!” signifying that they have all stopped trying to call in⁴. The team member recites the team’s identification number and asks the operator to repeat that number back to them. They then provide the operator with a clear and specific answer. Once the answer has been successfully phoned in, the relaxed, jovial atmosphere returns just as abruptly as it had dissipated until the DJ returns to close the question and pose the next one.

The rhythm described above is reflective of the typical question and answer sequence. However, there are some notable deviations that occur which disrupt this pattern that are meaningfully reflective of the values and assumptions of the team. One disturbance to this routine occurs when team members (typically new members) or visitors unwittingly continue to talk when a question is being asked or answered over the airwaves. Such behavior is promptly condemned by members of the team, often with hostile looks, shushing, and even verbal admonishment. This condemnation is indicative of two important things. First, it communicates to both the violating parties and others who observe the exchange what “appropriate” behavior within this context is, and that non-normative behavior is not tolerated. Second, it serves as a mechanism of delineating between ingroup and outgroup members. As a condemned violation of the normative pattern of behavior, newcomers or outsiders are identified and disciplined by the more-normative members of the group.

⁴ Phoning in multiple answers, even the same answer multiple times, is in violation of contest rules and can result in forfeiture of an answer and even disqualification from the contest.

A second disturbance to the typical rhythm of the contest occurs when consensus among team members about a correct answer cannot be achieved. These instances result in the rapid articulation of arguments in support of various answers, the forming of coalitions, and the implementation of both formal and informal hierarchies. Ultimately, a decision has to be made about what answer is used as the team's official answer, and both the choice of which answer is used and the rightness or wrongness of this answer contributes to the evaluation of "correct" knowledge and perceptions about who is most reliable at accessing or providing this "correct knowledge".

As noted previously, there are a number of discursive interactions that occur between the team's answering of one question and the asking of the next question. These discursive interactions include the discussion of previous questions, the telling of stories, speculation about the performance and strategies of other teams, and other episodic discourses that can contribute to the construction of meaning in this context. In the forthcoming sections and throughout chapters five and six, I will draw upon some of these exchanges to help explain how they contributed to the emergence of the two predominantly important identity discourses of the WLTC community. Additionally, in the appendices, I have shared both a compiled list of interesting and meaningful stories shared by participants (Appendix B) that had to be omitted from the main text of this project and a glossary of unique terms (Appendix C) that I observed during both participant observations and formal interviews that provide insight into the culture and discourses of the community.

Identity Discourse One: Knowledge

It is not surprising that among a community that defines its identity based upon its relationship to a trivia knowledge contest, a prevalent discourse was knowledge. While knowledge emerged with great consistency as a discourse of identification during my observations and across my interviews, the way knowledge was used to inform trivia identities had significant variations and was openly negotiated by members of the community. Below, I explain how knowledge emerged as a prevalent and influential discourse of identity. Then, I will describe some of the discursive tensions that emerged as members negotiated the resources and logics associated with knowledge as an identity discourse.

The value of knowledge. Knowledge, however it is defined, is an irrevocably integral component of the identification process among members of the WLTC community. One participant summed up the central role of knowledge when expressing, “The entire contest, the entire game is nothing more than a knowledge test, it’s, ‘What do you know?’” In this way, knowledge is at the heart of what brings this community together. It provides the community with its purpose, its essence. Below, I explain how knowledge emerged as an important discourse to the process of identification within the WLTC community, and I will explain how knowledge is used to distinguish this community (and its subsequent identity) from others.

Among members of this community, knowledge was not only a component of the identity discourse, it was the very thing that provided purpose to the organization. One

participant explained the importance of the knowledge discourse to his relationship with the trivia community,

You want to find out if you know the answer to the questions whatever it happens to be. I think that is kind of the curiosity which is really part of human nature that most people want to find out something that they don't know or maybe want to find out if they know. So, I have always thought that that was one of the things that attracted me to trivia was, you know, "what do you know and if you don't know it, why don't you know it?"

In this statement the participant identifies the pursuit of knowledge as what brings this community together. To members of this community, this participant asserts, it is in our very nature to challenge and grow what we know, and it is something that draws members together. An important insight that this participant shares in the excerpt above is how knowledge, within the WLTC community, is not only something that is to be pursued, but also tested both personally and publically. Thus, knowledge, as a discourse of identity, is something that is regularly reiterated through the social interactions of identity work.

The resources of a discourse of knowledge are communicated in the playing space and interactions of participants as described above. The emphasis of function over form in this instance foregrounds the importance of knowledge to this community. As noted, each of the headquarters I visited had a comprehensive media library and a wide array of knowledge artifacts to draw from. Furthermore, these libraries and artifacts were meticulously organized. The extensive and highly organized nature of these libraries reflects the compulsive commitment to behaviors that reflect an identity discourse of knowledge. This is in contrast to alternative design decisions that could have been made within teams' playing spaces which could have favored aesthetics or

comfort. Instead of concern for aesthetics or comfort, these playing spaces were designed for the efficient access to an expansive collection of knowledge resources. Through their size and organization, the libraries communicated a year-round commitment of time, energy, and financial resources to the accumulation of knowledge. In order to build and maintain these media libraries, team members engaged in decision-making that was informed by values derived from a discourse that prioritizes knowledge.

Additionally, the interactions of participants while playing in the 2014 WLTC reflect the priority of a knowledge discourse. Participants demonstrated the prioritization of the pursuit of knowledge by truncating conversations and other interactions whenever confronted with a new knowledge challenge. Additionally, members who interfered with a team's pursuit of knowledge were publically admonished for interacting in a way that did not reflect the knowledge-centric norms of the community. When consensus could not be reached, a battle of legitimacy of one's claim to knowledge versus another's emerged. Each of these behaviors enacts the resources of a discourse of knowledge that is unique to this community.

The central role of knowledge as an identity discourse within this community becomes further apparent as participants shared stories about how they were first attracted to trivia as an ideal and a community. Most frequently, these stories were about either one's own demonstration of knowledge or the awe inspired by witnessing another's display of trivia knowledge. One example of such a story came from a member of the community who has played in the contest for greater than 30 years and has been a member of three championship teams. He recalls:

One of the reasons I play trivia is that I have the ability to remember arcane facts and bits of information that others consider "useless." I don't! This started at an early age: I was home sick in first grade, watching *Jeopardy!* with my mother and grandmother. The original show with Art Fleming and Don Pardo. The Final Jeopardy category was "Famous Last Words" and the answer was "The last line of this movie is "There's No Place Like Home." I asked the right question; my mother and grandmother looked at me with a "what does he know, he's just a child" expression. None of the contestants got the right answer. I did, "What is The Wizard of Oz?" I've been a friend of Dorothy ever since.

Through this story, this participant makes clear that the way he values knowledge is something that distinguishes himself from others. To him, this is not "useless" information, but a defining characteristic of who he is and what he believes in.

Furthermore, as an example of identity work, the sharing of this story suggests that this participant possesses an innate and incontrovertible link to trivia that is not shared by others, including his mother, grandmother, and the participants on that episode of *Jeopardy!*. It is something that he uses to distinguish himself as both a unique individual and member of an exclusive group of trivia-minded people.

Another participant shared a similar story of how he came to understand knowledge as central to his self-identity. However, in this story, this participant does not demonstrate knowledge for himself but, instead, it is inspired by others. He explains:

I was up late one night and there was this thing on TV from the University of Colorado. It was called the World Series of Trivia. Basically, all these four-person teams competing [in a trivia bowl] live on stage with a buzzer system. That looked incredible. The people were extremely good. They knew a lot of stuff...I looked again, and just said, "Wow, these guys are so good. How do they know all this stuff about movies and things and TV and what not?"

Inspired by this first exposure to trivia, this participant went on to form a trivia team with his high school friends that has, to date, won more WLTC championships than any

other. He also has had an opportunity to compete multiple times at the University of Colorado Trivia Bowl which inspired his trivia aspirations, even winning one year.

When describing what attracted him to trivia as an ideal, this participant highlights the awe he felt at the expansive knowledge of those he watched on television.

Finally, I can attest to the role knowledge plays as a meaningful discourse of identity in my life both as a trivia player and across contexts. At an early age, the possession of unique knowledge emerged as a way for me to be able to both relate to others while simultaneously providing a distinguishing characteristic that individualized me. In particular, one instance stands out in which trivia knowledge provided a means by which I could establish meaningful social relationships. This occurred when I was a small child, competing against my older brother in the board game *Trivial Pursuit*. A game of *Trivial Pursuit* quickly becomes a marathon affair when played between an eight-year-old and a ten-year-old. More than twenty years later, there are three things I remember from this experience. First, I remember having a heated debate about whether my answer of “Sears” should be counted when the card said “Sears Roebuck and Co.” Second, I remember that the winning answer was “Babe Ruth”. Third, and most importantly, I remember the satisfaction felt by being able to define myself as a social and intellectual equal with my older brother and the meaningful way that game transformed our relationship, if only to me. Since that date, I have, on numerous occasions, been able to utilize trivia knowledge as a way to relate to others and perceive validation and worth in myself. Today, I do it as a member of the WLTC community and

every Wednesday when I play in a pub trivia league with my wife and a couple we are close friends with.

While knowledge, as an identity discourse, has provided me with opportunities to identify WITH others, it has also been a means through which I have identified APART from others. My reputation as a participant in the WLTC has frequently left me branded as “The Trivia Guy” among important people in my life who are not a part of the trivia community. As such, it is not uncommon for my colleagues, students, friends, or family to begin an interaction with me by saying, “Hey trivia guy, I’ve got a question for you...” In this way, my trivia knowledge serves as a defining characteristic to others, something unique, something others expect of me. This role as “The Trivia Guy” is something that a couple of participants in this research referred to in their own lives. For example, one participant who presently works for a law firm described how he is known as the “trivia guy” among his colleagues. He expressed a pressure he would feel whenever they would test him with a trivia, as though he was expected to always know the answer. In future chapters, these occasions will inform the discussion of identifying with this community in a trans-contextual way, its relationship to control.

Knowledge as a distinguishing discourse in the WLTC community. While knowledge has emerged as a valuable discourse within the WLTC community, the same could be said for many other organizations or communities. Certainly, as someone who identifies with the academic community as well, I can see parallels in the central role of knowledge as an identity discourse for both community identities. However, the WLTC community draws upon knowledge in a unique manner that distinguishes this identity

from other enactments of knowledge as an identity discourse. Specifically, value is placed on knowledge of “the trivial” and that which is non-academic.

Knowledge as trivial. One way the WLTC community draws upon knowledge as an identity discourse uniquely is through the emphasis of minutiae. While many organizational identities, such as paid occupations and academic environments, place value on knowledge that is rare due to its sophistication (its depth), the WLTC community values knowledge that is rare due to its scope (its breadth). This becomes clear when looking at some of the very questions that are asked each year during the WLTC itself. For example participants in the annual contest might be asked, “What is the first and last name of the professional baseball player whose signature is on the bat used by big screen character, Wendy Torrance, to strike her husband Jack in the head?” To those outside the trivia community, this information is hardly an important take away from a viewing of Stanley Kubrick’s *The Shining*. However, most members of the trivia community will recall that the bat was signed by Red Sox great Carl Yastrzemski. In fact, the author of the annual contest, Jim Oliva, explained during a newspaper interview that the WLTC is nothing more than, “answering questions about useless stuff”. In this statement, Oliva identifies an awareness of the irony of valuing knowledge in this way, and this irony is what makes this identity and its use of knowledge unique. That which others define as “useless” is of critical importance to the trivia community. The former captain of a team that has now won the WLTC three times humorously eluded to this ironic knowledge discourse when explaining the philosophy by which he and his team prepare for the contest. He exclaimed, “If it’s useless information, it’s very important,

so write it down!” One participant from the team I play for described this motivation for the accumulation of trivial knowledge, “I think for the people that [play trivia] seriously, that’s a big part of it...They always have that wanting to know more and know everything you can if you can...I mean, I think [we’re] looking at the things that most people take for granted.” In this statement, my teammate embraces the idea of a “trivial pursuit”. He draws upon a knowledge discourse that values the ongoing and never-ending accumulation of knowledge. Furthermore, he expresses the value of this knowledge by identifying that others “take for granted” this knowledge.

Participants went on to explain how this discourse of knowledge of the minutiae informs not only what you currently know, but also what you value as future knowledge. In this way, knowledge, as a discourse is more of a process – knowing and coming to know. One participant explains,

I watch television and I see something in the background and the same thing with movies. There is no way I could stop looking at that. Even if I was not playing on a team during the World’s Largest Trivia Contest I would still be doing that subconsciously or consciously, I suppose, while watching TV or movies, flipping through a magazine, and seeing those ads and stuff. So even if I stop playing trivia I will not stop doing trivia.

In this statement, the participant explains how his enactment of the knowledge identity discourse manifests in the irrevocable process of “doing trivia”, altering the way he interprets the world. Another participant elaborates this point explaining, “It’s that little bleep in your head every time you see a commercial or a, you know, a billboard or a quote in a movie or whatever and like, ‘Oh, that’s Trivia.’” As these two quotes explain, for some members of the WLTC community, knowledge is not episodic, it is a lens through which we interpret our world.

A participant from a team that has recently won the WLTC in consecutive years explained how this approach to a knowledge discourse is a distinguishing feature of the WLTC community,

I often have to joke about that and say, if you've got the average 50 trivia people from the contest in a room with 5 average American people, and threw these questions at them, stuff that would seem easy to an average trivia player would seem insane to the average American, you know? People just ... How just in-tuned our brains are, you know? You can just, "Have you seen that commercial that has that song playing in the background?" And you walk around and you talk to people who play trivia, and, yeah, everyone's seen it, everyone knows what that song is and what the product is, and that certainly is out of the norm for [non-trivia people] ... We're all just so trained, it's so ingrained into that entire culture that it just becomes more commonplace. That sometimes you can get so used to being around those people and having those conversations that you forget the rest of the world doesn't think that way or notice those things.

In this excerpt, the participant jokes about how the WLTC community thinks about knowledge in a way that is unique to people outside of the community. Another interview participant emphasized how this view of knowledge is a distinguishing feature of a trivia identity, "I'll talk to people and mention something of a shared pop cultural background, and they have no clue what I'm talking about. I look at them and say, 'You were alive in 1987, what are you talking about? You don't remember this?'" In each of these statements the way the discourse of knowledge is enacted within the WLTC community uniquely to prioritizes the "trivial". In this way, it makes the WLTC community unique.

Knowledge as non-academic. Interestingly though, when defining knowledge and its value as an identity discourse, the trivia community exhibited a resistance to "academic knowledge" as valuable. In this way, the trivia community values a

definition of knowledge that is counter to traditionally valued knowledge. For example, Merriam-Webster's dictionary defines "trivia" as "unimportant facts or details."

However, among the trivia community these details are given greater importance than more-academic knowledge. One participant explains this, "It's fun to remember and particularly to get away from the more academic type things. It's even more fun to remember the fun parts of life such as entertainment, movies, TV, and music." In this statement, academic is contrasted with trivia knowledge as being the less "fun parts of life", and subsequently is of less value. Another participant dismisses the value of academic knowledge when explaining his experience trying out for a high school college bowl team that emphasized more academic knowledge over pop culture knowledge,

I tried out for my high school team, and I was the first alternate for two years. I never made it on the show, so that was really - it's academic. They were asking things that were pretty obscure even for high school students. I watch it today, and I'm looking at it and going, 'Huh?' The algebra questions, I don't think I even knew that in high school.

In addition to the WLTC, this participant explained how he also participates in at least two other annual marathon contests as well as a weekly competitive pub trivia contest. Despite this interest in trivia knowledge and contests, he dismisses interest in the academic style of this high school contest.

A participant from my own team explains why trivial knowledge is more highly esteemed than academic knowledge within the trivia community:

I think that – you know, it's kind of something to apply – a lot of the feeling that a lot of people that do this I think have is that they just have this thirst for knowledge and they're just always looking to try to learn new things. And you know, that a lot of people that doesn't apply to school work or something like that because they're not willing to put this much effort in to something that you don't really care that much about.

This participant explains how, within this community, trivial knowledge is seen as being more applicable to one's lived experience. In contrast, academic knowledge is something that is obtained with an absence of passion.

Despite these common features of the interpretation of valuable knowledge within the WLTC community, there also exist tensions across members of the community when defining valuable knowledge. In the next section, I elaborate these tensions.

Tension in defining knowledge in the WLTC community. As previously noted in chapter two, the meaningful characteristics of the social discourse that a community draws from are a product of the ongoing social interactions and negotiations of the community members. As such, the knowledge that is deemed to be legitimate and valuable is something that continues to be negotiated through the social interactions of community members. The essential nature of knowledge as an identity discourse within this community becomes apparent when the validity of knowledge is being contested. Most notably, one predominant tension permeated the community as members enacted a discourse of knowledge. This tension was a distinction between (1) knowledge as something that is internal and finite versus (2) knowledge that is external and infinite. Below I further explicate an internal and external definition of knowledge as given meaning within this community. Then, I describe a manifestation of this tension over legitimate knowledge that continues to inform the perception of knowledge as valid. This site of tension concerns the proliferation of internet-related resources being used to store, organize, and access trivia knowledge. Finally, I describe two issues that will

contribute to the future evolution of the definition of knowledge as an identity discourse in the WLTC community.

Knowledge as internal and finite. Certain members within the trivia community advocate for a definition of legitimate knowledge as something that exists within an individual and can be recalled on command. From this perspective, knowledge continues to be something that is pursued and accumulated, but it is stored within us. Subsequently, knowledge is limited by our capacity to cognitively accumulate, store, and recall information. It is limited by the things we have personally witnessed or learned and by our ability to store and recall that information. One participant who has played in the WLTC for several decades explains, “Well, back in the '80s... There was no such thing as the Internet, and no Google and no IMDB or Wikipedia, et cetera, so the questions were what people had seen in movies or TV or academics or in textbooks, what have you.” As this statement suggests, this view of “legitimate” knowledge as internal was largely expressed by members of the trivia community who began playing in an era where external resources were more limited. Of the eight teams featured prominently in this research project, four of the teams featured a core of players with fifteen or fewer years of actively playing the contest. The other four each had decades of experience participating in the contest. The participants that described a greater value in an internal definition of knowledge exclusively representing teams with decades of experience. This is an interesting insight, because it demonstrates how identities evolve over time, tensions disputing the prevailing discourses emerge, and communities begin to draw upon social discourses in new ways.

Knowledge as external and infinite. Contrasting a definition of knowledge as being something that resides within and is restrained by the capacity of the individual is a belief that knowledge is something external to the individual. This perspective views knowledge as a limitless resource that exists in the world around us. The value, from this perspective, is not in possessing information, but rather in being able to locate information in the most effective and efficient way possible. The captain of a team explains,

It's the being able to use everything at your disposal to find answers. The thing is with *Jeopardy!* or *Trivial Pursuit*, if you look it up someone's going to call you out...It's the whole no-holds-barred, you find that answer, you get the points, aspect to it that is interesting. It's a different thing to do than knowing something off the top of your head.

As the tensions between these two approaches manifests through the social interactions and identity work of members of this community, one issue in particular emerged as a site of this tension. Below, I describe how the emergence of the internet as a knowledge resource demonstrates the tension that exists between these two perspectives of valid knowledge.

The proliferation of the internet. The modern proliferation of internet-related technologies including search engines, online databases, searchable text, audio identification services, and a number of others have challenged the trivia community to test what constitutes legitimate knowledge since the early 1990s. Teams that value an internal definition of knowledge feel as though the internet is challenging the fidelity of the contest and, subsequently, the community. Teams that have long-embraced an internal definition of knowledge have had to evolve along with new technology. One

player explained to me how his team has always made use of technology and has simply evolved with the internet,

We're actually one of the very first teams to use computers in a way. In fact even in 1978 we had this so-called index of certain things that was basically printed out comment cards...In those days what we could do was go in and use a keypunch machine and punch cards. That is sometimes what we did, whether it was for assignments or, more likely, just to do some indexing work. We still had that index until sometime in the mid '90s I think it was then that it was thrown out. But we had computers for this and that in the mid '80s...There weren't any of the online databases just yet. That was definitely a big advantage if you could index stuff. So I'm sure you've seen in *Trivia Town*⁵, there's this big scene where the interviewer asks me, "What is this?" It's this big binder, you know? This big printout of stuff. "It's trivia, of course." But what it actually is is essentially everything I typed into an index, like in '80s, mid 1980s to late 1980s. That was this mountain of stuff that was very effective for a while. Seldom used these days because most any of the books and magazines that were once indexed are now searchable in some other online way.

In this explanation, the participant notes that technology has always allowed for efficient access to external knowledge. The important issue has been keeping up as this technology becomes more sophisticated.

Contest organizers continue to play a pivotal role in how knowledge is defined as either internal or external as an identity discourse within the trivia community. The use and value of the internet as a resource has been no exception. On one hand the structure of the contest itself lends itself to an external definition of legitimate knowledge. As previously described, trivia teams have the time of two songs to decide upon an answer and telephone that answer into the trivia headquarters. According to the official rules of the contest, teams are allowed to make use of any resource to locate an answer with the

⁵ *Trivia Town* is an award-winning documentary that was made about the WLTC.

exception of sharing answers between teams. This includes commonly used resources such as books, magazines, self-taken notes, and the internet. Since the very rules and structure of the contest encourage the use of resources, it is not surprising that an external definition of knowledge would emerge.

Despite this, contest organizers have resisted an external definition of legitimate knowledge, at least when it comes to the internet. The authors of the contest's questions have explained how they attempt to word questions in ways that require internal knowledge and diminish the value of the internet. An article (Zencka, 2008) about how the internet has changed the WLTC quotes the contest's organizer and co-question-writer, Jim Oliva, as saying, "Not everything can be found on the internet...If you can simply come up with a question that is so baffling that you have no clue of where to look...those are the best questions." The organizer's perspective on internal vs. external knowledge was further communicated through the logo that was used for the 41st annual WLTC (Figure 2). The theme chosen for this contest was "The Dark Side of the Contest", an obvious nod to both the Star Wars saga and the band Pink Floyd. In the logo that was used to advertise for this contest, depictions of Darth Vader and the glass prism that appears on the cover of Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon* were accompanied by the logo for Wikipedia⁶. This logo sends the message that Wikipedia

⁶ Which presents an interesting imagery when placed in the presence of Darth Vader, communicating a "Death Star" like visual. The Death Star was the weapon used in the Star Wars sagas to destroy whole worlds. This is perhaps meant to suggest that Wikipedia is being used to destroy the sanctity of the contest.

and other external sources of knowledge are to be seen as “The Dark Side of the Contest”⁷.

As communicated by the logo for the 41st annual contest, the resources available on the internet pose the most identifiable modern threat to an internal view of legitimate knowledge. One participant who has played for more than 30 years and was on a winning team in the pre-internet era explained why the internet and an external definition of knowledge are a threat to the trivia community, “The real question is what’s going to happen to the contest when the internet becomes so prevalent that there is almost nothing that can’t be found?” This participant expresses concern about the persistence and health of the trivia contest and community as the resources of the internet grow.

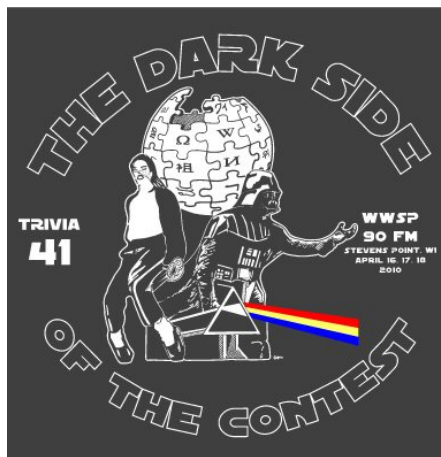


FIGURE II - Logo for Trivia 41: "The Dark Side of the Contest"

⁷ You’ll note a reference to Michael Jackson in the logo as well. While never explicitly explained by contest organizers, it could be inferred that his prominence in the logo is in homage to his having passed away in the year preceding this contest.

The participants who have embraced an external definition of valid knowledge also embrace the internet as a resource and even as a strategic advantage. The captain of a team that finished in the top-ten for the first time during the 2014 contest explained, “Our big initiative that first year was, ‘How many computers can we get?’ It was pretty much right after the advent of high-speed Internet. [The other team captain] and I are both techies, so we had the networking down. We were asking people to bring their CRTs and their desktop computers.” This team captain went on to explain how since that first year, internet-related resources have continued to play a central role in their team strategy and subsequent success. However, their strategy for implementing internet-related technologies has had to become more sophisticated,

Up until that point it was about...“How many answers can we rip out of that?” But now it's more of a focus on [making] sure we're getting the right stuff, because what we were doing was not sustainable... We were coming to terms with, “It's not about amounts of data anymore, it's about the right data.”

Building a team around a definition of knowledge as external is something that I can relate to, and my team has made sophisticated use of internet-related technology to give ourselves a tactical edge from its very inception. The photo featured above (Figure 1) was taken at my team’s headquarters during the WLTC in 2014. It is evident in this photo that internet-related technology is central to every team member’s effort during the contest. Each member of the team brings at least one computer that can connect wirelessly to the internet, and the design and build of our headquarters is meant to provide power and network resources that maximize our collaborative effort. One member of our team’s leadership has spent a number of years working for knowledge-

intensive IT companies in Silicon Valley. My team relies heavily on his expertise to keep us at the cutting edge of internet-related resources. He explained to me his view of his role, “I just really enjoy building cool stuff. I mean, that's kind of what it comes down to, and when it's something that's useful to a lot of other people, it's - I don't know - I enjoy that”.

As time goes on, even those who have resisted an external definition of knowledge have begun to embrace this discourse. One participant explained how his team tried to fight against the impact the internet was having on the contest,

We were against using computers for a long time. We used to have a little prop in the shape of a computer... We joked that that was our computer... At some point and I don't remember exactly what prompted us to do that we started with the computer. Then we had two or three and then everyone started bringing theirs and now it is hard to get somebody off their ass to go look at a book because you know the answers are in a book over there but they are too busy Googling it.

Similarly, another participant explains,

Well, the old adage is you won't bring a knife to a gun fight. If you wanted to do well, you have to learn to use the internet to compete. You can't go about without computers, without internet, with none of that knowledge and say, “Oh, we're going to do well.” You can't bring a knife to a gun fight. I grew up in a world where everything was notes and books and loose papers and magazines and top of the head, knowledge. And now, the majority of all of that is available on the internet.

This participant went on to explain how the internet has also, paradoxically, contributed to the value of internal knowledge. Since the point values for each question are determined by the number of teams that provide the correct answer, internal knowledge can be valuable in its scarcity. He explains, “The real difference now is a little bit of top-of-the-head knowledge – ooh – top-of-the-head knowledge that's the difference.

You can pick up a really big pointer on the internet, but they're not common. If you want to hit big point questions, it's something that someone on your team just happens to know."

Echoing this change in philosophy, the contest organizers have also begun to embrace the role played by the internet. A newspaper article (Zencka, 2008) describing how the internet has changed the WLTC explains, "While many assume writing questions for the contest has become more difficult with the advent of the Internet, Oliva [The contest organizer] said it's made the contest more difficult for contestants, not him, 'I write the Internet into the contest, not out,' Oliva said." In this way, Oliva tries to find a way that the internet can offer a middle ground between an internal and an external definition of legitimate knowledge.

Internal vs. external knowledge going forward. In the last five years, two issues emerged to inform the ongoing tension between internal and external definitions of knowledge. These two issues reside at the opposite poles of the spectrum that exists between the internal and external perspectives. At one end is the emergence of a second trivia contest called Trivia Unplugged that is hosted by the same contest organizers as the WLTC. At the other end is the emergence of a team that has skyrocketed to a top-ten finishing team by crowd-sourcing the answers to hundreds of people around the globe during the annual WLTC. Below, I describe the implications of each of these issues.

Trivia Unplugged. In an effort to respond to the voices among the trivia community that favored an internal definition of knowledge, organizers of the WLTC created a second contest governed by different rules. This second contest, Trivia

Unplugged, was hosted for the first time in 2008, and it has been played every year since. Rather than having teams play remotely (as with the WLTC), Trivia Unplugged requires that all teams are present at a central location in order to participate. Jim Oliva, described the contest as, “No books. No notes. No computers. No nothing...It’s gut trivia...This is old school trivia...Some say it’s the way trivia was meant to be played” (Imrie, 2009). One participant exalted a contest which valued internal knowledge stating, “In many ways, to me, Unplugged...trivia is more fun, because it's what you know or what you can deduce.”

Trivia unplugged has provided a challenge to the emerging knowledge discourse that favored external knowledge. Subsequently, those that have benefitted in recent years during the WLTC are having the value of their definition of knowledge tested in a new format. Oliva explains this in an excerpt from a newspaper article (Imrie, 2009) about the event, “What is interesting is some of the younger teams are kind of balking at getting into this contest because they don't know anything. [For them], everything is from books and notes and computers...They are afraid that they are going to get in there and get whipped around by older people who know stuff.” This statement further perpetuates the presumption that the tension between internal and external knowledge validity is a function of age difference. Additionally, it insinuates that the contest organizer of the WLTC is an advocate for an internal definition of knowledge. Going forward, Trivia Unplugged will provide a site for a counter discourse to challenge the prevailing external definition of knowledge that has emerged in the trivia age of the WLTC. This serves as a meaningful example of the evolving nature of identification.

Trivial Pursuit. Contrasting the internal knowledge promoted by Trivia Unplugged, a unique trivia team has emerged within the WLTC community representing the extreme of an external knowledge perspective. This team goes by the name Trivial Pursuit and remains a bit of a mystery within the trivia community. The team debuted in 2011, finishing in 33rd place. Since then, the team has steadily risen to 14th, 8th, and finally 7th in 2014. Among members of the trivia community, this is largely regarded as a meteoric rise to the top tier of teams. What makes Trivial Pursuit unique is that they are known to crowdsource questions from the WLTC using an internet chat community made up of hundreds of participants. On message boards online, members of the team boast that they were able to attract around 200 players to participate for their team in only their first year⁸. One participant from a competing team commented on how this team poses a fundamental challenge to the way the game has always been played and the way the community values knowledge. He explained,

I think the game changed obviously when the internet came to what it is now. So you can kind of take those 30 years of experience that those other teams had and you [throw it out]...I mean, just look at Trivial Pursuit. I mean they don't do notes and they have no experience, no one on the team knows each other except for the handful that started it. So it is just a numbers game and an internet game.

In this statement, the participant explains how knowledge that used to be thought of valuable that was obtained through years of experience and resource gathering has been neutralized by efficient use of the internet and crowdsourced knowledge. Contrasting this perspective, another interview participant suggests that the approach employed by

⁸ According to official rules, there is no limit to team size.

Trivial Pursuit is not a threat to the traditional top-finishing teams of the contest. He explains,

I don't mind Trivial Pursuit and what they are doing. I mean the answers are there, and you might as well take them. But to really get to our level, Dad's⁹ level and Network's¹⁰ level, you've got to take the notes, you've got to do what we do as far as technology goes. It is impossible to probably get to the top-three just on internet searching. So, while it is cool to see it, I'm not nervous about them trying to catch us unless they start taking notes and studying and researching on trivia and stuff.

This statement demonstrates how different definition for what constitutes valuable knowledge compete for legitimacy. To this participant, the existence of an alternative approach to knowledge is not a concern, because it does not challenge his team's supremacy.

Within the WLTC community, knowledge as a discursive logic acts as an important meaning system that informs members' beliefs and guides members' behaviors. Knowledge provides meaning and value to members of the community while also distinguishing between ingroup and outgroup members of the community. However, like most discourses, the meaning system continues to be negotiated by members of the community. In particular, a tension exists between internal and external views of valid knowledge. The emergence of the internet has played a meaningful role in how participants in the WLTC define and value knowledge. Contest participants who had embraced a definition of valid knowledge being something that is internal have been forced to adapt to a new dominant logic in which knowledge is more about what

⁹ Dad's is a reference to the trivia team Dad's Computers who has recently won consecutive WLTCs

¹⁰ Network is the winningest team in the history of the contest.

information can be accessed rather than what information can be recalled. These participants have responded to this new dominant logic in two ways. First, they have acquiesced to the logic of the external perspective. These teams have made the choice to make use of the internet as a knowledge resource of their own during the annual contest. However, members of this community who value an internal definition of knowledge also responded by creating a forum, Trivia Unplugged, in which an internal definition of knowledge again prevails. Thus, this example is a good demonstration of how identity evolves and adapts to changing circumstances. Additionally, this example demonstrates how members can create discursive spaces that challenge dominant meaning systems.

Identity Discourse Two: Competition

A second identity discourse that emerged from my analysis of the WLTC community was competition. Similar to how knowledge is of critical importance to the very existence of this community, so too is the idea of competition. This community only exists within its relationship to the WLTC. Thus, a requisite to membership within this community is some level of participation in the competition of the contest. This is particularly true of the subset of the WLTC community targeted in this project which consists of participants whom are on top-placing teams. Below, I describe ways that competition, as an ideal, is defined by members of the WLTC community as meaningful. Next, I discuss how competing definitions of competition produce a tension within the community between what participants described as “Serious vs. Screwing Around”.

Defining competition as meaningful. As an identity discourse, competition emerged as a defining feature of the WLTC community. All interview participants

expressed how competition is an important reason for their belonging to this community. Furthermore, all interview participants highlighted the importance of competition as a requisite for community membership. Below, I begin by outlining how competition provides purpose and value for members of the WLTC community. Then, I explain how members of this community use a discourse of competition to delineate between the ingroup and the outgroup.

Competition providing purpose. A question that I asked each participant in both formal and informal interviews was “why?” Why do they choose to identify with this community? Why do they invest so much time and so many resources into an event and community that provides nearly no tangible extrinsic reward? For all interview participants, competition emerged as an essential motivating factor. One participant stated, “That's a really good question. I mean, I think I'm really motivated – I'm a competitive person, so I really think it's, it's really the competition that does motivate me.” Another participant said, “Definitely competitive, the culture of competition.” These responses seem to give rise to competition as a defining characteristic of these members of this community. When asked to elaborate about the importance of competition, one participant responded, “The people, they're good friends. I could sit and have a beer with any of them anytime. But today, I play the game for the game, not for the socializing. The socializing is just a little extra topping of fun. It's an advantageous side effect. So...I play for the game.” For this participant, the very purpose of his membership within the community is the competition. The social

interactions and relationships are secondary to competing, and he seems to insinuate that they are superfluous. In contrast, the competitive environment is absolutely essential.

When describing the importance of competition, four interview participants explained how the competitive element of this community legitimates it relative to other activities and interests. One participant explains, “We all can't be in the NFL. We can't be professional athletes or do those things, but we can be...highly competitive in an event”. Another participant referred to the WLTC to as his “Super Bowl”. A third participant provided some further insight into why participants derive value from a competitive discourse,

I think that for me another part of it, Greg, is that I wasn't very good at sports. I was a nerdy kid growing up. My [older] brother was junior varsity quarterback at our high school... He was on the baseball team, and he was the valedictorian of his class, so I enter high school and everyone thinks, ‘Oh, another [participant’s last name]. He's going to be this brilliant guy, and he's going to be the jock,’ and I'm this nerdy kid, a little overweight.

For me...discovering trivia and something that I was good at was like if you're growing up in whatever sport, you think like, ‘Wow, I could be a hockey player or I could be a lacrosse player or whatever,’ so for me that was part of it. It was, ‘Wow, I'm good at this.’ It was the same adrenalin that a kid would get from winning the tennis championship or winning the little league championship. I get it from trivia.

For this participant, the competitive aspect of the trivia community seems to provide legitimacy to their identity. Through competition, members are able to enhance their sense of self relative to others both within the community and external to it.

Competition to delineate the ingroup from the outgroup. Adhering to expectations of competition emerged as a means of delineating between the ingroup and the outgroup. For each of the interview participants, competition was something that

attracted them to the community. One participant explains, “The challenge of it was extremely appealing to me because overall I'm a pretty competitive person. I looked at it as something that was really hard, and that made it fun for me.” It could be inferred within this statement that the challenge posed by the competition is not something that everyone would be attracted to, because this participant describes his attraction as related to him being “a pretty competitive person”. This opinion was further articulated by another participant, “It's a competition and I think that's the thing that draws a lot of people in...It seems like it's a type of personality that would fall in love with that competition and have the desire to do better and get answers right and move up the ranks and help win.” This explanation seems to assert that there is an inherent quality about people that either aligns with or fails to align with the discourse of competition that is important to members of the WLTC community. Subsequently, not everyone is cut out for this community. This mentality was shared by a member of my own team when I asked him what he thought made our team unique. He said, “Just the group of people that we are and looking across the board, I think everybody on the team played a sport growing up. So, the competitiveness is there naturally.”

As a discourse this community draws upon to inform the values and assumptions of identifying members, competition provides both purpose and legitimacy to the community. Furthermore, the competitive essence of this community is something that is not shared by everyone. Subsequently, this discourse can serve to delineate the ingroup from the outgroup. However, as with the discourse of knowledge, tensions exist

among members of the WLTC community in defining the value to be derived from a competitive discourse. In the next section, I address these tensions.

Tension in defining competition in the WLTC community. A persistent tension emerged as meaningful to the ongoing definition of competition as a discourse of identification in the WLTC community. This tensions was between those who take competing “seriously” and those who are described as “screwing around”. Below, I describe this tensions and how it informs the way members think about competition.

Not everyone within the WLTC draws from a discourse of competition to identify as a member of the community in the same way. Since this study aimed to include participants who have finished within the top tier of trivia teams, it is not surprising that the participants of this study all strongly identified with this community through a discourse of competition. However, most participants also acknowledged that some members of the trivia community value competition and the pursuit of winning to lesser degrees. While the participants of this project seldom excluded those who less embody a discourse of competition from the trivia community, they did identify the existence of such a distinction and did, in some cases, trivialize members who do not share their definition of competition. This trivialization arose as a distinction between those who “take the contest seriously” and those who are “just screwing around”.

In describing the distinction between members of the community who identified with a discourse of competition and those who did not, one participant explained,

There is a large group of players that become obsessed [with competing in the contest], and that drive and ambition forces them to sit with a notepad in front of the TV for the next 364 days taking notes on movies. One of the cool things about trivia is that it can be something different to

just about everybody that plays. You got the people that get together once a year to see their old friends and maybe they do a lot of drinking, they do a lot of eating...Then you get the people that eat, live and breathe this stuff.

A number of interesting things can be taken away this participant's insight. First, he identifies that this contest can be "something different" to many different participants. This is an interesting statement of inclusion which suggests that competition is not a requisite for membership in this community as previously suggested. However, he proceeds to make an interesting comparison between those who take competition seriously and those who do not. For those who are less competitive, he describes how the contest is about doing a lot of drinking and eating. This seems to depict these individuals largely as consumers who accomplish little of significance and produce nothing. In contrast, those who take the contest seriously, "eat, live, and breathe" the contest. Their consumption is of the CONTEST. Subsequently, one could interpret that those who take the contest more seriously are "better" representative of what this community is all about. This was not an isolated opinion. More than half of the interview participants provided a similar description of the trivia community. Another participant explained this distinction in tiers, again relying on language that minimalizes the experience of teams that do not embrace a competition discourse,

For a large percentage of [the] teams, this is this is just a social event. And there's nothing wrong with that, you know. You can get together with your friends and drink or, you know, cook out and sit around and tell old stories, whatever else.

And then there's a level where you become more committed to it, and you try to do better and can try to do a personal best or can beat a team that you're competitive with or people you know on another team.

And then there's the level of , you know, absolute top of it where there's a team like Network that's been around forever, that's won the contest

20-something times where they have the goal to always win. And bunch of the other teams at the top who have that goal to unseat them.

Again, this statement distinguishes tiers of teams based upon their embodiment of a discourse of competition. Once again, we see the description of those who do not represent a discourse of competition as having little productive value or accomplishing anything of great significance. In contrast, the serious teams “have goals”, they “win” things, and they are “more committed”.

Since the focus of this research project was to understand the identification process of members who identify strongly with WLTC community, the participants in this project did embrace competition as an identity discourse, and they were able to describe what it is that makes someone a “serious” trivia player. In doing so, a handful of participants shared with me a transition story. One participant explained the transition of when he and a teammate decided to become a “serious” team, “[The first couple years] we were kind of screwing around, listening to the questions...It wasn't very fun, because no one was trying, and no one really cared. I remember saying to [a teammate] at the time, ‘We should do better next year. We should actually try this, we should get into it.’” This story describes how this participant made a conscious effort to become “serious”. Another participant from a different team shared a similar story,

We started taking the contest seriously, getting excited for it, without having done any, like, real prep other than just showing up. My brother and I decided, "Well, hey, we both love this thing so much. We have each been playing on the team a few years." We said, "Well, how about we try to do something to do better, you know? Wouldn't it be fun to not only get together but also, you know, be competitive?"

This participant went on to explain how this decision fundamentally changed the way he related to the trivia community, and, subsequently, his life,

When we started making the top 10 consistently, when we talk about it now, going back, why did we do all that work? Why did we spend all that time taking notes, most of which will never garner a single point during the contest? Is it all worth it? I say, "Absolutely." It's a means to an end. When you're willing to do that much to be willing to win the contest and to have the dedication that I feel like any team, that can legitimately say, has a shot at winning the "World's Largest Trivia Contest", you can't set a big limit on what you are willing to do.

A particularly interesting part of this statement is when the participant states that for anyone who wants to say they have “a shot of winning the WLTC, you can’t set a big limit on what you are willing to do”. This statement seems to identify winning the WLTC as the peak of prototypicality within this community. As such, it would be the ultimate embodiment of the trivia identity. In order to achieve this, one must be willing to do anything.

Another participant’s story of transitioning to a more “serious” team was different than the two described above. Instead of being part of a team that made a collective move to being more competitive, this participant decided to change teams, leaving a team to which he had family ties to join a team which took more seriously the competitive discourse. He explains,

I needed to be on a team that was competitive, that was shooting for hardware [meaning top-ten trophies], that I had people working as hard I was working throughout the year. And so, that’s when I thought, okay, “How do I get that?”, and I knew a team that was like that. My brother-in-law was on that team...How do I get to that team without firing my whole family? I still want to be invited to family holidays. I [decided that I] have to quit. I can’t kick them off of my team. It’s not really my team, it’s our team. I have to quit the team. That’s the only choice and that’s how I ended going from the [my old team] to [my current one].

In each of these transition stories, the participants describe moments at which the discourse of competition overwhelmed competing motivations such as fun or family. The discourse of competition became the salient meaning system that informed members' beliefs and behaviors, causing them to transition to being more "serious" participants in the WLTC.

This same distinction between serious and either non-serious or less-serious trivia players exists within teams too. In the same way that some teams embody a discourse of competition better than others, so too do members of a team better embody this discourse than others. This distinction was articulated well during an interview I conducted over Skype. The interview participant was describing the amount of work he dedicates to trivia preparation each year in the months leading up to the contest. Midway through his description, his girlfriend can be heard interjecting. At this point, I had the following exchange with this participant and his girlfriend,

Interviewer: So, having [your girlfriend] potentially overhear you, what is her opinion of the amount of work that you put in? Especially when it gets to that crunch time, like you were talking about?

Participant: She can definitely get annoyed by it. But I think-

Participant's Girlfriend: The only time I get annoyed is because you do so much more than everybody else.

Participant: Well...

Participant's Girlfriend: It's true.

Participant: Yeah, I mean it's, yeah, I guess that's true. But yeah, what [my girlfriend] was saying is, she'll get annoyed because she thinks I've put in a lot more time than a lot of other people, and we're not able to really spread it out more, like evenly distribute the work, that would be different. I mean, there's absolutely no way to get around it, right? Some people are really dedicated to it, and some people aren't. There's nothing you're going to really change about it.

In this exchange both the participant and his girlfriend acknowledge and express a frustration over members of his trivia team not taking the competition as seriously as he does. Interestingly, this theme emerged across almost each of the interviews I conducted. Participants on serious teams were able to distinguish between members of their team who were more committed to a discourse of competition than others.

Unlike the exchange recounted above, most participants acknowledged that the distinction existed, but welcomed it as a reality. For example, during a conversation with two captains from my team, one explained,

It's fun because there are people that put in two hours of work over the course of the year, but then they'll hit [a big answer], and it's worth it, and we're happy that they did two hours instead of nothing. There's people that put in 40 hours, 80 hours. They put in 10 hours a week, what-have-you, and they really carry the team so the rest [of the team] doesn't have to put in that kind of work. And then there's still some that put off the work instead of spreading it out. They wait until the last minute and drive those that are carrying the team with the amount of work that they're doing, just absolutely nuts"

His fellow captain expanded, "It's like he says, it's varying because you can put in as little work as you want. You can do nothing and still participate in the contest, have a team, be a member of a good team." In these statements, the participants again use language of inclusion for those who do not fully embody a discourse of competition. However, they also offer praise and prestige to those who better represent this discourse, describing them as "carrying the team", because others "who drive them nuts" don't fulfill competitive expectations.

Despite the assertion of inclusion of "less serious" team members expressed above, a couple of other interview participants were able to point to moments when

differing opinions about the competitive discourse led to identity fractures that could not be resolved. In these instances, the result was team members distancing themselves from the team. One participant explains how not everyone can match the competitive expectations of each team, “I think [the WLTC] can be for anybody. [People] just have to find the right niche... I don’t think some teams are necessarily for everybody.” A couple of participants explained how their decision to become a “serious team” resulted in the team splitting apart due to differing opinions of competition. One participant explains, “Me [and some teammates] decided that we were going to go to the next level and, you know, [other team members] didn’t really like that, they didn’t really want to take it too seriously and that was fine. So, we went our separate ways.” These statements can be perceived to represent how changes in mentality from “screwing around” to becoming more “serious” led to identity differences that could only be resolved through changes in membership. The same phenomenon occurred, however, when the change went the other direction – from more-competitive to less-competitive teams. One participant from a team that had previously won three WLTC championships explained, “The team made the decision that we were going to play for fun and do as good as we can, and it wasn’t going to be our whole life anymore. Unfortunately, we lost a couple of good people because of that decision. They just dropped out of trivia altogether.” In this statement, the participant explains that certain members defined their trivia identity through a discourse of competition. When the team transitioned away from that mentality, they chose to no longer identify with the community and no longer identify as members of the WLTC community.

In this chapter, I began by providing a sense of the community of trivia players under investigation and a description of the experience of membership through descriptions of team headquarters and the rhythm of playing the trivia contest. With this foundation established, I was able to describe how discourses of knowledge and competition were uniquely enacted by members of the WLTC community. Specifically, I described the importance these discourses took on within the community, the unique manner in which member defined these discourses, and some of the tensions that became apparent as members negotiate the meaning of these discourses.

In the next chapter, I draw upon the established discourses of knowledge and competition to describe the relationship that exists between these discourses and context for participants in this research project. Specifically, I identify a number of other social contexts in which members draw upon these discourses to inform their decisions and interactions.

CHAPTER V

TRANS-CONTEXTUAL IDENTIFICATION

In this chapter, I address my second research question by exploring how participants in the WLTC engage in the identity work that enacts the discourses established in chapter four of knowledge and competition across their various social contexts. In this way, this chapter establishes that our many social identities are not merely situated within one context. Instead, particularly salient identities can span their local context and inform the various other contexts of one's social and organizational lives. In chapter two, I previewed three different approaches to the study of identity/identification that provided insight into the ways individuals draw from the discursive resources of their identities across contexts. These three approaches included professional identity, deep structure identity, and narrative self-identity. By operating at three different levels of abstraction (extraorganizational, organizational, and local), they each provide a unique way of understanding how one's community identification can span situated contexts. In this chapter, I introduce the concept of trans-contextual identification to describe more broadly a dualistic relationship that exists between context and identification as our particularly salient group, organizational, and community identities span situated context. Utilizing the concept of trans-contextual identification allows us to consider how our identities at all three levels of abstraction can transcend context. Additionally, it provides important nuance to the theorizing about context and identification by considering how individuals' various social contexts

are impacted by their particularly salient identities. I further elaborate about the value of this nuance in chapter seven.

In arguing this point, I will begin by describing how participants generally described their association with trivia and the WLTC as permanent and ever-present part of their self-identity. Within the tradition of narrative self-identity established by Svenningson and Alvesson (2003), this articulates that participants carry their trivia identity and its subsequent identity discourses into their various social contexts. Next, I build upon the existing theorizing of identity and context by considering how the prevailing discourses of participants' trivia identity, most notably knowledge and competition, inform the various contexts of their social lives. In doing so, I speak more specifically about the various social contexts that participants described being informed by their trivia identity. These social contexts include their paid employment, their education, their family lives, their romantic relationships, and their important lifestyle decisions.

Trivia as an Enduring Sense of Self

All of the 25 interview participants spoke of trivia and the trivia community as an inseparable part of their self-identity. These descriptions were congruent with Svenningson and Alvesson's (2003) description of the narrative self-identity. As a more-enduring perception of "self" the narrative self-identity describes how social actors draw upon their past life experiences and social relationships when conducting the identity work necessary to construct a perception of a "true" essence of self across contexts. For example, one participant described how one particular moment in his

trivia history was the most significant moment in his life, “That feeling of being the hallway at 90FM after the contest [the year we won] is something I’ll never forget. I literally can’t think of a moment in my life where everything felt so perfect and right as that night.” Below, I elaborate how members of the WLTC community have drawn upon their experience with the contest and the community in order to engage in the identity work of authoring their narrative self-identity. Specifically, I describe how participants explained their relationship with trivia as a component of their “true” self and how they would not be able to imagine a version of themselves that did not include trivia and/or the trivia community as part of their identity.

As an ever-present part of participants’ life story, trivia can provide a lens through which participants interpret their world. A couple of interview participants described this very effect. One participant explained, “It’s something that changes the way you focus on and how you think about the world. This different thing will catch your attention that you wouldn’t have otherwise paid attention to.” This participant’s explanation is a likely demonstration of how the discourse of knowledge as prescribed by the trivia community informs the way they interpret the world. By defining valuable knowledge as being vast, discrete, and “trivial”, this participant recognizes that they pay attention to certain parts of their surroundings in a way that would be different if not for their trivia identity. In this way, the participant draws upon the logic of their trivia identity to interpret and inform the various aspects of their world. Another participant stated, “It’s so ingrained into the entire culture that it just becomes more commonplace that sometimes you can get so used to being around those people and having those

conversations that you forget that the rest of the world doesn't think that way or notice those things." In this statement, the participant elaborates about the distinction that exists between members of the community and non-members of the community. By asserting that, "you forget that the rest of the world doesn't think that way," this participant seems to explain how the discursive logics enacted by identifying members of the trivia community become naturalized. It becomes difficult to relate to others who do not share the same assumptions and beliefs. It becomes difficult to interpret the other social contexts of one's lived experience without seeing it through the lens of one's trivia identity. In this way, one's various social contexts are interpreted and informed, in some ways, through the logic of their trivia identities.

Another participant explained how his trivia identity not only colors how he sees the world, but also how others see him. He explains,

Then you also get tagged with this identity too... You might not get labeled as like a fisherman or a woodworker, but when people find out about the trivia contest they want to hear more. They want to know more and then you tell them. You tell them how crazy it is and how much time is spent and all that. They kind of remember it, and so then I have been tagged as "That trivia guy"... Then it will come up in other things. An email will come out and they'll say, "Oh, we're going to do pub trivia this Wednesday." Then a bunch [of coworkers] will be like, "Get him on your team. He is the trivia guy." You also get a stigma with the identity too. It is kind of fun to have that be your identity. There are certainly worse things that you could have. I guess sometimes it can get annoying. Like if someone will bring up a random quote from a movie or a random lyric, they will ask you, "have you seen that movie or do you know what song that is?" If you don't know it then they're like, "Oh come on this is trivia." They're like, "You're a world trivia champion, you should know this." That, I suppose gets a little bit annoying.

For this participant, his trivia identity is not only something that colors the way he interprets the world, it also colors the way the world interprets him. In this example, the

participant observes how his identity as “the trivia guy” has altered the way he related with coworkers in his occupational context. The experience described by this participant is something that I can relate to. Colleagues, friends, family, and even students across social contexts have described me as “the trivia guy”, and they regularly will test me with pop culture references to test my trivia knowledge. When this occurs, I find myself engaging in the identity work necessary to defend the prototypicality of my trivia identity and reconcile that identity within this external context. In these examples, we can see how our situated identities are not only informed by our social context, but that our social contexts are informed by our many identities. When tagged as “the trivia guy”, the way others relate to me and the assumptions we make about our relationship are informed by that identity. Thus, these identities change the way we relate to social actors across social contexts, causing us to re-think how “situated” our identities truly are.

Further elaborating the pervasiveness of this effect, about half of the participants described how they cannot even imagine a version of themselves without this component of their identity. While some participants simply explained how they cannot imagine their lives without trivia, others explained how even if they were no longer a part of the trivia community, they would never be able to see the world without seeing in it through a trivia “lens”. In this way, participants have claimed that the narrative of their identity will always include a trivia theme, and, subsequently, their sense of self will always be informed by the prevailing discourses identified in chapter four. One participant explains, “I don’t think I could stop. I mean when you are from Stevens Point it is kind

of in your blood to begin with, and I want to say that even if we didn't form a serious trivia team I would probably have been on some team every year for it, even if it wasn't very serious. My wife will never say this but if she said, 'You are done with it. You cannot play trivia anymore.' I couldn't do it." This participant describes how he cannot envision a version of himself in which he is not actively engaged in the trivia community. In his explanation, we can interpret that his life narrative will always begin by being born into the trivia community. Furthermore, his relationship to the community is something that he cannot envision sacrificing. Another participant echoes this sentiment, "Part of it is just the fact that I grew up with it and I – it's – I guess it would be comparable to if I were to stop playing Trivia, it would be – I would have to go through some sort of a withdrawal...I feel that if I'm not doing Trivia, you know, I don't know what I would do with myself."

Meanwhile, others explained how even if they did ever stop playing trivia, they would not be able to stop seeing the world through the lens of their trivia identity. A participant from the trivia team I play for explained,

I mean, I watch television and I see something in the background and the same thing with movies. There is no way I could stop looking at that. Even if I was not playing on a team during the WLTC, I would still be doing that subconsciously or consciously, I suppose, while watching TV or movies, flipping through a magazine. So even if I stop playing trivia I will not stop doing trivia.

This statement seems to elucidate how the logic of the discourses described in chapter four are something that have become a permanent part of how he interprets the world. Across all of his social contexts, he cannot "stop doing trivia", even if he were to no longer be a member of the trivia community.

By contributing to participants' narrative self-identity, the relationship participants share with the WLTC and the trivia community informs the nature of their various social contexts. Participants have adopted the discursive logics described in chapter four as part of their narrative self-identity. As such, the values, beliefs, and behaviors that are informed by these discourses provide a perpetual lens through which participants interpret the world. Below, I will specifically elaborate about how participants apply the discourses of knowledge and competition when engaging in identity work across the following contexts, (a) paid employment, (b) education, (c) family, (d) romantic relationships, and (e) making life altering decisions.

Trivia and Paid Employment

Most of the interview participants of this project explained various ways in which their identity as members of the trivia community informed the social context of their paid employment. In particular, I was able to identify how participants drew upon the resources of the discourses established in chapter four in the descriptions of their behaviors, decisions, and interactions in the situated context of their paid employment. For example, one participant explained how her participation in the annual contest has informed the way that her co-workers relate with her in her occupational environment,

I work at the university where the contest is run from. So, that's become like the thing that I'm known for in my office...because our team has been so successful...and so, I find that very interesting because I never, up until to that point, thought of trivia as part of my identity, but like at work, that's really what – that's how they see me.

Similar to the quotation of another participant above, this interview participant has become branded as the “trivia person” in her workplace. In this statement, the

participant specifically explains how her relationship with trivia has impacted the day-to-day social interactions she shares with her co-workers. In this section, I describe how participants explain the impact their association with the WLTC has in informing their careers and how the logic of the discourses of their trivia identities have shaped their paid employment context.

A couple of the interview participants explicitly described how their definition of themselves as professionals is informed by their identity as members of the WLTC community. For example, one participant explained how both his identity as a trivia player and as a travel agent embrace a discourse of knowledge that prioritizes minutiae and the ability to recall information that others would consider un-important,

You never know when you're going to need that information. For example, one aspect of my job as a travel agent is I book people on flights, so I need to know the three-letter airport codes for cities. The average person may not really notice that their luggage is tagged ORD or LGA, but if I need to remember several hundred airport codes around the world, it's important to have the ability to remember things that someone else may not choose not to remember or think is important.

In this statement, the participant draws upon a discourse of knowledge congruent with how it is valued and defined within the WLTC community (as described in chapter four) by valuing knowledge of the details, the things others might deem unimportant. More specifically, he highlights this similarity when justifying the importance of valuing “trivial” information as valuable knowledge. This speaks to how participants use the logic of particular salient identities across social contexts.

Relatedly, one participant explained a similar congruence to how an identity discourse of knowledge as external and accessible is something he brings to his occupation as an IT professional. He explained,

Participant: At work there are a lot of things in the lab that we do that are done fairly manually, but can be automated. So a lot of the stuff I like to do is really work on the automation portion of that and save a ton of time, and I get a lot of enjoyment out of something that I created, being used by a lot of people to save them a lot of time.

Interviewer: Sure. So you see a lot of overlap between the things you do in your job and the way that you approach solutions for [trivia]?

Participant: Yeah. Yep, absolutely...I really think both have kind of helped the other. I really think that working on some of this [trivia] stuff certainly has helped with stuff that I've worked on at work, and vice versa. Just, I mean, I feel like I've kind of thought this way, I mean, kind of always thought this way. Really having the ability to implement this stuff, or just the experience of doing it, and it definitely it's about being able to find and do stuff a lot more efficiently the next time around, too, create a tool, or script, whatever, to automate stuff.

This participant described how he looks for automated solutions to being able to store, catalogue, and access knowledge both in his professional life and in his role on the Festivus for the Rest of Us (FFTROU) trivia team. Thus, in both settings he draws from a definition of knowledge that values accessing external sources of knowledge as described in chapter four. This participant went on to explain how web development he had done to allow his trivia team to better access information was something he had previously never had to do in his professional context, but has since added to his professional skillset. Thus, the logic of the identity discourses at work for this participant in the WLTC community inform his behaviors and decisions in the context of his paid employment.

A couple of participants even described how important decisions about the trajectory of their careers were made because of their identity as a trivia player. Specifically, participants explained how they arrived in their current occupation because of their relationship to the WLTC. One participant who authors her own online blog about cultural trends explained,

I started my website strictly to justify buying more trivia books and watching cartoons all the time. I have these books that talk about breakfast cereal and this and that, you know, all these things that I am goofily excited about which really is what Trivia is made for that kind of mind, you know? I'm going to watch cartoons and read these silly books anyways, so now I have a purpose. And now [my website] gives me a reason to like sit and read these books whenever I want to.

This participant specifically described how the content of her blog is “made for [a trivia] kind of mind. Thus, in this statement she explicitly explained how she pursued a career trajectory that aligned with the way she thinks as a trivia player. Similarly, another contest participant is famous for his work authoring books on trivia, creating crossword puzzles for various publications, and being the author of over 550 “Noodle Nudger” quizzes that were published in the *New York Times*. Both of these participants sought to apply the way they thought about trivia and the WLTC into an occupation.

A couple of other participants described how their identity as a trivia player informed the way they related to others in their workplace, specifically important decision-makers in their organizations. For example, one participant explained how his identity as a trivia player has helped him and teammates find work in the past,

There were job interviews that I had that because I put it on my resume, all we talked about for the entire interview was trivia and being a trivia player and what's this all about... One of the guys on our team put that on

his resume and he got an internship and he got a job because of it, because the entire interview was talking about trivia.

In this example, these participants mobilized their trivia identity when marketing themselves professionally. Furthermore, the decision to include their membership on top-finishing trivia teams on their resumes speaks to the importance of their trivia identity beyond the trivia context and into their occupational world. Additionally, this example speaks to my interest in how one's particularly salient identities inform the various social contexts of their lives. In this example, the context in which they relate to others in their organization has been informed by their trivia identity. For example, the assumptions and perceptions others have about them are informed by their trivia identity from the very beginning of their relationship. For these participants, their identity as trivia players informed the content of their job interviews and even resulted in acquiring a job.

While the examples thus far have pointed to how members of the WLTC community have found careers within the context of their trivia identities, participants also described how the exercise of their occupation is also impacted by the discursive logics of their trivia identities. Specifically, several participants described situations in which their trivia identity took precedent over their occupational context. For example, more than half of the interview participants of this project described how they do work in preparation of trivia either while at their jobs or in place of their jobs. One participant explained how he and a number of his teammates were working together to uncover the source of one trivia photo while they were all at work, "I remember working on finding the picture for 'the most dangerous man in the USA'. I was at work, not working,

chatting and talking to people about the pictures. [My teammate] was also helping figure out the pictures. [He] was also at work, not working.” Similarly another participant explained about how his job in IT afforded him time to accomplish trivia work,

I don't know if you want to call it lack of supervision, it gave me some free time to work on some trivia systems from work, as long as I was still taking calls from people who have computer issues. After a while, that becomes second nature, where you can do two things at once. It gave me a lot of time to work on Trivia stuff while at work, which was nice. Not that I'd ever want to tell them that.

In these examples, situational context does not merely define what identity is salient. Instead, a particularly salient identity is informing the way these organizational members are contributing to their situated context at work. Their identities as trivia players are shaping the way they approach their occupation.

Similarly, some participants described how they planned the time they spent working around their ability to prepare for and participate in the annual WLTC. One participant described how he and his wife work as photographers for a number of weddings. He explained how the conflict his trivia identity can have with his professional identity has informed his future decision making,

Participant: Three years ago, we booked a wedding on trivia weekend which was god awful. We booked the weekend early on, and I was told that we couldn't say no to it. We did it, and the whole time I was thinking about trivia, wondering what was going on. It was awful.

Interviewer: Do you avoid booking weddings on trivia weekend?

Participant: I talked to [my wife] about it, and I said, “I'm never, ever doing a wedding during trivia again.” She said, “Okay, that's fine.” But we stipulated that we would only avoid the weekend of the WLTC, not [some of the smaller contests]. Which I'm moderately okay with.

This participant explained how they have had to balance his commitment to his trivia identity with his commitment to their photography business, again demonstrating the trans-contextual nature of our identities. In this way, we can think of work-life balance being an example of identity work in the case of trans-contextual identification. Both our work lives and our personal lives are impacted by our identity commitments to the other. In this way, our identities are not only informed by our contexts, but our contexts are also informed by our various identities.

Other participants shared similar experiences with how they chose to use their vacation time for trivia purposes. One participant explained,

I would be lying, and a lot of trivia players would say the same, if they said they had not taken off work in some aspect over the course of their trivia career for the sake of the contest...Most of my vacation time is used for trivia preparation. If it comes down to crunch time and I've got a lot of stuff that I wanted to do yet, I'll take a week's vacation, stay home, and work on trivia stuff for the whole time.

A participant from FFTROU explained, "We have 6 or 7 of us that take the entire week off before trivia, and we spend virtually every second of that time at our headquarters getting ready for the contest." These participants draw from the logic of their identity discourse of competition to determine when and how they use vacation time from their work in pursuit of preparing to compete against other teams. This time away, and their use of this time reflects the trans-contextual nature of their trivia identities. These identities do not only exist within the context of the contest or even their free time. Instead, they inform their other situated contexts in the work place.

Such decisions can have wider-reaching implications on participants' occupational lives long term as well. One participant articulated his reflection on this

very question by saying, “I mean, I’ve definitely wondered, ‘Gee, there were a lot of possible opportunities to make a fortune in the ‘80s and ‘90s. I wonder what could have happened if I like focused on those things instead of spending all of my time preparing for this contest.’”

Trivia and Education

Beyond the trivia environment, participants have also used the discourses of knowledge and competition as defined within the context of their trivia identity to inform the context of their education and the education of members of the broader community. Since knowledge is a prevailing identity discourse within this community, it is not surprising that it would inform the manner in which participants prioritize and interpret the value and exercise of education. Below, I explain how settings of education in the Stevens Point community are informed by trivia discourses and how participants have made important decisions about their continuing education based on their commitment to the trivia community. In this way, the identity discourse of knowledge is being enacted beyond the context of the WLTC itself.

About half of the interview participants of this project described how in the city of Stevens Point and its surrounding communities, the contexts of public and private education are informed by the trivia community each year. When asked about her first exposure to trivia, one participant explained, “It started, I guess, for me when I was in grade school. The week before and after [the WLTC] they would have school trivia contests...it was a couple hours long or something, and they used to just try and prepare the next generation for trivia. So, that is how it kind of started for me.” In this example,

the participant articulates how the surrounding school districts have integrated the ideals of the trivia community into their annual curriculum and instruction. By doing this, the discourses of knowledge and competition that are prevalent within the WLTC community are reiterated and reinforced among young members of the community.

Another example of trivia identity discourses manifesting themselves within the context of education emerged during a conversation I had with a participant from a team that regularly finishes in or near the top-ten. I was visiting his team's headquarters the morning before the contest. He was presently on a break from his job as a typing teacher in a nearby school district, and he was using that time to help set up the headquarters for the impending contest. Before returning to work for the remainder of the afternoon, he explained to me how he integrates trivia into his instruction. He explained how he will sometimes bring in hand-written trivia notes he has taken throughout the year on various television shows and movies and have the students practice their lessons by typing up these notes. Type-written notes have the benefit of being computer searchable during the contest. However, he explained how the students benefit from this exercise as well, because the students practice typing content that is beyond the normal boring subjects, and they are able to benefit from the expanded knowledge contained within the notes. The trans-contextual nature of this participant's identification with the trivia community is as much apparent in the act of having the students practice their typing with trivia notes as it is in his justification for that act. The logic of his explanation is consistent with the way the trivia community draws upon discourses of knowledge, privileging

obscure information as valuable. He is making the assumption that the students benefit from increased exposure to the minutiae of life that is contained within his notes.

In each of these examples, it is not just the participants themselves who are drawing from discourses of their trivia identity within the context of education. Instead, these discourses actually inform that context and alter the way social interactions occur. Whether it is participating in school-sponsored trivia contests, or having students practice their typing on trivia notes, the discourses of the trivia community are informing the very make-up of contexts beyond the boundaries of the trivia environment.

It is not only in the local schools that trivia identity discourses inform education contexts. One interview participant chooses to homeschool her daughters and strategically uses trivia to enrich their learning regularly. She explained,

Trivia and teaching my daughters all kind of comes together, you know? My girls are learning how to use an index and the table of contents on trivia books, you know. For example, they didn't know who Horshack was. We were behind a team in the registration line this week that was in their teens, and they were like, "Oh, my team always has 'Horshack in it.'" [My daughters] were like, 'What's that?' I'm like, 'We're going to go home and look it up in the book.' Like, there you go. That's homeschooling.

In this story, the participant demonstrates how discourses of knowledge that are congruent with the trivia community are applied across context in the way she educates her daughters. The participant would go on to explain how her primary motivation for educating her daughters was to keep them self-motivated and to always be learning regardless of how "trivial" the information may seem. For her the important concern is being able to help her daughters build a wealth of knowledge and develop an identity that remains interested in learning new things. Through the enactment of the logic of the

knowledge discourse within the context of her daughters' education, this participant is engaging in identity work that not only allows her to reconcile and shape the identity of herself and her daughters, but it also shapes the context within in which they learn.

Finally, a couple of participants also explained how they made meaningful educational decisions motivated in large part by their identity as a member of the trivia community. For example, one participant explained how trivia played a big role when choosing what university he would attend. He explained, "I actually applied to Lawrence University¹¹, because one their mailings mentioned the college's annual mid-winter radio trivia contest...so attending LU was a no-brainer." For this participant, it was important that his educational institution reflected the values he derived from his trivia identity. Since this university viewed its trivia contest as a defining characteristic that it would use to recruit potential students, this participant was confident that he could fulfill his trivia interest there. This indicates a way in which this participant may be identifying as a trivia player across contexts, because he seems to express an interest in the context of his education taking place in an environment that is congruent with the discourses he uses to define his identity as a trivia player.

Trivia and Family

Midway through the 2014 WLTC, the Festivus for the Rest of Us team headquarters was visited by the wife and infant child of one of the team's captains. This participant's wife does not identify with the WLTC or the trivia community directly, but

¹¹ Lawrence University also hosts a smaller and shorter annual trivia contest. Lawrence University is located in a community approximately a one-hour drive away from Stevens Point, the home of the WLTC.

she felt like it was important to stop by the headquarters for a few minutes to say hello and wish the team luck. While the team captain was holding his infant child, one of the female team members jokingly asked, “When are you going to start getting [the child] to take notes for the team?” In response, another team member jested, “She’s NOT taking notes yet?!” The child’s mother laughed and responded, “Not yet, we’re still working on first words.” Everyone shared a laugh, and the team thoroughly enjoyed the uplifting visit. While this story makes light of socializing a child within the context of the WLTC and its broader community, a subtext of truth also existed within this dialogue. For example, when asked when he became a member of the community, an interview participant stated, “My parents had a team when I was an infant, so I guess I started as a baby.” Another participant explained, “I was more or less born into it. They were taking me to Trivia since I was about one [year old] or so.” For many participants, their trivia identity shapes the ways in which they interact with their family and vice versa. Below, I will elaborate on this idea with a further explanation of HOW participants’ trivia identities have informed the way they identify as parents/children and siblings. I will then describe the ways in which participants attempt to balance their trivia identity with their family context as a demonstration of the identity work necessary when identifying trans-contextually.

A common theme that emerged throughout the formal interviews was the way in which parenting relationships were often at times mediated through trivia contexts. This emerged within the research from the perspective of the parent, the child, and sometimes both. In some cases this was more subtle. In these cases trivia was simply an annual

family ritual in which children were participants. In other cases, trivia informed the relationship by socializing children to adopt important values, providing a source of common ground, and making lasting memories that would inform the relationship going forward.

In particular, one participant explained how she used the trivia community as a source of socialization for her daughters. She explained, “[My daughters] are more socialized through like the trivia community than they are through kids things, which I’m cool with. You spend so much of your life with grownups, and trivia people are good people to talk to. The conversation may not always be appropriate, but it’s always going to be interesting.” This participant explained how the trivia community as a whole plays an important role in the way she socializes her daughters. In particular this participant justifies her approach to parenting within the trivia context, by explaining how she prioritizes the quality of the interactions content over its appropriateness for children. In doing so, this participant is demonstrating the priority placed on knowledge as an identity discourse (as established in chapter four) and how she draws upon that discourse when socializing her daughters. Thus, the context of the mother/daughter relationship, in this case, seems to be informed by the values and assumptions that exist within the discourses enacted by the trivia community. In this way, the participant seems to be demonstrating trans-contextual identification as conceptualized in this project.

Similarly, other participants explained how trivia provides a common ground within which parents and children are able to relate to one another. One participant

explained, “My daughter had her first [trivia nightmare], little 7-year-old. She’s like, ‘Mom, I’ve been having these weird dreams about Trivia.’ I’m like, ‘You’re one of us now.’” For this participant, the experience of a “trivia nightmare” is a form of initiation everyone goes through, a rite of passage. Now that her daughter has shared this experience there is greater common ground for them to relate. Furthermore, the way this participant and her daughter make sense of the potentially traumatic nightmare is to use it as a rite of passage into the trivia community.

Another participant shared his story about how he and his wife are excited to relate to their young children through trivia. His wife’s father founded the team they play on decades before and was able to relate to his daughter through a trivia context. Today, he and his wife help run the team, and they hope to relate to their daughters in the same way. For them, trivia is something that can be shared with his two daughters, bringing them closer together through a common interest. He explains how his daughter immediately began participating in the annual contest,

Both the girls have been in the headquarters during the contest the last couple of years. They’ve actually been at the trivia headquarters every year since they’ve been born. [One daughter] is getting to the age now where she can actually contribute a little. She will use one of the communal kids’ computers [at the team’s headquarters] and play the contest...She has known a couple of those questions too. It would be a question about a kids’ show where we’re just like, “What is this from?”, and she’s like, “Oh it’s a Pokemon,” or whatever the hell it was this past year. I’m like, “Oh, well, great, amazing.”

It is evident throughout this statement that the relationships this participant shares with their daughters are often mediated through the trivia context. Not only was this participant’s wife once a child on the trivia team, but today there are resources

designated for child use at their headquarters each year. Furthermore, this participant is left with a meaningful sense of wonder at witnessing his daughter begin making a contribution within the trivia community. Another participant from a different team shared a similar story. He explained,

My daughter has been playing since before she could walk and go to school. I remember her first experience with a full trivia contest, and we told her that we would buy her something for every right answer...I mean we took few liberties here and there, like sometimes everybody knew [knew the answer] but she got a gift because she was a little kid. I wound up buying her the entire Spice Girls doll collection that year. She has still got it stored somewhere. She is just as die-hard, dedicated.

This participant would go on to explain how his daughter, now an adult, has taken over much of the planning and preparation for the team each year. Between the time of this story and today, trivia has been an important source of common identity allowing parent and child to relate to one another.

Within both of these stories, we again see the importance of knowledge as an identity discourse for members of this community both within and beyond the trivia context. One parent expresses a sense of wonder at his daughter's recall of trivia knowledge, and the other reinforces the importance of knowledge to his child through the use of incentives. Furthermore, these incentives have come to represent something more important than the mere reward for answering questions. Now as an adult, these dolls have been kept and stored. The participant expressed how they serve as a meaningful reminder to him about the forging of their relationship. They serve as a memento for both parent and child of the first time they were able to share the trivia community together. As such, they serve as a material manifestation of the way their

relationship has drawn upon a discourse of knowledge that is congruent with the assumptions of the trivia community in order to share common ground.

Two participants who are brothers explained a similar effect in terms of the relationship they share with their sibling. One of these participants explained how trivia has transformed the relationship he shares with his brother,

My brother and I had never had that much in common when we were growing up because we're two years apart. We didn't really have the same circle of friends while we were in high school, but we both had made friends on the trivia team. We had so much fun that first weekend when we played trivia together. We really started seeing each other a lot more outside of the contest. Every chance we would get. We would come to [Stevens] Point and hang out throughout the summer and throughout the whole year. Trivia was really our common bond...Today, we're very close. We live in the same [apartment] complex, so literally we talk about trivia every day of the week...There is not a day that goes by in our lives where he and I do not have a discussion about the contest.

This participant and his brother have redefined their relationship with one another through their identification in the trivia community. This participant describes how his daily conversations with his brother are about trivia topics. In this way, the trivia community has provided them with a shared set of discursive resources that they can draw from to find commonality and relate to one another. Before their shared membership in this community, they were lacking these resources, and they were not able to relate in the same way.

Beyond providing a context within which family members can relate to one another through a shared sense of identity, participants also explained how trivia has informed the different WAYS in which family members relate to one another. One example of this is apparent in the previous quote from the participant who has used the

identity discourses of trivia to be better able to relate to his brother. He specifically notes that, “There is not a day that goes by in our lives where he and I do not have a discussion about the contest.” They don’t simply communicate every day. They communicate each day within the context of trivia specifically. In this way, trivia has not only provided a context within which they can relate, it has informed how they relate within that context. Another participant explains how important family rituals are influenced by one’s identification within the trivia community, “You know, the first year that we really had a team, we had my baby shower during the trivia contest. What was I thinking? It’s a terrible idea. It’s like getting married on trivia weekend. That’s a catastrophe. You know, plan your pregnancies around trivia time. You make it all of your holidays.” For this participant, her identification with the trivia context supersedes some of her family commitments. Her concern was not that she had to divert attention away from her baby shower, but rather that her baby shower forced her to divert attention away from trivia. She explains how she views it as a mistake to have planned a baby shower for the same weekend as trivia, and how members of the trivia community purposefully plan weddings, pregnancies, and holidays around the trivia contest.

Similar to the social contexts of one’s paid employment and one’s education, interview participants described behaviors and interactions that were consistent with trans-contextual identifying in the social context of their family relationships as described by this project. Not only did participants draw from the logic of the identity discourses of the trivia community, but those discourses actually informed the context of their family relationships. Participants described familial relationships that were

mediated through a shared belief in the value and meaning of knowledge. Furthermore, the nature of the interactions shared by participants and their families were informed by their drawing up the discourses of identity with the WLTC community. In the next section, I describe how participants demonstrated a similar effect in the context of their romantic relationships.

Trivia and Romantic Relationships

The social context of romantic relationships also emerged as a site that was informed by the identity discourses of a handful of participants in this research project. These participants described how their relationship with the trivia community has led to the development of romantic relationships, altered existing relationships, and it has even complicated the manner in which romantic relationships conclude. Below, I elaborate about how participants described how their association within the trivia community has impacted their romantic relationships, and how this reflects a trans-contextual way of identifying as trivia players.

More than half of the interview participants of this research had either first-hand developed romantic relationships within the context of trivia or had team members whom had. One participant explained how both he and a teammate of his had both met their wives at trivia, “I never would have met my wife if not for trivia...[My close friend] joined the team in 2001 and then he met, fell in love with, and ended up marrying the captain of our team.” Similarly, an interview participant from a team that has played in the contest for a number of decades explained that they have had three couples meet through the trivia team and become married. The same thing occurred among members

of a team that first broke into the top-ten finishing teams in the 2014 contest. Additionally, two interview participants from my own team had met through their membership on the Festivus for the Rest of Us trivia team, began dating, and are currently married. As one of these two explains, “I met my wife through trivia. You know, we’re on the same team. We developed shared friends and we do trivia together.” A local news report even aired a feature that investigated the development of romantic relationships within the trivia community. The report concluded by airing the wedding of two trivia players which took place on a float in the middle of the annual Trivia Parade. In the report, the mother of the groom stated, “It’s interesting. I would never have expected anything else.” When asked if trivia is a pathology, one participant explained, “We’ve had couples meet and fall in love at Trivia. If that’s a disease, who would want a cure?”

It is not a surprising or uncommon phenomenon that people who share interests and activities would develop romantic relationships. Subsequently, it should not be considered surprising that similar occurrences would be frequent within the community of the WLTC. What is interesting about this topic, however, is the way in which interview participants described how the trivia identities of relationship partners continues to influence the way they interact within the context of their romantic relationship. In this way, we can see how the prevailing identity discourses established in chapter four inform the social context of these romantic relationships in a unique way. For example, in the statement of my teammate above, he notes that trivia is something he and his spouse do together. It is something that mediates their ongoing interactions. In a

separate interview, this participant's wife explained how their relationship is influenced by their trivia commitments, "You know, if you're watching a movie, you should be taking notes on it. Although, I don't do that, because my husband does that. So, I kind of get away without having to do that." In this explanation, the participant explains how their relationship to trivia community impacts the way they relate to each other as romantic partners. Whereas other romantic partners might enjoy sharing a movie together for entertainment purposes, these two use this shared movie-watching experience to contribute to the resources of their trivia team. Even when sharing in a potential date night, their behavior continues to be guided by the discourses of knowledge and competition that compel them to document the details found in the movie they share. This statement also articulates how the influence of these two identity contexts is symbiotic. It is not only their trivia identity that influences the way they relate as romantic partners. Their romantic relationship also impacts the way they engage in trivia work. As the female participant explained, "I don't do that, because my husband does that." While still recognizing the pressures to contribute to the team's ongoing preparation, her romantic relationship provides her with a freedom to not "have to do that."

It isn't only romantic relationships that developed within the context of trivia that are influenced by participants' trivia identities. In fact, most of the participants of this research were involved in relationships with a spouse or significant other whom did not personally identify with the trivia contest directly. These relationships were not necessary any more immune to the influence of the participants' trivia identities. For

example, one participant explained how his commitment to the trivia community has impacted the evolution of his relationship with his wife, “This past year were in the basement taking apart cereal boxes and categorizing them¹². I made a comment like, ‘When we got together, did you ever see yourself helping me do this?’ and she was like, ‘I probably would have run.’” In this story, this participant explains how his relationship with his wife is informed by the identity discourses of his trivia community membership. In pursuit of greater knowledge that aligns with his trivia identity and commitment to a discourse of competition, this participant involves his wife in a discursive interaction that would have otherwise been repulsive if their relationship had not been redefined to reflect discourses congruent with the trivia identity. In this way, the social context in which they interact is informed by the logic of this participant’s identity discourse commitments. Similarly, another participant explained how his relationship has evolved to reflect the identity discourses of the trivia context. He explains, “Even if I’m not down in the basement taking notes on something, I’ll still be upstairs [near my wife] running through some stuff on my computer, on my laptop. You know, I’ll be spending time with my wife but I’ll still be running through some stuff on my laptop. And even though she doesn’t play, she’s been getting really good at finding things on TV shows to take notes on too.” In this example, one can see how the identity discourses of the participant as a member of the WLTC community are informing the other contexts of his life. These identity discourses are not only informing his behavior in other contexts,

¹² Questions in the WLTC often are asked from product packaging such as cereal boxes. Many teams collect and organize cereal boxes for the purpose of preparing for these questions.

they are actually shaping that context and subsequently the behaviors and decisions of others.

Like previously established, the influence of the trivia context on the romantic social context is often symbiotic. Another participant explained how he has had to negotiate boundaries with his spouse as he manages competing identity discourses across these two contexts,

You know, honestly, when we first started dating in college we talked about [my trivia playing] and she never really got any interest in it, but she hasn't hindered me from doing it. I guess it is very, very minor but when we were watching *Rules of Engagement*, and you know both of us enjoyed the first time we watched it. Meanwhile, I was looking at the background stuff and she was like, "No, no, no you are not doing that. You know it is going to take us an hour to watch this 22 minute sitcom." We need to compromise. And she was like, "We will watch it as a couple and you have to go back to it for your trivia purpose."

In this case, the participant explains a compromise he has made with his wife that is demonstrative of how the identity discourses of his romantic relationship conflict with those of his identification to the trivia community. This participant describes a situation in which he is simultaneously feeling compelled to act as a husband and as a trivia player. Subsequently, he and his wife have to engage in the identity work necessary to reconcile this identity conflict. While his mind continues to notice "the background stuff" that is consistent with prioritizing trivial knowledge, he has agreed to not pause to document that knowledge when watching this specific television show with his wife.

For some other participants, this sort of compromise would not be possible. As noted before, one participant explained, "My wife will never say this, but if she said, 'You are done with it, you cannot play trivia anymore.' I couldn't [give up trivia]." In

this example the participant makes clear that his commitment to his identification with the trivia community takes precedence over the context of his romantic relationship. Similarly, one participant explained how he and his wife played for different teams when their relationship began. However, his commitment to his trivia team made it essential that she play with his team going forward. He explains, “So that trivia team stuff has kind of has taken over our lives, and when I say our lives I mean my wife married into it. She played on a different trivia team, I wasn’t moving. [My team played at] our house. She had to play trivia, so she had to switch teams.” This statement provides an interesting insight into how this participant applies the logic of the competitive discourse within his relational context. Drawing upon a desire to fulfill the competitive expectations of his team, this participant was unwilling to compromise his commitment to that team. Furthermore, he was not willing to consider playing somewhere else. Subsequently, if his wife wanted to play, she was going to have to play for his team.

Thus far, participants have articulated how romantic relationships can form, change, and evolve within the context of members’ identification to the trivia community. However, the end of relationships can also be informed by the logic of the discourses of the trivia community. A number of participants that have played in the contest for many years have explained that divorce has often been mediated by trivia commitments and can symbiotically have influence over the way members identify with the trivia community. One participant explained,

Participant: And obviously, families change and so the team changes, which was probably like the most awkward thing – removing people.

Interviewer: So, when you talk about awkward and families changing, you’re talking about...

Participant: Divorce. For example, my sister and her husband played on the team. When they divorced, we had to let him go from the team, and he was a big trivia player. It was just uncomfortable and awkward for everyone. It wasn't a good fit anymore.

As this discussion describes, divorce can have important implications for both trivia teams and members of romantic relationship. Other participants elaborated on similar concerns by explaining how divorce has led to concerns over team membership, resource ownership, loyalties, and friendships. As such, the termination of a romantic relationship does not occur independent of participants' identification with the trivia community. In contrast, it is entrenched in concerns that reflect the identity discourses of knowledge and competition that are essential to the WLTC community's identity. Additionally, it further demonstrates how the context of a romantic relationship can have equally profound impacts on the way members interact and identify within the trivia community context.

Trivia and Life-Altering Decisions

Members within the trivia community also told about situations in which their identification with the trivia community informed the context of making life-altering decisions. Specifically, in this section, I focus on two issues of lifestyle that emerged in the data as being informed by members' trivia identity: (1) purchasing a house and (2) prioritizing how money is spent. Below, I will describe how some participants explained their trivia identity informed how they made decisions within these two important areas of their lifestyle and how these decisions reflected the identity discourses of their trivia identity.

Since teams participating in the annual contest play from a headquarters that is often similar to the ones described in chapter four, having a physical infrastructure that can support an organized team of players and resources including networked computers, servers, books, indexed notes, product packaging, etc. is important to participants whom identify strongly with the trivia contest and its community. As described in chapter four, these locations are a reflection of the dominant identity discourses of competition and knowledge. As the site in which information is collected, stored, indexed, and accessed, one's trivia playing space is a physical manifestation of the importance of knowledge and a definition for what constitutes valid or important knowledge. Additionally, a teams playing space provides the material environment within which the annual competition takes place. It is the site of many "fantasy themes" (Bormann, 1976) of the trials and triumphs that teams encounter during each contest. Thus, these spaces serve as a material reflection of both of the prevailing identity discourses established in chapter four.

With the importance of a team's headquarters in mind, for the broader community of Central Wisconsin it is commonly understood that homes are bought and sold with trivia in mind for many residents. One interview participant explains, "How many bedrooms there are? I don't care. Look at the house's flow for trivia. You know, they sell houses in town with Trivia rooms as a selling point, and they sell like that (she snaps her fingers)." She went on to explain about how she chose her first home, because it allowed her to build her trivia team there, "It started at my mobile home which was bought because, 'Oh, we can play trivia here.'" This sentiment was echoed by another

participant who allowed me to interview him in his recently purchased home. He explained,

I knew I was going to be getting a house soon and most of my decision to get this house was based on what I could do with the basement for trivia compared to the other houses that we looked at in our price range, and this one seemed to work out the best. We actually had a wall over that little back goes right there. There was a wall going across. The other part was just storage that was connected to the rest of the basement...So, we just up a little bathroom and a sink. We turned the guest room over there in the corner into a sleep room. I built a bunch of shelves last year mostly just for storing our stuff, but one of the segments I said, "No, it's going to be for trivia." So, we used it as our shelving for a trivia library...It's good for Trivia.

This participant details how the prevailing discourses of his trivia identity informed his decision to purchase the house he shares with his wife and the renovations they have begun with that house. Specifically he pointed to features of the house that were compelling for him for competitive purposes and for providing the space in which he could accumulate, store, and organize knowledge resources.

Another participant described the importance of maintaining a stable trivia headquarters over time. For this participant, it is essential that his house, their trivia headquarters, remain in the team's control. He explains,

My aunt and uncle eventually moved out of their house and moved into the house that [the team's founders had been playing in]. They retired last year. Prior to their retiring, they wanted to downsize, so me and my wife bought the house. So we are still playing in the original [team's] house. That's one of the cool things, that the house has stayed in the family and stays the headquarters for the team.

Another team that has recently won the contest for the first time placed a similar importance on keeping their trivia location the same for many years. The team began playing in the house of their former captain. When that captain passed the team down to

his daughter, he kept his doors open so that his home could continue to be used for the team to play the contest. One interview participant explained how meaningful this continuity has been for the team across its generations,

Going back to the captain of our team, her dad, who's been playing all the years of our team, to have a win – we won the contest for him. The first thing that I did when we gave our speech [at the awards ceremony] and had gotten the Point Cup¹³, was to hand it to him and to say that we had done it for him, and the look on his face and the tears in his eyes made it that much more special for us, too.

During the awards ceremony referenced in this quote, the participant held the trophy and said, “The first thing that I want to do is hand this cup to the dad of Dad’s Computers. This is dedicated to Dad [and his wife], because without them and their continual open door with all of us, this would never be a possibility.” For this team, the house served as the space with which to compete and catalogue knowledge. It made possible the fulfillment of their dream to actualize the height of prototypicality within this community, winning the Point Cup.

When it comes to major expenditures participants dedicate toward their pursuit of trivia, houses are just the tip of the iceberg. One participant explained, “Money helps. Money helps you evolve. If we didn’t have jobs I suppose we would be playing trivia a little bit differently. I have got a fair amount of my budget that goes for trivia stuff.” Primarily, participants explained how acquiring various resources imposes a financial demand for teams and players. One participant explained how trivia has informed the way he has had to adopt various technologies,

¹³ The Point Cup is the traveling trophy that is awarded each year to the winner of the contest.

You know, technology is a big thing and the technology prompted us to probably buy things which we wouldn't have because of trivia. You know I got a TV, VCR, DVD, and Blu-Ray player upstairs that get used for only 54 hours each year. We bought them because I wanted certain features on my VCR and DVD [player]. I wanted to be able to go fast forward at different speeds, I wanted an A/V Jack and things like that. So those features were probably because of trivia. That is part of that evolution. The VCR and DVD player in the living room isn't as fancy as the one up in the trivia room. It stays there. The same thing with the TV. We use that TV for 54 hours for which we got an LCD flat screen. We use it for one weekend a year. Your buying habits change.

In this statement this participant described how his buying habits have been shaped by his commitment to trivia. This is reflective of how he draws upon the logic of the identity discourses of this community to inform his buying habits. The technology he chose to adopt serves a purpose for competing and for access knowledge in ways that are congruent with the discourses described in chapter four. Furthermore, these purchases are only used the purposes of competing during the WLTC. For other teams, technological expenses stretch into demands for computers, networking, and server space all used to catalogue and provide efficient access to information thought to be essential for answering trivia questions.

Beyond technological expenses, there are also expenses related to the acquisition of other knowledge resources. One interview participant explained these financial demands while sharing with me some of the books in her trivia book collection. She explained, "There's once in a while where if I hear like, 'Oh, there was this really good trivia book,' or I'll hear [the contest organizer] say, 'Oh, I'm going to buy this new book.' And I go and look, and it's like 200 bucks. Yeah, that goes on my wish list." Similarly, during the 45th annual contest, a new member of the FFTRou team asked one

of our captains about our magazine resources. As the team captain demonstrated the strategy to collecting and organizing these resources he explained, “We order about \$1,000 worth of magazines...It’s all part of the process.” Again, this reflects a commitment of financial resources that is informed by the prevailing definitions of valuable knowledge and competition circulated within the trivia community.

A final example of this financial commitment to resources that may or may not ever be the source of a trivia question/answer occurred in the Festivus headquarters in the hours before the 45th annual contest kicked off. One series of questions each year are derived from a series of photographs that are shared with participating teams 5 days before the contest begins. Each photograph will inspire exactly one question that is asked at some point during the contest. Teams are then challenged with identifying the source of each picture in advance of the contest. Included in the 2014 collection of photographs was a picture taken from an obscure board game titled *Elfquest*. After hours of searching, a copy of the game was found at a hobby store in Janesville, Wisconsin (approximately a two-hour drive from Stevens Point). Upon making the trip back from Janesville to acquire the game a mere couple of hours before the contest began, a team captain set *Elfquest* on one of the team’s tables and exalted, “*Elfquest*, a bargain at \$85.” Due to its obscurity, a game that would normally retail for no more than \$20, demanded a price 400% higher. When the question taken from the *Elfquest* game was asked during the 2014 contest, the answer was something that could be readily found online, rendering the physical board game useless.

Each of these examples provide a material discursive example of social interactions and behaviors reiterating the prevailing identity discourses of knowledge. In line with an external definition of knowledge participants commit financial resources that impact their lifestyles in pursuit of their trivia needs. Additionally, the competitive identity discourse also manifests itself when teams talk about how and why they dedicate their financial resources. For example, an email shared among members of my own team encouraged participants to consider dedicating more resources to the trivia effort specifically in pursuit of gaining a competitive advantage. The email urged,

I hope everyone will consider pitching in - any amount is very appreciated. As some of you know, last year we unfortunately had a major [deficiency with a specific resource]. The total bill for [overcoming this shortcoming] was \$2500. Obviously this is a very large expense and we are hoping to recover this... The acquisition of stuff is, for better or worse, a big part of the contest. And frankly, this is an area where we can exact a huge advantage [over other teams]. So, I hope everyone can set aside a bit extra to contribute to the common goal of getting back the Cup.

In this email, the acquisition of resources and the spending of money serves to reiterate a competitive identity discourse among members of the team.

In chapter four, I described how the WLTC community drew from the resources of discourses of knowledge and competition when enacting their identities and making sense of their environments. In this chapter, I sought to better understand how the discursive resources of one's particularly salient identities are enacted through identity work across social contexts. Consistent with the prevailing theorizing on identity work, participants described situations in which they had to reconcile the predominance of their identity as a trivia player across these social contexts. However, many participants

also described ways in which their activation of the discursive logics of their trivia identity actually shaped the various contexts. The specific contexts identified within this chapter included paid employment, education, family, romantic relationship, and life-altering decisions. Each of these different social contexts was informed by the discursive resources of identity that participants enact as members of the WLTC community.

In the next chapter, I describe how the discursive resources established in chapter four restrict the behavior alternatives of members and inculcate decisional premises that restrict member choices and inform behaviors. Furthermore, I highlight how members of the community surveil one another and discipline non-normative behavior in a way that is consistent with the theorizing of cultural and concertive systems of control as described in chapter three. As a necessary corollary of control, I also describe how resistance (Mumby, 2005) has manifested in order to challenge the limitations imposed by the reiteration of the dominant discourses. Finally, I elaborate upon the theorizing of this chapter by considering ways in which this system of control also spans social contexts. In doing so, I build upon the theorizing that links identifying to systems of control by considering how trans-contextual identifying can lead to trans-contextual control.

CHAPTER VI
IDENTITY AND CONTROL AMONG MEMBERS OF THE WORLD'S LARGEST
TRIVIA CONTEST

Participants of this research project often exhibited and described behaviors and decisions that I interpret as being limited by the definitions and expectations of knowledge and competition as predominant discourses of their trivia identity. As systems of meaning, the discourses that members of any community draw from in enacting their identities necessarily make assumptions about the nature of reality and appropriate behavior. These assumptions impose limitations on what members of the community perceive as natural and appropriate. In this way, these assumption control member behavior. This is why a number of theorists have linked identification to theorizing about control (Alvesson, 1996; Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Alvesson et al., 2008; Deetz, 2003; Tompkins & Cheney, 1985; Tourish & Vatcha, 2005). In this project, I observed how members' behaviors were influenced by the dominant discourses of knowledge and competition, and how non-normative behavior was disciplined through the use of surveillance and social pressures congruent with the theorizing on cultural and concertive control (Barker, 1993; Barker & Cheney, 1994; Barker & Tompkins, 1994; Deetz, 2003; Papa, Auwal & Singhal, 1997; Simon, 1976; Tomkins & Cheney, 1985) and identity regulation (Alvesson et al., 2008; Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Tourish & Vatcha, 2005) as discussed in chapter two.

In this chapter, I specifically describe how a system of control manifested within the WLTC community through four themes. The first theme, discursive limitations,

describes how the prevailing discursive trends of knowledge and competition limited members' decisional alternatives, constricting their behavior. Furthermore, I discuss how the enacting of these discourses by community members manifested through gendered language and behavior, limiting the ability to identify within the community in a non-masculine-centric way. In the second theme, mechanisms of control, I elaborate about how members' behaviors were limited through mechanisms of identity regulation including surveillance and the discipline of non-normative behavior. In doing so, I tell the story of two events that occurred leading up to and during the 2014 WLTC within the headquarters of Festivus for the Rest of Us (FFTROU). Additionally, I describe how this surveillance and discipline eventually became self-imposed as members engaged in self-surveillance and self-discipline. In the third theme, member resistance, I describe how participants exhibited behavior of resistance by establishing space for counter-discourses to challenge the system of control. Finally, in the fourth theme, trans-contextual control, I explain how the trans-contextual nature of identity (as described in chapter five) contributes to a system of trans-contextual control.

Discursive Limitations

Members of the WLTC community were limited in their behavior, decisions, and means of relating to members within the community by the available discursive resources of the prevailing discourses of knowledge and competition as described in chapter four. Specifically, these discourses and the ways in which they are defined and reiterated by members of the community prescribe decisional premises that limit member behavior. As noted in chapter two, decisional premises (Simon, 1972) are the

basic assumptions inculcated in members of a community that guide and restrict behavior in an unobtrusive manner. In this way members' behaviors are controlled in subtle ways, maintaining an illusion of free choice. In addition to the limitations imposed by the predominant discourses of the community, the enactment of member identities included gendered language and behavior that limits the ways in which individuals are able to relate to the community in a non-patriarchal way. Below, I describe how both of the prevailing discourses serve to inculcate decisional premises to community members, and I highlight instances of gendered language and behavior that occur in the enactment of these discourses.

Knowledge. By establishing knowledge and the pursuit of knowledge as meaningful and providing a rigid definition of what constitutes valid knowledge, knowledge as an identity discourse informed members' behaviors and restrained their decisional alternatives. Specifically, members demonstrated and described behaviors that represented a near compulsive pursuit of knowledge and knowledge resources throughout their daily lives and in the way they interacted with one another. Below, I begin by describing the relationship that exists between knowledge and power by drawing upon theorizing of Foucault. Next, I describe how members explained their compulsive pursuit of knowledge in line with the resources of the prevailing discourse of knowledge. Then, I explain how the material resources teams had compiled and catalogued within their headquarters and homes provided a representation of how the pursuit of knowledge has informed members' behaviors and habits. Finally, I draw upon a story shared by one participant who described how the pursuit of knowledge and

knowledge resources has informed his lifestyle and how that behavior is something that is shared by other members who identify strongly with the WLTC community.

In many ways, the discursive battle over legitimate knowledge within the WLTC community is also a struggle over influence/power. Foucault (1980) challenged the work of other theorists such as Habermas (1984) that argued that knowledge could be cleansed of power through rational discourse (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992). Foucault contended that knowledge inherently favored some while necessarily excluding others. Through the definition of valid knowledge, one defines what is valuable and subsequently what is deviant. Thus, within the context of the WLTC, the struggle over what constitutes valuable knowledge (internal vs. external; academic vs. trivial) is a struggle over who and what has value. This line of reasoning takes on specific nuance within this community in which an annual contest of knowledge provides a public forum through which the value of specific knowledge can be articulated through the questions posed and answered, and members' ability to better demonstrate their possession of or access to "valid knowledge" is publically measured.

An example of how a battle over what constituted valid knowledge reflected a battle over power and legitimacy can be found in a piece of trivia lore that was shared by an interview participant who experienced this battle for legitimacy firsthand. This participant shares the story of how his team, Network, and a rival team, Occupation Foole, struggled over the validity of a single answer in which there was dispute,

There was also the very unfortunate issue of...the Robert Redford answer [that is] at the beginning of each contest. That came out of 1980 and a

very bitter dispute between ourselves and Occupation Foole...Oz¹⁴ has this question, "Who was elected sewer commissioner of Provo, Utah in 1976?" Okay so, he thinks it's Robert Redford which is kind of goofy, because Provo is a real city...It's a real city, and the sewer commissioner is a real job...And, Robert Redford has been extremely successful. He started making movie appearances in the early '60s. He was a major international star by the mid '60s. That's why Robert Redford did not work in a real city of Provo, Utah being a sewer commissioner. It was the worst case scenario. I believe that the question was...200 points...We did not say Robert Redford and Occupation Foole did, and there was a lead change as a result...So, there's this bitter thing going on with us calling the complaint line and trying to say...it really isn't Robert Redford¹⁵...So, we call the Mayor of Provo. We actually got him to talk to us during the question. He told us the name of the guy who was really sewer commissioner of Provo Utah in 1976...It is this battle between the first and second with our fates hanging in balance. It just went on for hours and hours...There was much complaining until [the question] was thrown out [of the contest] around 8:00 p.m. You know, not an hour went by in between when we weren't complaining, and they were complaining that we were complaining. Much of the bitterness over the years really hadn't happened until then.

This story demonstrates the socially constructed nature of "valid knowledge" within the WLTC community. Valid knowledge is whatever is deemed to be the correct answer, regardless of reality. In this case, the validity of the answer "Robert Redford" was contended between two teams. Each team believed it would be a great injustice to have the alternative answer accepted and perpetuated as truth, both teams understanding that more was at stake than whether Robert Redford was a sewer commissioner in Utah. At stake was knowledge and power.

Thus, as teams continue to discursively negotiate what constitutes valuable knowledge whether it is trivial vs. academic or internal vs. external, at stake is who will

¹⁴ Oz is the nickname given to Jim Oliva, the current contest organizer and co-writer.

¹⁵ In fact, Robert Redford owned a house in **Provo Cannon**, Utah where he was jokingly referred to by neighbors as the sewer commissioner.

be benefitted more by the accepted definition of the discourse. Since the discourse invariably communicates values, beliefs, and decisional premises, power is significantly at play in this negotiation over valid knowledge.

Each of the interview participants of this project spoke about how their pursuit of knowledge, particularly “trivia/trivial” knowledge has become a compulsion in their daily lives that is reflective of the logic of the prevailing knowledge discourse. One participant explained,

Speaking of compulsion, I have the personality where I would...go to Blockbuster, and I would look at the movies and say, “Is this a movie [the contest writers] are going to watch?” If so, I would watch that movie, and I would kick myself if I didn’t get the right movie, or if I had but couldn’t find the notes [on that movie] in time or took notes on something that was incorrect.

In this explanation, the participant described how he experiences a personal compulsion to make life decisions in a way that reflected the pursuit of a very specific form of knowledge. The knowledge this participant sought was the kind of knowledge that was deemed meaningful within the trivia community. Specifically, this member would ask himself whether he thought the contest organizers were likely to see a specific movie. If so, it meant that that movie reflected a valuable knowledge resource, independent of the merit of the movie in the mind of the participant himself. Other members echoed this way of thinking about not only choices of which media such as what movies, television, and music to consume, but also when it came to purchasing the right brand of cereal, reading the right books, and collecting the right records. Members did not feel the discursive freedom to consume the media or purchase the items that their tastes drew

them to. Rather, they made these decisions in an effort to consume or catalogue as much knowledge as possible and to make sure that the knowledge they accumulated aligned with a narrow definition of what was constituted as valuable within the WLTC community.

Furthermore, members described how decisions about the WAY they consumed knowledge were also impacted. One participant explained,

The nice thing about being friends with people who play trivia is that there is sort of this understanding of what that means, because I think to some people it's weird to open your laptop when you're watching a movie and take notes...but trivia people sort of understand that.

In this statement, the participant describes how otherwise normal media consumption is informed by one's adherence to the identity discourse of knowledge. Whereas individuals who do not identify with the WLTC community would find such behavior non-normative and even deviant, members of the trivia community understand how such behavior is a reflection of the identity of a trivia player and how their behavior should inform their pursuit of knowledge and knowledge resources.

The material impact of the discursive limitations imposed by the knowledge discourse at work within the WLTC community is evident in the descriptions of team headquarters found in chapter four. Team headquarters were largely cold, impersonal spaces that reflected the importance of knowledge to the community's identity. The headquarters were designed to favor function over form with rooms structured in a way as to provide efficient access to the most important knowledge resources. Shelves stretched from floor to ceiling along full lengths of walls which were overflowing with books, magazines, records, and other knowledge resources. Teams had computer

workstations, televisions, and media players dedicated year-round to accessing knowledge resources. Teams collected, stored, and catalogued hundreds of product packages and advertisements. As noted in chapter five, the accumulation and maintenance of these resources is costly. For some teams, including FFTRou, this cost is in excess of thousands of dollars each year. Outside of the logic of the identity discourses adopted by members of the WLTC community, the design of these team headquarters and the hoarding of resources would reflect behavior that others may deem deviant. This behavior, however, is reinforced within the community of the WLTC.

As a reflection of how this commitment to collecting knowledge resources is something shared by members across the WLTC community, one participant shared with me the story of how he one day observed how the depths of his own commitment to knowledge acquisition was mirrored in a contest-participant from another team. This participant explained how he frequently used his “free time” to seek out knowledge resources from his local library. One day, while preparing for trivia at his home, he was able to identify an important trivia resource that would be valuable for his team. Upon making this revelation, he explained,

That night I went to the library to check out a hard copy of it. I went to the shelves, and I figured out that it was [a specific volume of the source he was seeking]. I went to the shelves and the volume that [was needed] was gone...I went to the front desk and asked them, and they brought it up [on the computer]...When she got to the volumes I needed, they'd all been checked out...She turned the computer screen over to me and she's like, “Oh no, somebody already checked it out. They actually just checked them out a little over an hour ago.” I looked, and it had been [a captain from a different team] that had checked it out. I couldn't believe that [he] had gotten there first and found it like an hour before me.

In this statement, this participant explains how he makes use of library resources to fulfill the knowledge expectations of his trivia identity. Furthermore, he demonstrates how this pursuit of further knowledge resources is normative within the trivia community. In fact a scarce and unlikely source was simultaneously being sought by another member of the WLTC community, motivated by the same fulfillment of the knowledge accumulation.

These examples demonstrate how the assumptions perpetuated by the discourse of knowledge as enacted within the WLTC community served to inform member behavior. By essentializing the collection of knowledge resources that are both vast and obscure, this discourse compels participants to sacrifice time and resources in pursuit of a very specific type of knowledge attainment. Furthermore, the narrow definition of what constitutes valuable knowledge informs the way members make decisions about what media they consume, what items they collect, and the manner in which they interpret their world around them.

Competition. The identity discourse of competition within the WLTC community also established value premises that served to limit discursive alternatives for organizational members and control their behavior. Having a discourse of competition established as part of the essential essence of the organization, members identifying with the organization described being compelled to perform behavior that was pursuant to competitive ends. Below, I describe how members drew from the identity discourse of competition in a way that served to control members by (1) establishing and reiterating

standards of behavior that were measured against the behaviors of other teams and their members and (2) reinforced a mindset that necessitated constant improvement.

When describing the motivations for their behavior, participants described the importance of inter-team competition. As noted in Chapter 4, one way the competitive discourse was enacted within the WLTC community was through long-term competitive relationships between teams in the contest. While this discourse served to bring team members together by uniting them against salient outgroups, it also established an ever-present measuring stick upon which members could measure the prototypicality of their behaviors. One participant described how the competitive relationship his team had with another team influenced his motivations and commitment to the expectations of the competitive discourse,

I think there is that sense of one-upmanship, because it feels personal like I want to beat that team, and I don't want to have to listen to them saying, "Oh, we won."...I know it gets personal for other people on the team. I know there are members of our team that like, it's a very big deal to have to beat them, and it motivates us.

By becoming personal, the competition between these teams serves as an example of how members measure their self-worth through their success or failure relative to other teams. Subsequently, members' measure of self-worth is influenced by the ongoing competition with community rivals. This serves to motivate members of the team in a way that likely wouldn't emerge if not for the importance of a discourse of competition and its subsequent value premises.

The captain for another team explained how he would use strategic discourse of competition to motivate his teammates and encourage them to undertake additional

projects of preparation. In doing so, he reiterates decisional premises of the competitive discourse by reinforcing taken-for-granted assumptions that restrict the decisional alternatives available for team members. When asked how he attempts to motivate his team to continue to commit to preparation, he explained, “I recognize that a lot of people like the rivalry and it’s motivating for them, so I’ll use that to motivate them to do the work in the offseason.” This captain explicitly identifies the importance of competition with a rival as a factor that motivates and informs member behavior. Furthermore, he explicitly explains how he draws upon rivalry language to serve the purpose of motivating a specific type of behavior for team members.

I observed examples of drawing upon competitive strategic discourse to motivate team members to continue to contribute increasing amounts of time, money, and other resources through email correspondence among members of the trivia team I play with. One member shared a story that drew from a discourse of competition to express his own motivations. In this email, he described one particular moment in which his competitive relationship with another team was particularly motivating to his behavior,

I received an email inviting me to [a party for one of our rival teams]. After asking just what this party was, I found out it was a victory celebration. Now I know that I am friends with numerous people on the team outside of trivia, but I honestly have been pretty fired up over this due to the fact that 1) They have OUR cup, 2) They're holding a grand party in a ballroom to celebrate their victory, and 3) I was invited to this thing. It has only made me more fired up to continue to work towards getting our cup back.

In this statement, this participant described how the team’s competitive relationship with their rivals informs his behaviors and motivations. Drawing upon the premises of the

competitive identity discourse, this member is motivated to commit more time and resources into his preparation for the next year's contest. In this way, competition is uniquely inspiring his behavior and influencing him to strive to better fulfill the prototypical expectations of the WLTC community by outperforming his rivals. In another email a member stated, "I hope you are all doing well and that the sting of [the team's recent defeat to their rival] is still fresh in your memory." This statement demonstrated a particularly interesting way in which the discourse of competition is defined and reiterated. This salutation begins with the wish that everyone on the team is doing well. However, it simultaneously expressed the desire that members of the team are still pained by their recent defeat. The juxtaposition of these two statements made clear that feeling pain after suffering a defeat in competition is a natural and expected response. To not be having those feelings would not be congruent with "doing well".

The email went on to express,

With what looks like to be an even more glorious array of terrible television shows this season, we need people to step up and take some shows! It is time for YOU to STEP UP and take a show. You can take ONE show from the spreadsheet and be a trivia hero come April. I mean, seriously, a half hour of your time every week to get our cup back? SUCK IT UP and let's do this.

After already establishing the "sting" of defeat that members should be feeling as a reflection of the competitive discourse, members are encouraged to resolve that sting by contributing to the preparation for the next year's contest. In particular, this email is calling for members to contribute to a project that would otherwise be undesirable for most team members – watching and taking notes on a "glorious array of terrible television shows." Contribution to this project is described as the means by which one

can become a “trivia hero” by ideally reflecting behaviors prototypical to the team’s competitive identity. The ultimate motivation for doing so is to “get our cup back.” In this statement, the email’s author established that the cup, as a designation of the contest’s champion, rightfully belongs to their team. Through this expression, the author is establishing that the team is the most prototypical of the WLTC community’s identity, and, thus, is most deserving of the cup.

The gendered enactment of identity discourses. Given the mutually-constitutive nature of discourse established in chapter two, it is important to note that the prevailing discourses established in chapter four and elaborated above are products of the social interactions of members of the WLTC community. Members create, enact, and reiterate these discourses through their social interactions. Through the enactment of these discourses, a pattern of gendered social interactions emerged that is meaningful to the process of identifying within the WLTC community. The gendered language and behavior of the community made it difficult for members to identify with the community in ways that were inconsistent with the masculine-centric norm. The gendered nature of these interactions was most apparent in the language and metaphors used by interview participants and in the relating that occurred between males and females that I observed among my own team during the 2014 WLTC.

Through the discursive enactment of the identity discourses of knowledge and competition described in chapter four, gendered language can be readily observed. Specifically interview participants often made use of metaphors for trivia as either a contact sport or forum for combat when enacting the discourses of knowledge and

competition. The use of these aggressive metaphors is congruent with prevailing masculine signifiers that favor violence, aggression, and competition over more nurturing, empathetic, and sensitive signifiers that are often understood to represent femininity. For example, when justifying the value of an external definition of knowledge, an interview participant likened the style of play to being “no-holds-barred”, using a metaphor to define knowledge within the context of a wrestling match of a particularly violent nature in which no forms of violence are deemed outside the bounds of the rules. Another participant drew upon a similar violence-related metaphor when defining the same distinction between internal and external knowledge. He stated that “you won’t want to bring a knife to a gun fight.” In this metaphor, knowledge, as either internal or external, is likened to a weapon of combat, a means of inflicting pain or damage upon another. Similar combat language was used as participants described their goal as “shooting” for “hardware” or top-finishes in the annual contest.

Beyond the metaphoric language used when describing the nature of the predominant identity discourses in the community, the questions posed throughout the contest are also often framed within a similar gendered-perspective. The common question genres regularly reflect areas of interest that are more consistent with masculine signifiers such as sporting competitions and classic movies and television which are masculine. This is not surprising since the two question authors are both male and are likely to generate questions from areas of their own interests from media they are more-likely to access. However, the result can be interpreted as less innocuous. Since the ability to most-adeptly answer these questions serves as the measuring stick upon which

members and teams within the community are measured for prototypicality within the logic of the knowledge and competitive discourses, the knowledge of these masculine-centric media is rewarded in a way that further reiterates the dominance of the masculine perspective. Furthermore, the fact that the two authors of the questions of the contest are both male may be further symptomatic of the masculine-centric discursive environment of the WLTC.

Finally, the gendered enactment of the prevailing identity discourses was apparent in the interactions that I observed during the 2014 WLTC among participants of my own team. The gendered relations of the team are readily apparent in the simple observation of the space of the headquarters when considering where participants are seated. In figure one (found in chapter four), one can note that the women of the team are seated grouped together in a single row along the wall of the room. This has been traditionally the space reserved for female members of the team, being reiterated to any other non-female members that attempt to sit there. This location is at the periphery of the clump of seats shared by the team's captains which is located in the closest proximity to the team's most valuable knowledge resources. As a space that is at the periphery of the clump of captains, access to these knowledge resources has regularly been denied to the females in those seats. For multiple years, this contingent of female participants has lobbied for greater access to these resources, always being rebuffed. The explanation for why these resources were not shared with the female participants (as well as other non-captains) was a concern that everyone would search only the same resources if they were shared. However, this still does not resolve why the all-male contingent was designated

to be the one's accessing these resources despite the female protests. During the 2014 WLTC, it was not until about halfway through the contest that these female participants were successful in their petitions for access to these resources.

This designation of space within the team's headquarters becomes further relevant when considering the ways in which it restrains the voice of female participants throughout the contest. For years, the lack of voice felt by this female contingency has been a persistent source of controversy. The controversy stems from a team policy that establishes that no answer can be phoned in without the consent of at least one team captain, as noted in chapter four. This has become problematic over the years as females sitting along this row have asserted that their input while in pursuit of an answer gets ignored by the clump of captains who have the sole power of determining whether an answer is made official or not. This controversy re-emerged as early as the third question of the first hour of the 2014 contest. During the question a female that was new to the team proclaimed to the room that she is finding that the answer might be "Jimi Hendrix". At this point, a number of other members of the team had already found this answer and were in the process of phoning the answer in. The new female felt a little embarrassed for having not noticed that the answer had already been found. In response another female member of the team consoled her saying, "Don't worry, in three hours they won't even be able to hear you." This statement was made as part of a running joke to reference how the female members of the team often go unheard throughout the contest. About 12 hours later, the same female participant that offered consolation to the new member asserted that she believed the answer to a question was from the Muppets.

After receiving no response from the team's captains, she re-asserted what she was finding a number of times until finally another captain responded by saying, "Yeah. I heard you." The female participant laughed and did a hand motion, raising her open palm slowly up in front of her as if to indicate that a wall was raising that separated the female participants from the clump of captains. This too represented a running reference to how the female participants feel as though there is an imaginary wall that separates them from the rest of the team as they attempt to contribute to the team's efforts.

In a final example, one of the male captains literally took away one of the channels through which the female captain of the team would have a voice. This example occurred in the final hour leading up to the kickoff of the 2014 WLTC. One of the team's male captains was settling into his spot among the clump of captains on the team when he noticed that he did not have a landline phone in front of his workstation¹⁶. Upon noting that he did not have one of the phones in front of him, he proclaimed, "Where's my phone?," aloud to the room. In response, the female captain of the team asks, "Will the phone by us work?" The male captain replies, "Yes!," and he comes over to move the phone from in front of the female captain to his workstation. While doing this, he jokes that, "The girls don't get a phone." As she helps pass the phone to the male captain, the female captain visibly snarls. She then jokes, "We defy stereotypes. The women [on this team] aren't the ones always on the phone." While,

¹⁶ The team recently invested in a handful of landline phones that are particularly useful for phoning in question answers because of the fidelity of their connection and their ability to automatically redial in the event of a busy signal. Overcoming busy signals is a meaningful challenge to all teams in the contest as teams are frequently trying to call in answers at the same times.

the interaction was veiled in humor by both the male and female captain, the implications were no less real. The male captain denied the female captain a resource of voice while strengthening that same resource for himself.

In chapter four, I identified two predominant discourses members of the WLTC community drew from in defining their identities. Above, I described how each of these discourses and the ways in which they are enacted are limiting to members' behaviors. By providing narrow assumptions for what constitutes valuable knowledge and appropriately competitive behavior, these discourses restrict members' decisional alternatives. Furthermore, these discourses have been enacted in a masculine-centric manner that was limiting to non-masculine behaviors and attitudes. In the next section, I provide a further explanation for the mechanisms that exist to enforce this system of control.

Mechanisms of Control

Existing theorizing of cultural and concertive control has described how surveillance and discipline have acted as mechanisms of control. Surveillance has long been used to describe how the behavior of community members is monitored to ensure compliance with community norms. In more obtrusive systems of control this surveillance might come directly from supervisors, or it may be mediated through technological resources such as punch clocks or surveillance cameras. However, in less obtrusive systems of control, like concertive and cultural systems of control, surveillance is often imposed by the members of the community being surveilled or by individuals

upon themselves. As an extension of this surveillance, discipline describes the manner in which non-normative behavior is punished and normative behavior is reinforced.

In following with this theorizing on concertive and cultural systems of control, team surveillance and discipline were both apparent in the interviews and observations I gathered among members of the WLTC community. Within the community, there is an expectation that members will make decisions and conduct social behavior that is congruent with the logic of the discourses of knowledge and competition as described in chapter four. When members' behaviors either failed to enact these discourses or did so in a way that was not fitting of the dominant discourse, those members were met with discipline, often public, that served to reiterate these discourses and further inform members' behaviors. These mechanisms of control were more explicit during the participant observations, but they did also emerge as topics during the interview process. Below, I describe how team members surveilled one another and how behavior that contradicted the dominant identity discourses was disciplined. Additionally, I describe how this resulted in members' self-surveillance and self-regulation.

More than half of the interview participants spoke about mechanisms of team interactions that could be interpreted as surveillance. Surveillance was something that was also apparent through observations of the trivia communities in practice. The most commonly described form of surveillance occurred through public documentation of the work that was to be done, who was to do it, and their success or failure in following through on that assignment. For example, one participant explained, "We have a spreadsheet on, you know, network television. When they release their full shows and

their schedules, we create a spreadsheet and then people go on that and everyone signs up for the shows you want to cover.” This participant described how the use of the spreadsheet served the benefit of helping keep the team organized and thorough as they collect knowledge for each year’s contest. However, one of this participant’s teammates described how the spreadsheet and other documentation of members’ assignments is also used to monitor and quantify member contributions, “[Some team members will] be like, ‘Hey, you said you were doing project X. Have you even started project X? You have had eight months to complete it. I could have gotten project X done three months ago, why aren’t you doing it?’” In this statement, this participant explains how the public documentation of who is responsible for each of the team’s projects also serves the purpose of allowing team members to check in on project progress and apply pressure to teammate who are not completing their projects at a pace that fulfills the competitive identity expectations of the team. This statement also makes it clear that members of the team are aware that others are keeping track of who is completing projects and at what rate. Thus, members know that their behavior is being monitored by their teammates.

When explaining the use of the spreadsheet, the first participant quoted in the previous paragraph explained that signing up for shows and other projects is not obligatory, that no one “forces anyone” to commit to these projects. This sentiment, however, was not shared by all members of that participant’s team. Another teammate explained,

You know, sometimes it is kind of forced upon you. It has to get done, and no one is volunteering, and so it’s kind of like you just get stuck with it. So, there are like special projects that I would say those are the ones

that I feel like I have to do that I wouldn't normally otherwise, and those sometimes get forced...Nobody really wants to do it. They just have to get done.

This participant explains how the pressure to accomplish these tasks, particularly the less desirable ones, still exists even if force is not explicitly articulated. This is reflective of how the values inherent in the dominant identity discourses of knowledge and competition create a taken-for-granted assumption that these undesirable projects “have to get done”. Thus, although no one is forcing this participant to accomplish these projects, she nevertheless feels compelled to do so. Furthermore, the use of the public spreadsheet serves the purpose of perpetually adding to the list of things that “have to get done”.

Although the above statement explains how assumptions of the dominant identity discourses unobtrusively pressure participants to fulfill their obligation to complete even the most undesirable tasks, some participants described more direct means of control when it came to completing tasks for the team related to growing knowledge resources and making the team more competitive. A participant on my own team explained, “I know for instance on one team that if you don't put in work in the offseason, you're not sitting with the big boys [during the contest].” In this statement, the participant describes a not-so-subtle system in which member identity legitimacy is determined by the quantity and quality of work accomplished in the offseason, and is publically demonstrated through material expressions of space. In this instance, there are locations within the team's headquarters that communicate member prototypicality and are associated with greater power resources and prestige. If you do not fulfill offseason

expectations of work pursuant to growing knowledge resources and making the team more competitive, you are denied access to these power resources and prestige.

Prefacing the statement made above, my teammate argued that this was a way of enforcing expectation on **other** teams, but not the way that our team treated work assignments and expectations. However, my observations directly contradict this. As described in greater detail in chapter four, there are clearly delineated borders that separate members of the FFTROU team based upon their prototypicality, and these borders are equated with both power resources and prestige. For example, each of the team's captains are located in a cluster closest to the most valuable knowledge resources the team possesses, and they often act as gatekeepers of that knowledge resource. As noted in the discussion about the gendered enactment of identity discourses, there has long been a discussion among team members centered upon whether other members of the team should have access to search those resources, or if it should be reserved only for those who sit amongst the team's captains. In contrast, sitting at a completely separate table, is a group of team members that have begun to refer to themselves as the "Hot Corner". The Hot Corner is populated by team members that put in less work during the offseason and are mostly newer members of the team. They have the least access to the most useful knowledge resources, and they are often simultaneously praised and derided through the use of the term "Google Monkeys". They are praised through this designation, because this subset of players has demonstrated their value at locating even the most obscure question answers through the use a well-cultivated talent for searching the web. However, the term also clearly designates that their value to the team is

something that could be accomplished by a trained “monkey”. Interestingly, as a form of counter-discourse, the community has begun to rally around their designation on the team. This began with the adoption of the term “Hot Corner”, meant to communicate how they can become particularly efficient at finding answers. During the 2014 contest, the Hot Corner even debuted its own exclusive t-shirts (Figure 3) that were kept a secret from all other members of the team.



FIGURE III - The Hot Corner

Featuring an eagle with narrowed, focused eyes, these t-shirts communicate how this community of players has a unique ability to access knowledge that challenges the prototypical expectations of the team leadership. This group is presenting a counter-interpretation of a discourse of knowledge than is promoted by the team’s leadership. Subsequently, a counter-identity is emerging that includes value premises that differ from those promoted by the dominant discourse of the team.

Below, I recall two stories that emerged during my observations that served as demonstrations of surveillance and discipline among members of the team that are consistent with the theorizing on concertive control.

The shame of late notes. During an interview, a member of my team explained how in a recent year's contest, Wendy¹⁷ had failed to fulfill her commitment to complete and submit some trivia notes that she had agreed to accomplish before the start of the contest. The interview participant explained,

I guess she had a few years of [notes on a certain resource] that she ended up having to complete during the contest a few years ago. She procrastinated and procrastinated and finally she got to the contest and she is like, "I didn't do [a certain part of the expected work]." So she sat at her computer for the next few hours and took those notes. So, you know, it's kind of an honor system thing.

A few interesting notes can be made from this statement. First is how the interview participant mentioned in the story that Wendy's commitment to accomplishing this task was public information. What she was meant to accomplish as well as her failure to do so was public knowledge. In failing to accomplish this expectation, this team member had controverted both of the dominant identity discourse expectations. She had failed to contribute to a meaningful source of knowledge for the team and she had put the team in a place where it might be less competitive during the contest. Interestingly, the interview participant concludes this explanation by saying, "it's kind of an honor system thing." This is interesting, because it asserts that completing the work that is expected of you is something that each person is expected to enforce themselves, that teams do not apply pressure to team members to fulfill their commitments. However, in this instance, the opposite is apparently true. The team was aware of Wendy's failure to follow

¹⁷ Names of all participants are pseudonyms.

through on what was expected, and she felt the pressure to follow through on that commitment during the contest.

The story shared by this participant was particularly resonant in light of observations made in the hours leading up to and during the 2014 WLTC. The evening before the contest was to kick off, a number of team members were together at the team's headquarters doing some last-minute work in preparation for the contest. During this time, a team captain, Jack (pseudonym), was collecting and organizing the submission of electronic notes being made by several members of the team. As emails from team members rolled in throughout the evening, Jack made announcements about who had turned in their notes for the year. He even provided a commentary about the quality of the notes, almost always positive. In doing so, Jack made it very clear to the team members around the room that receipt of the work one commits to will be made public and will be critically evaluated for quality. At one point, with a sigh of exasperation, the Jack announced to the team members in the headquarters that Wendy had just sent an email informing Jack that she had not completed the work expected of her on a particularly important project the team had undertaken. The captain even reads part of the email aloud to the team, stating that she says in the email that she is "shamed" and will "bury her head in the [knowledge resource] all weekend in order to complete as much of the work as she can." Team members around the headquarters joke that they should banish her to another room during the contest until the notes are complete.

The next day when Wendy arrives, she does set to work on catching up her notes before the contest is officially underway. She is never banished, and she does not spend

the whole contest working on notes rather than participating. Instead, she is welcomed warmly, but with a degree of public jesting about her failing to follow through on her commitment to provide that knowledge resource for the team.

In this story, no overt form of control was exerted. In both instances, Wendy voluntarily undertook a commitment to complete a project for the team. In both instances, no one forced her to complete her commitment to this project or banished her from the team's headquarters. However, in both instances, unobtrusive discursive interaction served to discipline her non-normative behavior, reinforce team expectations, and reiterate the dominant identity discourses of the community. As such, both Wendy and all other team members who were witness to the exchange are subject to further reinforcement of value premises and have a heightened awareness for the "shame" that should accompany the failure to fulfill Discursive expectations.

A nearly catastrophic mistake. In the late hours of the 2014 contest, the team encountered a near-catastrophic mistake that threatened to compromise any competitive chance at winning the contest. For competitive reasons, I am unable to go into great detail about the mistake. However, I can explain that through a comedy of errors, two members of the team, Rob (pseudonym) and Red (pseudonym), unwittingly failed to accomplish a time-sensitive task that could have resulted in the team losing a significant amount of previously earned points, essentially eliminating the team from contention to finish first in the annual contest. By the time the mistake had been noticed by other members of the team, it was nearly too late to reconcile, and Rob and Red were away from the headquarters on an unrelated errand. While the mistake was the result of a

number of unforeseen circumstances that could not be solely attributed to the two team members in question, blame and discipline were being exclusively directed toward Rob and Red.

Upon realizing the mistake, one team captain, Bert (pseudonym) immediately got on the phone with Rob and Red. Simultaneously, a second team captain, Ford (pseudonym), flew off in the direction of the contest organizer's headquarters in order to fulfill the expectation with mere minutes remaining before the deadline. The mood in the team's headquarters had been meaningfully altered. Many members of the team looked at one another with blank expressions, resigned to the assumption that the team had just cost itself any chance of winning the contest due to a foolish mistake, compromising all of the work that had been done leading up to and during the contest.

Upon getting Rob and Red on the phone, the team captain explained the situation and persuaded them to rush to the contest organizer's headquarters and attempt to stall as Ford rushed to accomplish the task in time. This phone conversation took place in the middle of the team's headquarters to be witnessed by all members of the team. Meanwhile, the rest of the team was left helpless at the team headquarters, forced to half-heartedly and distractedly continue searching and answering questions without knowing whether those answers were even relevant to the team's endeavor. During the space between questions, the conversation always returned to the pending catastrophe at hand. Much of the response was the disheartened admonishment of Rob and Red, "How could they have not known?" Many team members articulated how miserable the

remaining few hours of the contest would be, knowing that the team would be out of contention for the championship, especially knowing the reason why.

During one of these exchanges, Hugh (pseudonym), a team member that is often described as being among the group of “Google Monkeys”, spoke up in defense of Rob and Red. He commented about how this contest is, at its core, supposed to be just for fun, and mistakes do happen. He argued that the team would be best served to just get over it, to move past it. The comment was meant to make everyone feel better, but it was met with animosity most directly from two of the team’s captains. One of those captains responded by saying that, “for those on the team that put in the hours and hours of work all year, this is more than just a fun contest,” and he left the room. Implicit in this message was an admonishment toward Hugh for not demonstrating the prototypical commitment to the pursuit of knowledge resources and competition expected from those associated with this community. Furthermore, it was a reiteration of the ideal that this is not merely an annual contest, but rather a year-long commitment, a lifestyle. This message further implied that Hugh had not “earned” the right to comment on the implications of this mistake in the same way that other members of the team had, because he was not among those who put in “the hours and hours of work all year”.

At this point, Beau, another member of the team, spoke up in defense of Hugh. Beau explained that Hugh had simply been trying to provide perspective and calm the team down. A second captain quickly snapped back that, “people aren’t just going to get over this or calm down.” He went on to explain that we all “should be upset.” In doing so, this team captain articulated a reinforcement of the competitive discourse. As

previously established in this chapter, part of prototypically fulfilling the identity expectations of this community includes feeling poorly when the team does not fulfill its competitive expectations. This was further reinforced by this captain's reply. In response, the dissenting members of the team resigned themselves to the somber and anxious tone and tenor of the team as they awaited resolution to this situation. Their acquiescence served to reiterate the value premises being promoted by the captains.

Ultimately, Ford succeeded in his quest. The full points that had been earned were awarded to the team, and the catastrophe was averted. However, the ends did not absolve the mistake, as awkward and tense feelings continued to permeate the headquarters, especially when Rob and Red returned.

When Rob and Red returned, they immediately made expressions of remorse and shame for their mistake. They also asked if anything could be done in order to help atone for the error. This attitude affirmed the group's discipline for their non-normative mistake. Despite their contrition, they experienced further interrogation from teammates about how they could have made the mistake in the first place. Some members of the team reached out to them, telling them not to worry about it, but only subtly, in a way that would not be observed by other members of the team and possibly evoke the harsh replies previously observed. The pressure to remain silent rather than to defend the members of the team was something I both experienced and was influenced by as well.

As the contest progressed, the mood mildly began to lighten, but Rob and Ford remained contrite, and jokes continued to be played at their expense. For example, while away from his computer a member of the team installed a browser extension that would

render Rob's computer useless. This is the type of prank that is often perpetrated throughout a 54-hour long contest to help keep the mood light. However, in light of the previous events, the prank took on a deeper tone. It was felt by many to be a suitable punishment, and upon realizing the prank had been directed his way, Rob acknowledged that he was deserving of the prank for his role in the near-catastrophe saying, "It's okay. I deserve this." His acceptance of this behavior as a response to the mistake served as a further reiteration of the value premises of the team, especially in line with the identity discourse of competition.

Self-surveillance & self-discipline. As members internalized the discursive values and decisional premises of the trivia community identity, the system of control resulted in the self-surveillance and self-regulation of members' behaviors. Above, I described how social surveillance and social pressure imposed by fellow members of the community served to both communicate and enforce the discursive expectations of the community. However, as members' identification within the community became increasingly salient, interview participants began to describe a self-monitoring of discursive prototypicality that did not require the enforcement of social peers. Below, I describe specifically how discussions with interview participants demonstrated a system in which members of the community draw upon the discourses of knowledge and competition in a process of self-surveillance and self-discipline as part of an unobtrusive control system.

One member in particular described how his internalization of the knowledge identity discourse served to inform his decisions and behaviors. He explained, "The

amount of work, the amount of preparation is weighing from time to time, but it's important to me. Like, if I had a job to know something or get notes on something, I don't want to do poorly on it. It's something I'm supposed to know, and I feel horrible if I don't get it done. We need to have that resource." This participant's statement seems to reflect how his pursuit of acquiring increasing knowledge resources is informed by his internalization of the knowledge discourse. He accepts the assumption that acquiring a vast quantity of knowledge is a noble component of his personal identity. He further articulated that not acquiring these knowledge resources would be deemed "doing poorly," describing a sense of self-surveillance and discipline about his ongoing pursuit of knowledge. This participant even explained how this pursuit can at times be something that "weighs" on him, but is an essential component of his identity, and failing to assume this burden would result in him "feeling horrible." In other words, failing to fulfill the decisional value premises associated with the knowledge discourse of his trivia identity would result in self-imposed undesirable feelings.

Another participant described how an identity discourse of competition was something they had internalized, resulting in self-surveillance and self-discipline,

[Competition] is definitely a tool I use for motivation for myself, because I do some of the stuff that I couldn't pay people money to do, and I still have to suck it up and do it, because I feel it's important for us to win...If you don't do it and something happens that we don't get the question right because of something that you said you were going to do and you didn't, that's a big motivational thing. And it's not like we don't have examples of that happening in the past where people had to witness how the team reacts when someone didn't do something they said they were going to do and then we miss the points. How horrible you'd feel.

For this participant, the motivating factor to do the work that he, “couldn’t pay people money to do,” comes down to points and the potential disappointment of being responsible for his team losing. A takeaway from this statement is how this participant described observing moments in the past when members impeded upon the competitive potential of the team. The result was disappointment and pressure from team members that resulted in the transgressor feeling horrible. This is evident in both of the examples described in the previous section. As a result of this threat of discipline, this participant draws upon an internal fear of upholding community expectations of competition to motivate himself to perform behaviors that are undesirable enough that others wouldn’t even do them if they were paid to.

One participant elaborated about how this self-surveillance and discipline is a perpetuated by the behavior and decisions of others that are praised among the community. He explained, “You know how hard others work, the time they put in. If they can put in that time, we all should be putting in that time. That motivates me.” For this participant, it is important that their effort mirrors the effort of other members of the team who are praised for fulfilling the discursive expectations of the community. A corollary of this effect is a fear of not fulfilling the discursive expectations of the community. One participant describes this fear,

Interviewer: What compels you to put in the amount of preparation and the amount of work that you put in?

Participant: I have to.

Interviewer: So what is it that makes you feel that way when you say, “I have to?”

Participant: Like, I don’t want to let – because I know that chances are if I take notes on something, it’s not – they’re not going to ask a question on it, and it’ll be useless, and I have wasted my time. But there is that

idea that if I don't take notes on something or like that if I don't do my part, that that's the one thing that they're going to ask on, and I have let the whole team down.

Echoing this concern for letting their team down, a participant from another team explained, "I don't want to be responsible for missing something we could have gotten. I don't want to let people down. I guess that is my big fear." These participants describe a fear of letting down members of their community as a motivating factor when making behavioral decisions to commit time and resources to trivia preparation. The first participant even endures a persistent sense that the work he is producing is a "waste of time," but he is still committed to dedicating his time and attention to these tasks due to a fear of letting the team down. This fear is something that many of the participants in this research project expressed. In the examples of Wendy, Rob, and Ford in the previous section, an example of the source of this fear can be observed. In this way, participants no longer have to directly surveil or discipline one another. Instead, the fear of surveillance is enough to motivate members to self-surveil and self-discipline.

Resistance

As Mumby (2005) suggests, control and resistance are "mutually implicative and coproductive" (p. 21). That is to say that systems of control imply some degree of resistance by organizational members. Whereas control describes the way discourses "shape and fix" (Mumby, 2005) meaning in a way that limits and restricts members' decisional and behavioral alternatives, resistance describes members' discursive efforts to de-stabilize these discourses. In doing so, members challenge the logic of the dominant discourses and create space for counter-discourses to emerge. Within the

WLTC community, I was able to discover four notable instances of resistance to the logic of the prevailing discourses that are drawn from defining member identities. These examples of resistance include: (1) the emergence of Trivia Unplugged, (2) the counter-discourses of the Hot Corner, (3) individuals speaking up against mechanisms of discipline, and (4) satire of prototypical community members. Below, I describe how each of these were present within the WLTC community.

Trivia Unplugged. As noted in chapter four, Trivia Unplugged emerged as an annual contest organized by members of the WLTC community to test “top-of-the-head knowledge”. In contrast to the WLTC, Trivia Unplugged necessitates that teams are present at a central location throughout the contest, and no resources are allowed when answering questions. This contest is a manifestation of the discursive tension between an internal and external definition of knowledge that persists within the WLTC community (as described in chapter four). Whereas the annual WLTC is designed in a way to favor an external definition of valuable knowledge by not regulating the resources members can make use of in answering a question, Trivia Unplugged only places value upon an internal definition of knowledge by requiring teams to answer questions using only knowledge contained within the minds of the participants.

By challenging the predominance of an external definition of knowledge, Trivia Unplugged presents decisional and behavioral alternatives that are not available within the logic of an external definition of knowledge. By increasing the worth associated with internal knowledge, members can actualize within the community without necessarily having to pursue and collect knowledge resources.

Despite challenging the external definition of knowledge and the limits it imposes on the discursive behavior of members of the community, Trivia Unplugged also reinforces other assumptions of the Knowledge discourse that are also limiting to members. For example, the questions posed at Trivia Unplugged are authored by the same authors of the WLTC. Thus, these authors remain the primary arbiters over what is deemed valuable knowledge. As established previously in this chapter, this influence informs members' decisions as they make knowledge consumption choices that align with the perceived interests of the contest organizers. Furthermore, the authors of the annual contest continue to represent a largely masculine perspective, reinforcing a definition of knowledge that favors masculine signifiers.

The Hot Corner. Earlier in this chapter, I described how the Hot Corner is a self-assigned nickname adopted by a number of players on the FFTRou trivia team. The name is derived from a location in the room in which this subset of team members sits that is geographically distanced from the most valuable knowledge resources of the team. This subgroup of the team had long been disciplined by other team members for not committing to the year-round effort of knowledge accumulation that is congruent with the prevailing definition of valuable knowledge. As a part of this discipline, a number of the members of the Hot Corner have been described using the term “Google Monkey” which is meant to playfully degrade the value of the contribution made by these members of the team.

By adopting and celebrating the moniker of the “Hot Corner”, these members of the team are engaging in a counter-discourse that serves to redefine their value to the

team and the value of the knowledge that they access. They offer a counter definition for valuable knowledge as something that is accessed efficiently in the moment rather than something that is accumulated throughout the year(s). When members of the Hot Corner adorned matching shirts featuring the face of an eagle, they communicated a unique ability seek out and uncover valuable knowledge. Furthermore, by making these shirts something that was unique to only the members of the Hot Corner, the established value in purposefully distinguishing themselves from the other members of the team. In doing so, they created a counter-identity within their subculture that possesses the power to define the value knowledge in its own way.

Defense against discipline. A third example of discursive resistance that was apparent within the WLTC community occurred during the near catastrophe described earlier in this chapter. While leaders of the team were vocally and publically disciplining the mistake made by Rob and Red, certain members of the team spoke up in defense of those team members. This included a tense exchange between one team captain and a team member resisting the value of competition that was being reinforced in this example. It also included the subtle condolences and sentiments of support offered by teammates to Rob and Red after they had returned to the team's headquarters. Speaking up in defense of these members challenged the taken-for-granted nature of the competitive discourse that was being reiterated through the discipline of their mistake. By supporting Rob and Red, members of the team demonstrated that the assumptions that are perceived within the competitive discourse of the team are not universal.

It is worth noting that one result of these exchanges was the further reinforcement of the competitive discourse. Ultimately, the members of the team that had spoken up in defense of Rob and Red acquiesced to the arguments made by team leaders. Furthermore, Rob and Red themselves accepted blame and accountability for the mistake and willingly atoned for the error by allowing themselves to be disciplined by other members of the team. In doing so, the validity of the competitive discourse was reinforced.

Satire of prototypical team members. A final source of resistance that was notable during the observations of this project was the occurrence of satire made of highly prototypical members of the community. Highly prototypical members are those in the community that are perceived as best embodying the behaviors expected of identifying members. While often praised for their embodiment of the dominant discourses, there were also instances in which the appreciation of these members was a source of satire.

One example of this satire was apparent in the exchange that often came from the row of female players on the FFTRou team who felt as though they had inequitable access to knowledge resources and that their voices too often went unheard. These participants joked of a metaphorical wall that existed between them and the team's leadership, and they also made jokes that made light of a perceived willful ignorance that was demonstrated by the team's leadership in not listening to the input of the female players consistently. An example of this resistance being veiled as humor is evident in the exchange described above in which the female member of the team jokes, "We defy

stereotypes. The women [on this team] aren't the ones always on the phone." This joke was made in response to having her access to team phone removed and installed in front of a male team captain.

The subtext of truth that was inherent in these jokes became apparent in certain circumstances in which the veil of the joke was let down. At times during the contest, members of the female contingent of the team vocalize a sincere frustration in not being heard. An example of this occurred when a team captain applauded himself for uncovering an answer that had been identified and announced moments earlier by a female member of the team. This self-adulation reflected how this particular captain had not paid attention to the contributions made by the female members of team. The result was an unveiled expression of exasperation from female members at not having their voice heard.

The satire offered in instances such as these makes light of the predominant discourses within the community. By poking fun at the exercise of these discourses, members demonstrate the fallible nature of these discourses. If they can be the source of satire, then the predominant discourses of this community are something that, at times, can be violated or even **should** be violated.

Each of the four demonstrations of resistance described above presented a challenge to the limitations imposed by the predominant discourses at work within the WLTC community. In doing so, they created space for behavior that was outside of the prescription of these discourses to be perceived not only as possible, but even, in certain circumstances, as desirable. In the examples above, challenges are made to both the

knowledge and competition discourses as well as the masculine manner in which these discourses are enacted by members of the community.

Trans-Contextual Control

In the final section of this chapter, I discuss how the trans-contextual nature of identification can result in a system of control that also spans situated context. Earlier in this chapter and in chapter two, I established the relationship that exists between identification and control (Alvesson, 1996; Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Deetz, 2003; Kunda, 1992; Tourish & Vatcha, 2005). As members of a given community enact the logic of the prevailing discourses of a community, they adopt certain values and assumptions that are inherent in those discourses. These values and assumptions serve to restrain decisional and behavioral alternatives to only those that serve to reflect the prevailing discourse. In this chapter, I build upon the theorizing in chapter five that described the trans-contextual nature of identification in the WLTC community to account for how member continue to be restrained by the decisional premises inculcated from the prevailing discourses across context. To do so, I begin by explaining how interview participants described and demonstrated beliefs and behaviors consistent with the restraints imposed by the discourses of knowledge and competition established in this chapter across their social contexts. Next, I describe how members experience the mechanisms of control including surveillance and discipline in other contexts as well. Finally, I describe how the trans-contextual nature of these identities results in control over the decisional premises of individuals who are not members of the WLTC community in other contexts.

In chapter five, I described how some members' affiliation with the WLTC community fundamentally changed the way they interpreted the world around them. As one participant explained, "It seems normal. It's something that it changes the things you focus on and how you think about the world. These different things catch your attention that you wouldn't have paid attention to before." He goes on to explain, "It's just so ingrained into that entire culture that it just becomes more commonplace...you forget the rest of the world doesn't think that way or notice those things." In these statements, this participant expresses how his relationship with the WLTC has altered the way he perceives the world. In particular he notices details in the world around him that he would otherwise fail to observe. This is consistent with the logic of the prevailing definition of a knowledge discourse within the WLTC community as described in chapter four. Furthermore, in these statements, this participant articulates how this way of thinking is something that permeates the contexts of his life, it informs the way he perceives his entire world. This is consistent with an interpretation of the control system as something that spans context. This participant exhibits behavior consistent with the assumptions of the knowledge discourse in the way he interprets his world in all contexts. Additionally, he explained how this way of thinking is something that has become "normal" across the "entire culture" of the WLTC community.

The result of the trans-contextual adoption of the decisional and behavioral premises of the identity discourses of the WLTC community is limiting of decisional alternatives in the various contexts of one's social life. Examples of such behavior are evident throughout chapter five as I described how participant's behavior was informed

by the discourses of the WLTC community across contexts. For example, multiple participants described how their decision to buy a specific house was informed by the interests of their trivia team. These participants described how they favored houses that had features that were consistent with the discourses of knowledge and competition. In this way, their decision was limited by the decisional premises of the discourses of the WLTC community. A participant described another example of this effect as she was shopping for groceries with her daughters. She explained, “You know, [we go] grocery shopping [and they’re] like, ‘Oh, Mom, look at that. [It’s] limited edition packaging. We better buy it.’” In this example, the participant described how the choice of what groceries to buy was informed by the interests of trivia for both her and her daughters. Additional examples of decisions made in other contexts that were informed by the logic of the discourses of the trivia community included members choosing when to use their vacation days at work to serve the interests of trivia, members describing how they watch television and movies with a notepad or an open laptop in order to document notes, and choosing what university to attend in order to serve their trivia interests. In each of these examples, members’ decisions are informed by the discourses of the trivia contest, beyond the context of the community itself.

Earlier in this chapter, I described how mechanisms of surveillance and discipline manifested within the community to control member behavior and reinforce the logic of the prevailing discourses. A couple of members described how these mechanisms of surveillance and discipline were also evident in contexts outside of the WLTC community. Specifically, these participants described how non-trivia players in

the context of their paid employment would expect these participants to continue to enact the discourses of their trivia identity. As noted in chapter five, one participant explained,

I have been tagged as ‘that trivia guy.’ [Co-workers are] like “Oh, he’s really into trivia.”...I guess sometimes it can get annoying. Like if someone will bring up a random quote from a movie or a random lyric. They will ask you, “have you seen that movie?” or, “do you know what song that is?” If you don’t know it, then they’re like, “Oh, come on, this is trivia.” They’re like, “You’re a world trivia champion, you should know this.”

Another participant described a similar experience, she explained,

At work – I work at the university where the contest is run from. And so, that’s become like the thing that I’m known for in my office, because our team has been so successful. Like when we interview new people like for Hall Directors, and – [the candidates are] always like, “What’s one thing that is different about like the university?” and my co-workers are always expecting me to say, “Well, Trivia.”...At work, that’s really what – that’s how they see me as like the trivia person.

In both of these examples, participants described how they have become known to trivia outsiders by their trivia identities. Subsequently, their coworkers expect them to exhibit behaviors that are consistent with their trivia knowledge. In doing so, their co-workers act as a sort of surveillance, testing these participants’ knowledge and expecting them to always be representing their trivia identity. Furthermore, as noted in the first explanation, failure to adequately fulfill this expectation results in a discipline, as their coworkers respond by saying things like, “Oh come on... You should know this.” In this way, the mechanisms of surveillance and discipline also span beyond the situated context of the trivia community.

Similar to how individuals outside of the trivia context can act as mechanisms of surveillance and discipline in contexts external to the WLTC community, non-community members can also experience the limitations imposed by the behavioral and decisional premises of the discourses that are spanning context. In chapter five, I demonstrated how members of the WLTC continue to draw upon the discourses of their trivia identity across a number of social contexts. Furthermore, I explained how these discourses serve to shape the nature of the various situated contexts as well. In doing so, these discourses can serve to limit the decisional and behavioral alternatives of social actors across these various contexts. A number of examples of this occurring were evident in chapter five. For example, one participant explained how his wife, who does not play trivia, found herself helping him take apart and categorize cereal boxes. When the participant asked his wife, “Did you [ever] see yourself doing this?”, she responded that she, “probably would have run.” In this example, the participant’s wife performs behavior consistent with the decisional premises of the trivia community, despite not being a member of the community herself. Other examples of this effect were apparent as member described how they reinforced the discourses of the trivia community in their children or their students. In these examples, members of the community imposed the discourses of their identity as a trivia player upon individuals external to the community. In doing so, they altered the behavior of those participants as their children participated in taking notes or students practiced their typing by typing up trivia notes. In this way, the system of control described in this chapter spanned context not only for members of the trivia community, but for other social actors across these contexts as well.

In this chapter, I described how the discourses of knowledge and competition, as established in chapter four, shaped and limited members' decisional and behavioral alternatives. Specifically, the resources of these discourses inculcated certain decisional premises in members that unobtrusively limited the decisional alternatives available to members of the WLTC community. Furthermore, consistent with the theorizing of concertive and cultural control established in chapter two, members of the community described mechanisms of member surveillance and discipline that served to reinforce these decisional premises. Ultimately, as members internalized these decisional premises and developed a fear of their peers' discipline, members expressed feelings and behaviors consistent with self-surveillance and self-discipline.

However, I was also able to observe instances of resistance that challenged the logic of the predominant identity discourses. This is consistent with the dualistic relationship that exists between control and resistance as described in chapter two. These instances of resistance served the function of challenging the legitimacy of the predominant discourses and creating space for counter-discourses to emerge.

Finally, I drew upon the trans-contextual nature of member identification described in chapter five to inform the system of control observed within this community. Scholars have long linked identification with theories of control. Thus, it stands to reason that an experience of identification that spans contexts would beget a system of control that could also transcend context. Subsequently, I reported how members expressed beliefs and behaviors that were demonstrative of the decisional premises of the control system transcending social context. As a result, members

continued to be limited in their discursive alternatives to the narrow logic allowed by the identity discourses of the trivia community even in contexts that exist outside of the community. Furthermore, by informing the nature of other social contexts, these discourses also informed the decisional premises of members external to the WLTC community. In this way, even members who do not directly identify as members of the community were also influenced by the system of control.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

I approached this investigation by posing the following research questions:

Research Question 1: How do members of a community define, enact, and negotiate the discursive resources and logics of their salient identities?

Research Question 2: Are, and in what ways are, the discursive resources and logics of a salient identity enacted across social contexts?

Research Question 3: Are, and in what ways are, control and resistance a function of identification across social contexts?

I addressed each of these questions in the preceding three analysis chapters. In chapter four, I identified knowledge and competition as the dominant discourses that emerged as members enacted their trivia identities. Furthermore, in chapter four, I described the resources and logics of each discourse and how they informed the experience of identification for the participants of this project and how member interactions reiterated and renegotiated each of these discourses. In chapter five, I introduced the concept of trans-contextual identification to describe how members of this community draw upon the resources and logics of the established identity discourses beyond the confines of the situated context of the WLTC community. Furthermore, I demonstrated how these discourses actually shaped the various contexts in which members continued to enact their trivia identity. Lastly, in chapter six, I delved into the relationship that exists between members' identification in the WLTC community and control. I drew upon theorizing of concertive control and identity regulation to uncover how decisional

premises are inculcated from the logic of the prevailing discourses and how these premises are reinforced through concertive and personal surveillance and discipline. I also explained how the manifestation of the dominant discourses emerged in gendered ways that served to limit the ways members identified and behaved within the community in a masculine-centered way. Finally, I described how the trans-contextual process of identification members experienced resulted in the manifestation of trans-contextual control.

In this chapter, I will outline the theoretical and local contributions I have made with this project. I will then reflect upon my methodological commitments and how they informed my methodological choices, interpretations, and reporting. Finally, I will discuss areas for future research in the subject areas of identification, context, and control as well as within the community of participants in the World's Largest Trivia Contest (WLTC).

Contributions

With this project, I have sought to better understand how our particularly-salient group, organizational, and community identities are expressed and enacted across our various social contexts. This was an important endeavor, because the expression of salient identities across contexts can be observed in all walks of life. I began this dissertation with a discussion of how fundamentalist believers, activists, and nationalists are prime examples of how salient community identities can have profound impacts beyond their contexts. The results of this trans-contextual expression of identification can be profound in both negative and positive ways. For this reason, it is important that

we gain a better understanding for how members of such communities co-create and negotiate the discursive resources of their shared identities, how the logic of these resources permeates beyond situated context shaping the other facets of our lives, and the wide-reaching impact trans-contextual identifying can have on individuals' decisions and behavior. In order to ask these questions and pursue their answers, I turned to a community of trivia players who identify with particular salience as a collective. My relationship to this community provided me with unique access to understand this experience of identification.

In pursuit of a greater understanding of this phenomenon, I drew upon the predominant theorizing of a discursive approach to studying identity (Alvesson et al., 2008; Alvesson & Karreman, 2000; Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004; Scott et al., 2008) which highlights the identification process as being (a) a product of mutually constitutive relationships that exist between systems of meaning and members behavior and interactions, (b) socially constructed, (c) plural, and (d) an ongoing process. Furthermore, I considered how the practice of identity work serves to inform the exercise of identifying in both an intentional and unconscious manner (Wieland, 2010). Next, I investigated the current theorizing about the relationship that exists between context and identification, and I drew from three theories that have sought to explain how individuals draw from the logic of their salient identities across contexts from three different levels of abstraction: professional identity (extraorganizational), deep structure identity (organizational), and narrative self-identity (local). I also drew upon theorizing of concertive control and identity regulation (Alvesson, 1996; Alvesson et al., 2008;

Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Ashcraft, 2005; Deetz, 2003; Kunda, 1992; Larson & Pepper, 2003; Tourish & Vatcha, 2005) to inform how the process of identification serves to inculcate decisional premises, surveil member behavior, and discipline non-normative behavior reinforcing compliance. Within this body of research, I have made six contributions that I have grouped in two categories, theoretical contributions and local contributions. Below, I elaborate on the contributions made in each of these categories.

Theoretical contributions. In this project, I describe theoretical contributions as those made by advancing and providing nuance to the prevailing theories of our discipline. Specifically, I identify four theoretical contributions made by this project: (1) I demonstrated how the resources and logics of identity discourses are evolving and negotiated among members of a unique community, (2) I informed the theorizing of communities of practice in terms of identification and its relationship to knowledge management by conducting an interpretive investigation of how knowledge, as an identity discourse, was defined, negotiated, and enacted, (3) I provided nuance to the way we think about context and identification by considering the way our various social contexts are shaped by our enactment of trans-contextual identification, and (4) I extend theorizing about concertive control and identity regulation by describing processes of control as products of identity discourses within the WLTC community and considering how the trans-contextual nature of these identities broadens the reach of the control system beyond the confines of the organization.

The evolution of identity discourses. With this research project, I was able to provide unique access to the experience of identification among members of an exclusive community of trivia players. This community of trivia players expressed a profound identification with a collective that shared unique beliefs about the world and demonstrated uncommon behaviors. Insider access is important to obtaining an informed understanding of how members draw upon identity discourses, how those discourses are defined, and how those discourses evolve. A discourse of knowledge within the community proved to be a particularly meaningful and distinguishing one. Participants drew upon a discourse of knowledge in ways that are uncommon to individuals whom are external to the organization. In particular members valued a breadth of knowledge of a depth of knowledge, and they demonstrated an interest in minutiae over academic information. Furthermore, participants routinely expressed a relationship with knowledge acquisition that was ever-present and changed the way they interpreted the world around them.

An important contribution of this study was the description of how the discourse of knowledge has evolved over time in response, most notably, to technological advances and member negotiations. Through this project, I have demonstrated how the logic of the discourse of knowledge within the WLTC community had evolved from valuing an internal definition of knowledge, to valuing an external definition of knowledge in the wake of the internet. The prevalence of an external definition of knowledge gave priority to knowledge resources that could be readily accessible as opposed to an internal definition of knowledge that favored knowledge that members

could immediately recall from their memory. The social and material results of this transition were also noted. Socially, members strategized about knowledge accumulation and categorization, and the practice of participating in the annual contest served as a discursive reiteration of this logic as participants responded to each question by turning to acquired resources to seek out an answer (whether on the internet, in a book, or contained within a meticulously catalogued collection of cereal boxes). Materially, this external definition of knowledge was apparent within the headquarters of each team. These headquarters featured bookshelves, record collections, collections of product packaging, and sophisticated networking systems that provided for optimal internet and database access.

In response to this discursive evolution, interview participants explained how their teams resisted and adapted to the evolving definition of knowledge within the community. Some teams explained how this transition allowed them to flourish, while other explained how it resulted in them floundering. Furthermore, this project has set the stage for the future discursive expression of this tension by juxtaposing an event such as Trivia Unplugged which exclusively rewards internal knowledge and a team such as Trivial Pursuit that epitomizes an external definition of knowledge.

Subsequently, this investigation provided a meaningful insight into how social interaction within a community, as described by Alvesson et al. (2008), serves the purpose to, “create, threaten, bolster, reproduce and overhaul” (p. 11) the dominant meaning systems at work. The mutually-constitutive discursive process of identifying (Alvesson et al., 2008, Alvesson & Karreman, 2000; Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004; Scott et

al., 1998) can be observed through a decades-long evolution. Through this evolution, participants have explained how the community has fundamentally changed. Additionally, participants described how the debate over the value of internal versus external knowledge continues to play out through members' social interactions. It becomes apparent how this discourse informs and restrains members behavior while simultaneously being "create[d], threaten[ed], bolster[ed], reproduce[d] and overhaul[ed]" (Alvesson et al., 2008, p. 11) through members' social interactions. Thus, with this project, I am able to provide a meaningful insight into how a unique community performs the process of identifying discursively and the long term evolution of one such discourse.

Lastly, while there is value in the investigation of this community due to its uniqueness, this research project also offers a broader theoretical appeal. While the findings and implications of this research project are not meant to be generalizable, given the very specific population under investigation, the members' telling of their story is intended to be relatable. This is to say that the existence of unique groups, organizations, and communities of practice that provoke particularly-salient identification that spans social context is something that many can relate to whether it be in their occupation, organizations, or any other community of practice similar to the community under investigation in this project. Many readers will be able to relate to the stories told through this project and, subsequently, will have a new theoretical perspective through which to interpret and interrogate the way they identify trans-contextually and the implications of control that result from that process of

identification. Furthermore, communities like those used in the introduction of this project demonstrate that the trans-contextual expression of identity can have wide-reaching social and political impact on our society. This project provides a lens through which to interpret how individuals enact the discourses of their particularly salient identities beyond their situated context.

Communities of practice. In chapter two, I established how research into knowledge management has turned to communities of practice in order to better understand how collectives prioritize, organize, and access knowledge. Research into communities of practice has identified ‘practice’ as being central to issues such as learning and knowledge management. Some scholars have also established the link that exists between the activities of practice and identification. In this project, I have theorized the activities of practice as being a site of identity work. Practice serves as both the conscious and unconscious enactment of identity discourses within a community.

With this project, I have contributed to the study of communities of practice in two ways. First, I provided an interpretive study of ‘practice’ (identity work) that contains rich detail about the processes of practice. Research into communities of practice have been noted as being largely quantitative. While a quantitative approach can help researchers make predictions about issues such as learning or knowledge management within communities of practice, they do not capture the actual PROCESSES at work as members engage in PRACTICE. With this project, I am able to provide a rich description of both long-term and immediate enactments of the

PRACTICE itself. In chapter four, I describe how teams engage in the practice of knowledge collection, organization, and access throughout their daily lived experience. Additionally, I provide insight into the efficient access of vast knowledge systems while under stress and brief time limits. Wenger (1998) described the three characteristics of communities of practice as (1) a mutual engagement with a specific problem or purpose which includes the sharing of knowledge, (2) negotiation of joint enterprise providing purpose to the community members, and (3) a shared repertoire of discursive resources which includes “stories, jargon, theories, forms, and other resources from a stock of understood information and techniques that can be utilized by members” (Iverson & McPhee, 2002, p.262). Each of these characteristics are notably interactive processes. They are things members of a community DO. With this project, I am able to describe how a specific community actually performed each of this characteristics, how they actually DID them. In doing so, this research can better present the lived experience of members of a community of practice. Additionally, it can inform the quantitative analyses that have previously been conducted by offering insight into the actual experience of practice, rather than merely its result.

Second, this project responds to the criticism of over-emphasizing situated context that has been levied against theorists of communities of practice. Handley et al. (2006), articulated this criticism stating,

Wenger portrays a picture of the compartmentalization of practices (one for each community setting), arguing that learning (and therefore, identity) is fully situated with little possibility of transfer or translation across contexts. Yet, if knowledge is to transfer across communities then Wenger’s portrayal of the compartmentalization of practice is highly problematic” (p. 647).

With this project, I respond to the problematic compartmentalization that has theorized communities of practice as being an exclusively local phenomenon. While Handley et al. (2006) contended that learning and knowledge are able to transcend context, I have demonstrated how identity and the enactment of identity discourses can occur across context.

Trans-contextual identification. Theorizing about the plural nature of our social and organizational identities dates back to Burke (1941) who explained that one's individual identity is the result of our multiple collective relationships. He contends that, "The so-called 'I' is merely a unique combination of partially conflicting corporate 'we's'" (p. 307). Since Burke promoted the idea of our sense of self being the product of numerous "corporate 'we's'," identity theorists have often theorized about the role of situated context making one of our identities more or less salient (Scott et al., 1998) and the relationship that exists between our various identities (Alvesson et al., 2008; Larson & Pepper, 2003) in terms of either being integrated (discursively aligned) or fragmented (discursively in conflict). However, little theorizing has considered or demonstrated how particularly-salient identities have the capacity to span their situated context, remaining salient to a social actor even across their various social and organizational contexts. In this project, I sought to better understand how the established identity discourses of knowledge and competition influenced the way members interacted socially and made decisions beyond the situated context of the WLTC community. This provides some greater nuance into the way we think about the relationship that exists

between identity and context and the way we manage our various identities, whether integrated or fragmented.

In chapter two, I drew upon the theories of professional identity, deep structure identity, and narrative self-identity as theories that had previously considered how individuals enact certain identities across context. The concept of trans-contextual identification provides nuance to these three theoretical approaches in three ways. First, it can be used to explain trans-contextual identifying across all three levels of abstraction. Professional identity operates at an extraorganizational level, deep structure identity operates at an organizational level, and narrative self-identity operates at a personal level. In contrast, trans-contextual identification can be used to describe identifying that occurs within and across these three levels of abstraction. For example, when applied to the trivia community under investigation in this project, the extraorganizational level of abstraction (professional identity) can be conceived of as members' identification as trivia players, the organizational level of abstraction (deep-structure identity) can be conceived of as members' belonging to the WLTC community or even their specific trivia teams, and at a personal level (narrative self-identity) can be conceived of as the story that is told through members trivia knowledge or their history with playing trivia.

A second meaningful nuance of the trans-contextual approach is that it describes the enactment of discourses in contexts completely dislocated from their origin. Much of the literature from the professional identity and deep structure identity approaches continue to describe identifying of members engaged in the activity of their organization

or occupation. For example Lammers and Garcia (2009) describe how employees at a veterinarian call-center identify more-strongly as veterinarians than as members of that specific organization. In this example, the participants of the study are still engaged in the practice of veterinary science. In contrast, participants explained how they enacted their trivia identities in seemingly unrelated contexts.

A third nuance of this approach is the focus on the dualistic relationship that exists between identity and context. As established earlier in chapter two, much research has noted the role context plays in shaping what identities are enacted within a given setting and how they are enacted. However, little research has looked at how our various group, organizational, and community identities inform the many contexts of our social life. I develop this dualistic relationship in the spirit of narrative self-identity as described by Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003). In their example of H, we can observe how her previously lived experience on an isolated farm has informed how she identifies as manager within her organization. In this way, her more-enduring self-identity informs the various contexts of her lived experience. With trans-contextual identification, I extend this theorizing to our more relational identities that are derived from our particularly salient group, organizational, and community memberships.

The trans-contextual nature of members' identification within the WLTC community became apparent as participants described and demonstrated their use of the identity discourses of the WLTC community across their varied social contexts. Most notably, I was able to observe members mediating social relationships and applying the discursive logics of their trivia identity in the contexts of their paid employment,

education, family relationships, romantic relationships, and when making major life-altering decisions including their purchase of homes, consumption of entertainment, and consumption of other consumer goods. In each of these examples, members were not merely confronting the demands of potentially fragmented identities and having to reconcile their discursive differences. Instead, members' identification as trivia players and members of the WLTC community actually played a role in informing the situated contexts of their various other social identities. One example of this phenomenon was apparent when observing how participants' continued to draw upon their trivia identity when in their paid employment environment. Participants described how their relationships with employers and co-workers were informed by their identity as a trivia player. The way these individuals socially interacted in the workplace was mediated by their identity as trivia players. Participants described how they were treated differently by co-workers and how co-workers expected them to behave in a way consistent with their trivia identities. As such, their identity as a trivia player did not simply remain salient across social contexts, it actually informed the way the individuals interacted within these social contexts.

Furthermore, participants described ways in which others who were not members of the WLTC community were influenced by the discourses of the WLTC community in external contexts. Examples of this effect are apparent throughout the analysis provided above as members of the WLTC describe how they apply logics of the dominant identity discourses to the contexts of raising their children, relating to their loved ones, educating their children, finding and practicing paid employment, and making major lifestyle

decisions that impact both the participants and those they associate with. By applying the logics of the identity discourses across social contexts, individuals who are not directly associated with the WLTC community are also affected (i.e., children, spouses, sibling, students, co-workers, employers, etc.). In this way, we are able to think about the relationship that exists between context and identity in a nuanced way. Not only does context inform the way we identify, with trans-contextual identification our identities actively inform our various contexts and its other social actors.

Identity discourses and control across context. A number of scholars have investigated the link that exists between identification and control with a specific emphasis on less obtrusive forms of control such as concertive control and identity regulation (Alvesson, 1996; Alvesson et al., 2008; Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Ashcraft, 2005; Deetz, 2003; Kunda, 1992; Larson & Pepper, 2003; Tourish & Vatcha, 2005). Much of this work is rooted in theorizing about how social actors are limited to the resources of the prevailing meaning system (Ashcraft, 2005). Subsequently, as members of a community identify with that community, they are limited to the available discursive resources when defining themselves, defining others, and interacting socially. Scholars have approached the discursive limitation imposed upon identifying members of a community from the perspective of cultural engineering (Alvesson, 1996; Kunda, 1992) and systems of concertive control.

Deetz (2005) describes the strategic process of cultural engineering by explaining how, “the willing assent of employees is engineered through the production of the normalcy of specific beliefs and practices” (p. 35). Subsequently, the tenets of the

prevailing identity discourses become naturalized for organizational members, and the result is the belief that behavior that contradicts these tenets is deemed unnatural or deviant. This effect becomes apparent within the observations made in the preceding three chapters as members of the WLTC community describe how the community's unique definition of knowledge and competition become normalized. The result is a profound impact on member behavior which results, for example, in the meticulous accumulation and categorization of knowledge resources derived from media, notes, packaging, etc. Beyond the boundaries of this community such behavior may be deemed unnatural¹⁸. However, within the logic of the identity discourses at work in the WLTC community, this behavior has been naturalized, and the unsatisfactory performance of these discourses is often publically disciplined, such as in the example of Wendy, the participant from my own team, whom was “shamed” for not having submitted the notes she was supposed to have taken during the year on time.

Larson and Pepper (2003), extended theorizing on cultural engineering by contending that social actors are, “not simply passive receivers...but are active participants in the constructing and reconstructing of their identities” (p. 532). As such, the authors contend that members have the agency to choose which meaning systems they are willing to adopt and perpetuate. Furthermore, given the mutually-constitutive nature of identity discourses, members play an active role to “create, threaten, bolster, reproduce and overhaul” (Alvesson et al., p. 11) how these discourses are defined and

¹⁸ In popular culture, similar behavior has been described as “hoarding” and diagnosed as an unnatural psychological disorder.

how they inform our beliefs and decisional premises. As outlined above, the ongoing tension over the priority of an internal versus an external definition of knowledge is a demonstration of the agency members have in their own cultural system of control. While participants who have advocated on behalf of an internal definition of knowledge have been forced to adapt to the tenets of an external definition of knowledge in order to remain competitive in the WLTC, some members have fought to challenge the assumptions of this approach to knowledge by creating a separate competition which forbids the use of external knowledge resources. In this way, members of the community have demonstrated agency in the construction of the identity discourses that serve to culturally normalize beliefs and control members' behavior.

Theories of concertive control have emerged as a second line of theorizing meant to address the relationship between identity and control specifically within team environments (Barker, 1993; Barker & Cheney, 1994; Barker & Tompkins, 1994; DiSanza & Bullis, 1999; Kunda, 1992; Papa, Auwal & Singhal, 1997; Simon, 1976; Tomkins & Cheney, 1985). Similar to the theorizing of cultural engineering, theories of concertive control suggest that identifying members are restricted in their beliefs and behaviors by the tenets of the prevailing systems of meaning. However, theories of concertive control contend that the decisional premises contained within the dominant discourses of a group are subtly controlled by group leadership, and members' identification with the group/team/organization represents the adoption of these value premises. Tompkins and Cheney (1985) explain, "A decision maker identifies with an organization when he or she desires to choose the alternative that best promotes the

perceived interests of that organization” (p. 194). Furthermore, theories of concertive control have described in greater detail how organizational members internalize the value premises communicated by the prevailing knowledge system, normalize these value premises, and ultimately codify the decisional premises (Barker, 1993). However, these codified norms end up creating a more-constraining system of control than a traditional bureaucratic control system, because the authors and arbiters of these codified norms are not limited to organizational leadership. Instead, Tompkins and Cheney (1985) argue that members are surveilled and disciplined by all other team members rather than a single supervisor.

As a team-based competition, the WLTC provides a compelling backdrop to observe the effects of a concertive control system. Within the analysis provided in the preceding chapters, I was able to describe examples of a system of concertive control at work. Specifically the observations made of my own team in the months leading up to and during the 2014 WLTC provide examples of the strategic communication of value premises from team leadership, the normalizing of these premises among group members, and the discipline of non-normative behavior by organizational members. For example, the team’s leadership makes use of email messages, personal interactions, and spreadsheets that serve as a public work record for each of the group members. Team captain’s emails often perpetuated themes that reinforced a specific interpretation of the dominant identity discourses of knowledge and competition. Additionally, one captain publically proclaimed and evaluated the receipt of team member contributions in the hours that led up to the 2015 contest. Each of these acts can be perceived as the

inculcation of value premises by team leadership. Simultaneously, team leaders and members alike expounded about how the leadership does not “force” or “make” anyone do work. Work is not “assigned” by the teams’ captains, each member chooses themselves to contribute. Similar behavior became evident in conversations with players across multiple teams as well. A common refrain among interview participants was that no one on the team requires team members to do work, and no projects are “assigned”. However, participants often spoke about how they would feel compelled to do jobs they would otherwise find undesirable for fear of letting down their teammates. Furthermore, multiple participants communicated designations that existed to label the more and less normative members of the organization. This was sometimes manifest in the form of seating locations, access to specific resources, and even direct labeling such as “Google Monkey”. The regular denial of the existence of the system of control demonstrates the truly unobtrusive nature of it.

Resistance to the concertive systems of control at work within the WLTC community was also evident. Mumby (2005) suggests that control and resistance are “mutually implicative and coproductive” (p. 21) meaning that control cannot exist without also necessarily implying that resistance exists. Furthermore, both control and resistance produce the other. That is to say, without control there is nothing to resist against, and without resistance, there is no need for control. In describing this dialectic of control, Mumby identifies control as attempts to limit discursive alternatives, as described within the community of the WLTC contest in the above discussion. In contrast, resistance represents the discursive efforts aimed at de-stabilizing systems of

meaning which limit member interactions. These means of resistance are apparent within the WLTC community in more and less formal ways (Prasad & Prasad, 2000). For example, in an effort to resist decisional premises that compel team members to work throughout the year to competitively acquire knowledge resources, a portion of the Festivus for the Rest of Us team has embraced their designation as “Google Monkeys” a term that was initially meant to be derogatory and discipline the non-normative behavior. This group of participants embraced their skills as web surfers as their primary contribution to the team’s annual effort and created a counter-label, the “Hot Corner”. The participants have formed a counter identity meant to destabilize the prevailing discourses of knowledge and competition. Instead, this group perpetuates a discourse that establishes value in the more casual participant on the team.

In chapter five, I demonstrated how the process of identifying within the WLTC community spans social contexts. I built upon this theorizing in chapter six, by explaining how the reach of identity regulation and the concertive system of control also spanned the situated context of the community. This provides a compelling nuance in the consideration of the theorizing about cultural and concertive control. It opens up the theoretical potential for us to consider how members’ beliefs, values, and behavior are influenced by their group, organizational, and community identities not only within the container of those relationships, but across their social lives. In the case of participants in the WLTC, I observed how members’ decisional premises continued to be influenced by the identity discourses that would span context. Furthermore, individuals external to

the WLTC community continued to apply surveillance and discipline and mechanisms of control across these social contexts.

Going forward, researchers that consider the implications of cultural and concertive control systems in groups, organizations, and communities should consider the broader trans-contextual implications of the control system. This will require that researchers ask questions about how members' lives are influenced beyond the container of their organization, how surveillance and discipline operate beyond the bounds of the situated context, how members' other social contexts are informed by the discourses and decisional premises of the control system, and how other social actors are impacted through the inculcation of premises, surveillance of behavior, and discipline of non-normative behavior. Additionally, by providing a trans-contextual lens to the interpretation of cultural and concertive control systems, we can better understand the role of resistance beyond the confines of situated context.

Local contributions. An important component of the reflexive practice of ethnographic participant observation is mindfulness about how the community under investigation is being impacted by the research being conducted. The collection, analysis, and reporting of data will have a necessary impact on the ongoing social processes of the community. As such, it was essential that I was mindful of the impact I had on the WLTC community while conducting this project. With that in mind, I have made two important contributions that are local to the WLTC community: (1) I have created a medium through which highly identifying members of this unique community can articulate the meaningful components and processes of their identification to the

WLTC community and (2) I have provided a theoretical lens through which members can better understand the way they identify as members of the WLTC community and the implications of this identification from a critical perspective that exposes discursive limitations of community members. The first of these concerns audiences external to the WLTC community and how they interpret the identity and behavior of these participants. The second of these provides a benefit to the community by providing them with tools through which to better interpret their identification as members of the WLTC community and its broader implications. Below, I will describe the nature of these contributions and how they might inform the WLTC community going forward.

The first practical contribution of this project has been the establishment of a medium through which members of the WTLC community are able to tell their own story. The WLTC community draws upon identity discourses in a way that is unique to those outside of the community. Subsequently, their behavior can be interpreted as non-normative at best and deviant at worst. Examples of this were apparent in news media that reported on the contest and its participants. For example, the newspaper for the university that hosts the annual contest described the contest and its participants as “the craziest” and “most nerdy” (Hanson, 2012). Given this, this project has served as an important resource for members of the WTLC community to articulate the logic behind their identity discourses and subsequent behaviors. Through this project, I am able to provide a systematic means through which strongly-identifying members of the community were able to contribute to the meaning-making process that describes

participants in the WLTC. This has an inherent value, because it provides a population with a voice with which it can articulate its own purpose, meaning, and worth.

Additionally, by allowing members of this unique community to tell their story, I enrich the experience of those who hear their story. The community under investigation is unique, because there are very few contests like the WLTC in the world, and there are perhaps none that engender such a strongly-identifying community of players. In line with the definition of a discourse of knowledge provided in chapter four, I ascribe to a value that argues that knowledge for the sake of knowledge is, itself, valuable. Thus, gaining insight into the experience of a unique community is inherently enriching.

The second local contribution I have made with this project is that I have provided theoretical resources through which members of the WLTC community can better understand their membership within the community. This project has sought to interpret the behavior and beliefs of participants through a critical interpretive lens focused on the processes of discursive identification of community members. Specifically, this project has sought to provide a greater understanding to the manner in which participants' identities as members of this community impact the varying facets of their social lives in meaningful ways. Both participants and members of the broader population under investigation will hopefully be able to relate to the experiences shared in this project and the interpretive lens applied to these experiences. By relating to these experiences, members will be prompted to more critically assess the meaning, value, and implications of their membership to this community. In this way, I am able to draw

upon my resources as a researcher to contribute to the understanding of fellow members of this trivia community.

Finally, I also draw attention to concerns of control and discursive limitations that are apparent among members of the WLTC community. Specifically, I have highlighted instances of concertive control which have resulted in potentially intrusive means of surveillance and discipline resulting in the unobtrusive control of members' behavior. Furthermore, I have highlighted how the manifestation of the dominant discourses of knowledge and competition have emerged in a largely masculinity-centric way. This limits the discursive resources of male and female participants alike by restricting the discursive tools of community members to those that exist within a masculine logic. Uncovering these potential sources of discursive limitations within the WLTC community contributes to the establishment of counter-discourses that can challenge, resist, and even replace the more limiting and restrictive structures at work within the community. Thus, with "emancipation" (as the enlightenment of both restrictive discourses and discursive alternatives) being the ultimate goal of the critical scholar, this project has contributed to this greater project.

Methodological Considerations and Limitations

There are important reflexive considerations a researcher must make whenever collecting, analyzing, and reporting data (Cunliffe, 2003; Tracy, 2013). At the outset of this project, I embraced ontological and epistemological assumptions that suggest that knowledge and reality are social constructions, products of our ongoing interactions and interpretations. Furthermore, as a critical scholar, I acknowledge the inherently political

nature of our social construction, and I endeavor to uncover a system of oppression and create space for counter-discourses that can challenge these structures. Subsequently, I established three reflexive implications of my methodological commitments. First, I reject the ideal of the “objective researcher”, acknowledging that I carry assumptions as a product of my own embodied, lived experience into the research project. These assumptions color the data I collect, the manner in which I interpret it, and the lens through which I report my findings. Second, as a socially interactive process, I acknowledge that my presence within the research community influences how members relate to one another and subsequently the way they negotiate meaning and knowledge. This has both a methodological implications by influencing the data that emerges as well as ethical implications by altering the lived experiences of the subjects of this investigation. Finally, the relationship that exists between me, as a researcher, and the “subjects” of this research is irrevocably political (Kauffman, 1992). By writing for dissemination, I possess “the power of representation” (Kauffman, 1992, p. 187), meaning that it is my version of reality that will be perpetuated at the conclusion of this project. Subsequently, it is essential that I acknowledge this relationship, and assume the obligation of exercising my research in an ethical manner that endeavors to maintain the fidelity of participants’ voices.

Stemming from these three implications, three essential questions emerge which warrant addressing during this discussion: (1) How have my existing assumptions, particularly as a member of the WLTC community, impacted the design of this project, my process of data collection and analysis, and the reporting of my findings?; (2) How

did my presence as a researcher impact the population under investigation?; and (3) How have I addressed the political nature of the relationship that exists between me, as a researcher, and the participants of this research as subjects under investigation?. Below, I address each of these questions in turn, reflecting on how they impacted the results of this project and the community this project endeavored to study. Additionally, I will consider how my insider status within the WLTC community has positively informed the process of this project.

My pre-existing assumptions. My existing experience within the WLTC community has certainly informed the development of this project from beginning to end. The inspiration for this project was bred from the relationships I have maintained and interactions I have exchanged within the community under investigation. Through the combined lens of my researcher and community member status, I was able to interpret that there was something interesting and meaningful about the ways members in this community identified. These observations contributed to the formation of the research questions that guided the data collection and analysis of this project. Through an assumption about the unique way in which members of this community identified, I ventured to investigate how the prevailing identity discourses work, the implications of these discourses in terms of systems of cultural and concertive control, and the manner in which participants identified as members of this community across their social contexts.

Subsequently, these assumptions also informed the manner in which data was collected in two ways. First, research sites were chosen and interview participants were

identified based upon a pursuit of investigating the discursive process of identifying for individuals who identify strongly with the WLTC community. This narrowed the field of investigation to a subset of the broader trivia community to only those who express a particularly meaningful relationship with trivia and the WLTC. Second, while largely open-ended the conversations were in some ways informed by my particular interest in better understanding the processes of identification of participants. Furthermore, during data collection, my frame of reference was inalienably one of a member of the WLTC community. Thus, certain assumptions that I may take for granted as a member of the community may appear to be less natural to someone outside of the community. This certainly informed the way I interacted with research participants.

Finally, the interpretation of field notes, interview transcripts, and textual data was framed from the perspective of an insider to the community. This offered certain benefits as I was able to interpret interactions with the knowledge of the context in which they occurred in a way an outsider may not. However, things that seemed natural and rudimentary to me, as a long-time member of the community, may have emerged as more meaningful to someone with outsider status and an outsider frame of reference.

While providing some benefits that I will elaborate later, these pre-existing assumptions posed some necessary limitations as well. It is worth noting that all research is conducted from a frame of reference, and thus necessarily suffers from the same limitations in different ways. All researchers carry into their research site pre-existing assumptions about both the communities and topics under investigation. My

personal frame of reference has colored this data due to my relationship with WLTC community and my personal identification as a member of that community.

Subsequently, my interpretations may have framed certain data as being more natural than an outsider may have interpreted it. Additionally, in an effort to maintain a positive sense of personal identity, my interpretations may have been biased to a more positive interpretation of the interactions that occurred, particularly when concerning the contributions and observations of my own team and its members. Since my personal sense of self is tied to the evaluations I make about the communities I belong to, I may have been biased to interpret this particular community in a more positive light than I may have if I were not also an identifying member of the community. While this is a potential source of bias, it also provides a meaningful nuance to the presentation of the data. Self-disclosures like the one I am currently offering allow interpreters of this project to understand the frame of reference from which the findings were generated. Subsequently, individuals are able to make informed evaluations of the data as presented.

My impact on the community. Throughout the process of this research project, my impact, as a researcher, on the WLTC community was an ever-present concern. This concern manifested as concern for how the community and its existing relationships could be negatively impacted through my investigation and findings and how my standing within the community could be damaged through the honest reporting of my interpretations. The totality of my impact on the community cannot be immediately known until my findings have been completely published. Thus, the implications of this

project on the community are something that could continue to evolve for some time. However, I am able to speculate about two potential implications this research project may have on the WLTC community and my relationship with members within the community.

First, the emerging themes of my data analysis, especially those concerning relationships of control and resistance, may inform the way members of the community choose to identify with the community and the impact that this identification has on their behaviors. It is my wish that members trouble their taken-for-granted assumptions about their identification process and seek to reconcile how it impacts their behaviors. Many members may choose to continue to relate within the trivia community in the same ways they always have, just as I have. However, through a reconsideration of the prominent identity discourses at work and the way these discourses inform members' behaviors, members will be able to make a more informed decision, returning agency to members that may otherwise feel the restraints of the cultural and coercive systems of control.

Second, participants may be dissatisfied with the manner in which I interpreted the interactions I observed and engaged in through the data collection process. While I was mindful to make use of participant data checks, participants still may find my telling of their story to be incongruent with their own intentions or interpretations. This might provide tension between members of the community and myself. This could be particularly impactful among members of my own team which is made up of a complicated web of interpersonal relationships. Thus, the alienation of any individuals

on this team may have a reverberating impact upon others not directly involved including individuals who are not members of the WLTC community.

Participant subjectivity. Related to the concerns about my impact on the WLTC community as a researcher, I made a special effort to ensure that members' voices were reflected with fidelity. Through these efforts, my intention was to mitigate my power of representation by accurately reflecting the representations of my participants. However, despite these efforts, the nature of a project such as this is that I am the sole author giving me a unique power to create and inscribe meaning upon research participants. As such, it is important for any reader of this work to remain mindful of this relationship and actively engage in the troubling and challenging of my interpretations. As with any site of discursive power, individuals should challenge the truth of my interpretations and offer counter discourses that test the tenability of my findings.

Furthermore, one should remain aware of the secondary effects of this subjectivity. The participants of this project have also possessed the power to create meaning from their own perspectives, characterizing others who do not have access to a similar medium through which to present a counter discourse. This secondary effect illuminates the inherently subjective nature of research that is unavoidable.

Benefits of insider status. In chapter three, I drew upon the theorizing of Riemer (1977) to establish the particular benefits of conducting research in "familiar social situations" (p. 471). These three benefits concerned gaining entrée within the investigation community, the establishment and maintenance of rapport between myself

and participants, and the more “accurate” interpretation of data. Below, I describe in detail how each of these three advantages manifested within the context of this investigation.

The pre-existing relationships I shared with members within the WLTC community provided a unique access to data in the form of interviews, observations, and the collection of meaningful texts. Most immediately, this benefitted manifested in access to conducting observations among the Festivus for the Rest of Us trivia team. Through my long-term membership on this team, I was able to gain nearly exclusive access to observations within the FFTRou headquarters with existing knowledge of the meaningful jargon, history, and relationships on the team that allowed me to interpret behavior with a greater understanding for the context of these behaviors. Furthermore, when soliciting participation for formal interviews, I was able to identify meaningful candidates for participation based upon my existing experience and knowledge of the community. Additionally, the relationships that I previously maintained spawned connections with other individuals across a number of teams who identify strongly with the WLTC community. These relationships ensured that the participants solicited for formal interviews were ideal candidates for contributing to this project as I had structured it.

My relationship with the community under investigation also contributed to the establishment and maintenance of rapport between myself and the participants. With insider knowledge of the community, I was able to break the ice with participants, ask meaningful questions in a way that would resonate with participants, and contribute to

the discussion through stories, thoughts, and experiences of my own making the interviews more conversational. This rapport was useful, because I was able to come across as competent and trustworthy to participants. Participants felt safe that I was representing their best interest, because in most cases their best interest was also my own.

Finally, I was able to draw upon my experience within the WLTC community in order to reflect the discourse of the participants with a maximum fidelity. This is to say that my understanding of the context of the contest allowed me to understand the meaning-making participants were engaged in in a way that an outsider may not be able to. Thus, my interpretations were able to most-closely reflect the honest discourse of the participants so that their contributions to this project were framed within the voice of an insider rather than an outsider.

Areas for Future Investigation

By providing nuance to the way we think about the process of identifying, control, and context, this project opens up some exciting avenues for future theory development. Additionally, this project has elucidated the value of the WLTC community as a unique environment to observe and investigate a number of other important social theories. Below, I will outline some of the future research directions that are prompted by this project.

Theorizing of identification, context, and control. The nuance to the way we think about the process of identification, context, and control I provide in this project prompts three directions for meaningful research going forward. First, while this project

has established that participants who identify strongly with a particular community continue to draw from the identity discourses of that community across social contexts, further research could better describe how these identity discourses impact individuals' various social contexts and the implications of this on other social actors. For example, research could follow up with participants of this research project to better understand how they draw upon identity discourses of the WLTC community within the context of their employment environment. This research could consider how this process of trans-contextual identifying impacts the environment of their work place and the interactions of this participant with co-workers.

A second direction for future research is to consider how the trans-contextual nature of one's identifying can expand systems of control to influence non-identifying individuals. An example of this is evident in this project through participants who described how the context of their romantic relationship is impacted by the identity discourses of their trivia identity. Future research could consider how the decisional premises of romantic partners (or others as the site of context may change) are impacted by the trans-contextual identifying of an individual. Thus, when one participant describes an exchange with his spouse while they are both engaged in the sorting of cereal boxes, future research could seek to better understand how and why his spouse feels compelled to engage in behavior despite not identifying within the community.

Finally, in line with theorizing on cultural engineering (Alvesson 1996; Kunda, 1992), future research could seek to better describe how members of an organization seek to strategically induce member trans-contextual identification and prompt

organizational members to adopt normative decisional premises. Applied to the present research site, this research could further investigate strategies employed by contest organizers, trivia team leadership, and other community leaders in order to promote the prevailing identity discourses beyond the contextual boundaries of the contest.

Research in the World's Largest Trivia Contest community. Beyond theorizing about identification, context, and control, the community of the WLTC would serve as an excellent research site for theorizing in a number of different areas. One such area is research into knowledge work and knowledge management. Teams that participate in the annual contest are engaged in an intensive exercise in knowledge work as they attempt to accumulate, catalogue, and efficiently access incredibly deep and diverse stockpiles of knowledge. In order to accomplish this, teams rely on transitive knowledge systems of both human and non-human resources such as information and communication technologies, books, and catalogued commercial products.

Another compelling area for future research among the WLTC community is in the area of social capital. Putnam (2000) famously described the decline in American social capital in the second half of the twentieth century. However, trivia both in terms of the WLTC and in other contexts such as pub trivia poses an interesting new trend in how people are organizing their social networks and spending their “free time” socializing. The participants in this research project in particular demonstrate an interesting phenomenon of individuals investing tremendous amounts of time in this single social endeavor.

Finally, from a cultural perspective, the WLTC could offer some interesting perspective to the way a given social community can come to represent a multitude of things to a number of different sub cultures. Within the context of this project, strongly-identifying members who are on teams that are annually competitive in the WLTC were the specific sub culture under investigation. However, as various participants pointed out, this context has come to mean many different things to different people. For some, this is an intense competition tied closely to one's sense of self both with and beyond the context of the community. For others, the contest presents an opportunity to reunite with old friends and family. For others still, the contest is an opportunity to give back to the community, the local University, and the radio station. Across the 12,000 annual participants in the WLTC, the meaning of the culture varies greatly. This variance could be a source of meaningful theory development.

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APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW GUIDE

*In order to accurately reflect statements made during this interview, I would like to record our conversation. It is your right to refuse recording our conversation, and you should feel welcome to invoke that right at any time. Do you consent to having our conversation recorded?

- Tell me a little about yourself and how you began to participate in the contest.
 - How many years you have been playing?
 - How did you get started?
- How would you describe your role on your trivia team?
- In what ways is your experience with trivia unique from other participants?
 - Is the experience different for Men/Women?
 - Is the experience different for people of different ages or experience?
- What is meaningful to you about being a trivia player?
 - Do you think of yourself as a “trivia player”? What does that mean?
 - What do you get out of playing trivia?
- What are some of the responsibilities that come with preparation for the annual contest?
 - What are your responsibilities? Expectations of your teammates?
 - What is your motivation when preparing for each contest?
- What do you perceive as the most important values of...
 - ...the trivia community/your team?

-How closely do you align with those values?

- Are there individuals that you would identify as leaders on your team?

-What is it about them that makes them leaders?

- How does trivia affect your life outside of the 54-hour contest every April?

-Can you share some specific experiences?

- Why do you choose to be a trivia player?

- Why should someone who has never played consider becoming a trivia player?

-How would you describe trivia to someone who has never played before?

- Do you participate in trivia in any way outside of the annual contest?

- Did you have any concerns or reservations about meeting with me?

-Strategic or Otherwise?

- Is there anything else that you would like to add/anything else you think I should be asking?

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANTS' STORIES

One of the most interesting outcomes of each of the conversations I had with the trivia players that participated in this research was hearing interesting stories about their memorable experiences as trivia players. Many of these stories were included as exemplars throughout the project. Others, however, simply would not fit the space of this document. They do, however, provide a further insight into the experience of members of the trivia community, and the meaningful (D/d)iscourses of identity within the community. Below, I share a number of additional stories that may be perceived as being theoretically meaningful in a number of ways, telling of what the trivia experience is like for participants of this research, and particularly interesting.

The First Time is always Magic:

I couldn't tell you what I had for dinner last Tuesday but I remember my first question, my first experience with trivia [as a child]...Whatever happened I don't remember why I was in town that day, but I know that I was at St. Pete's playground playing basketball which is one block away from [the trivia headquarters]. I came back in and everybody was scrambling around going crazy. I was like, "What is going on?" They said, "Well we are trying to find this answer." Then I go, "What is the question?" Now keep it in mind I was 10 years old. So a 10 year old boy comes in with his basketball and people were scrambling around...

The question was, "In the movie Magic...", which is a really stupid horror movie about this dummy, ventriloquist dummy that comes to life and kills people. They

wanted to know what the opening monologue for the trailer was. For some weird reason, I think it had something to do with sex and a 10 year old boy I remembered it and I can even to this day. It was “Abracadabra, I am me. Presto-chango, now he is me. Hocus-pocus will take her to bed. Magic is fun. You are dead.” I don’t know why I remembered it but that then was before Paramutual scoring, it was a 50 point question. 50 points to a 300th placed team back then in the ‘70s was huge. They did everything but carry me on their shoulders [laughter] and it was kind of fun.

My Team is Your Team

There's actually a really good story for anyone that doesn't know that much about trivia contests is. There's a guy I know that plays on another team, and this is probably even before I played trivia, but I think this would probably be true for any team, ever. They're playing the contest and they look around and there's a person standing there, and they don't even know who this person is! He's chiming in and he's answering questions, and he's doing this and he's doing that, and everyone kind of just assumes that, "That must be so-and-so's friend," that somebody there, obviously, must know this person. They notice later that he's gone. They're outside talking later, and realize that he has been at the wrong headquarters the whole time! This was like four or five hours. He was at the wrong team. He didn't even know it. People who were playing the contest, they didn't know. They didn't care. That's kind of the perfect example of what the weekend is like. If somebody showed up, and you don't even know who they are, and they want to play, and they're going to contribute and they're going to have a good time, no one's going to question that.

Calling His First Shot

As a kid, I kind of just listened along for the first two or three years. I still remember one question that I got for that, and that's what really kind of got me hooked. I think it was like, "According to recent commercials, or something, what does the com in '.com' stand for?" It was an ESPN commercial where they talked about like Babe Ruth at the Allstar game, calling his shots, and he called his shot at Comiskey Park, and he did it for his daughter Dorothy. So, I think the answer maybe was Comiskey Park, Comiskey Field, or something. Anyway, I like ran in the room and had the courage to tell them that that's what I thought it was. They had nothing, so they went with it. They got it right. I don't remember how much it was worth, but I remember they were excited.

Claim to Fame

I would say my claim to fame would probably be; I think it was a couple of years ago. There was a question about some Super Bowl montage they were showing, with the immaculate reception, and the song that played over it was from the Super Bowl. It was like a little clip at some point, but I ended up finding [a video of] it, and I was listening to the song in my headphones. At the time, I couldn't tell you what the name of the song was to save my life. I was trying to hum the tune to people, and say the lyrics. It was one of those songs, I think the song is called Lido Shuffle, but you know, as far as I've always known it up until that point, it was always "Rita", a common misconstrued lyric. We were all thinking, "What kind of song has Rita in it?" We were panic, panic, panic, trying to figure it out. We had a couple of people listen to it. Then I just ended up

Googling, "What songs has the lyrics Rita oh, oh, oh in it?" It ended up like Yahoo answers, saying, "Oh, that's not that song. It's actually called the Lido Shuffle."

We figured that out, [my teammate] is calling, he gets hung up on before we were going to give the wrong answer, because we hadn't found it yet, and we were just going to go with Rita or whatever. Then as that song was winding down, and as he was getting in for the last time, we shouted "Lido Shuffle," and quick hang up, and then phones down. I don't remember the point value, but it was kind of crazy.

Srixon One...

My favorite question was, "In this motion picture Harry Stamper was hitting golf balls on the deck of this oil ship. What is the brand name of the golf ball that Harry hit into the ocean?" So first to the person: "Who is Harry Stamper?" In case you didn't know, well that is Bruce Willis' character from *Armageddon*, and you know most people have seen *Armageddon*, because it was a blockbuster movie and they say, "Yeah, in the beginning of the movie when he gets a call from the government he is hitting golf balls." You know, for about half a second he tees the ball into the ground, and you know then it was Srixon. I believe when the movie came out it was in 1998, 1999.

I mean as a person who plays golf, Srixon is not a popular brand by any means, but it is a recognizable brand to someone who plays golf casually and they know it is Srixon. So it is just a great question to get to people, because there is so much to do because they don't say, "In the movie *Armageddon* Bruce Willis's character..." you know, it is very generic, so I think that people like when I tell them that question. It kind of gets them interested.

Sir, You're on the Air

I actually got on a live radio show in Idaho one time trying to get an answer for a potato question. It was, "What ice cream is made with potatoes?" So I correlated potatoes with Idaho. "What is open [in the middle of the night] in Idaho?" Well, radio stations.

So, we call a radio station. We are calling the radio station in Idaho and saying, "Hey do you guys know of any ice cream that is made with potatoes?"

"Excuse me?!"

We did that a lot you know. They will think we are crazy.

"We are trying to find out if there is an ice cream made with potatoes, are you familiar with it?"

"Sir, you are 'Live'. Did you have a question?"

Winning for the First Time

It was one of those moments. Obviously, I've thought a lot about that moment, and I'm the kind of person who likes to try to push the pause button, because you know it's only going to last for so long, and it's happening so fast, and you kind of just stand there. The final scores were being read, and we knew it was between [another team] and us, and, quite honestly, we figured we really needed, not necessarily a miracle. But, if you'd asked us what our chances were of winning, I would have probably said, 15%, 10% chance. We knew it was going to be close, but we thought we needed 1 or 2 more questions, probably, to pull out a win. So, a bunch of our members kind of grabbed each other and we kind of stood in a circle outside of the studio door, and you know, when

[the other team] was announced in second [place], obviously, we knew then that we had won, and there was definitely an explosion of emotions. Lots of tears of happiness, lots of bursts of excitement, and the first thing I did is grab my wife and kissed her, and that kind of stuff, and lots of hugs... To have finally accomplished it after so much effort and work was obviously a dream come true for a lot of us on the team.

Unlikely Circumstances

It's possibly the greatest moment on our team, just because of the extreme unlikeliness of getting this particular question right, and the timing of it, because it was the first year that we were in the top ten. A question was asked about a literary character, and he was basically from a fiction novel, like a juvenile novel. When the question was asked, my brother immediately recognizes the name of the character and the book, so he's looking it up, because he'd read it when he was a kid. Then, people are popping around online, and, you know, can't find anything, can't find anything. Well, he remembers that, in his room, at home, that that book still should be on the bookshelf that my parents left in his bedroom, in his closet. So, we call my mom and luckily it was in the afternoon and not 3:00 in the morning, and time is running out, and we're over into the second song here.

He calls her, and he's like, "Mom, here's what you need to do. You need to go in my room. You need to go in the closet, it'll be on the second shelf, blah blah blah, a few books in. It's going to have a blue and red spine on it. The name of the book is called *HOWL High* okay?" The question was, they wanted to know what HOWL, what H-O-W-L, it's an acronym, they wanted to know what the acronym stood for. So, my mom

runs in the back. Sure enough, the bookshelf is still there, the book is exactly where [my brother] remembered it from when he was a kid. You know, he hasn't lived at home for 15 years, but he knew exactly where it was!

My mom's like, "Okay, so what do we ... ?" She has no idea what she's looking for, and he's like, "Okay, just open it up, flip through it, it should be in the first two to three pages," and he explains to her exactly what we're looking for. He's on the cell phone with my mom, in the garage, and my wife actually was out there with them. My mom finds it and she reads off the answer. My wife writes it down, she comes sprinting back downstairs, and hands it to me. I'm right by the phone, dial, dial in, get it in, get the answer in. The answer was "Hollywood Offspring of World-Renowned Legends". We just got the answer in, phone's down. Then, time passes; it's obviously a very exciting moment for us. Then, the points are announced, and it was 500 points, which means we were the only team that got the question right, and it was the first 500-pointer we'd ever gotten, and it kind of propelled us into taking the top 10 for the first time.

A Miracle that We're Still Alive

Come Saturday morning, we didn't even know that this was going to happen, but they said, "Okay, come out to the Clark Street Bridge and count all the pillars on the bridge and a couple of other things and add them up." Well, none of us could drive, we were in ninth grade. So, it's about eight o'clock in the morning and we're desperately trying to find somebody that's a year or two older who can drive us down to the Clark Street Bridge to count the pillars. We did find somebody miraculously and most of us wanted to go, so we got six kids crammed in this little car. Well, let's just say that the

speed rules were not adhered to on the drive downtown. It's actually a miracle that we're still alive. It's something that I think about whenever my young kid asks "Hey can I go out and do this." You know, I think about this crazy drive downtown to get to the Clark Street Bridge in time. But, you know, at the time it was just a blast.

They Thought it was a Garage Sale

We played in a garage [that year]. It was darn cold. We had one little kerosene heater in the corner. We'd take turns warming our hands. It got warm enough on Saturday that we could open the garage into the alley a little bit. The sun was shining in and fresh air. Everybody was smoking at that time. A couple of ladies started walking down the alley and were thumbing through our books, because they thought it was a garage sale.

Elementary

In the Baker Street subway station in London, on the Baker Line there are portraits of Sherlock Holmes. They are composed of smaller, almost like your thumbnail sized imprints of Sherlock Holmes in the tile, and there are a certain number of whole ones and a certain number of Sherlock Holmes that make up the entire mosaic. In 1984, a friend and I who's also a fellow trivia player, we were in London once as a semester abroad program. One Sunday morning, we decided that we were going to count all of the Sherlock Holmes. Each big Sherlock Holmes is comprised of however many, and we figured out the exact number of Sherlock Holmes in the Baker Street line of the London Underground. A few years later they asked that question, and I had the answer. I called it in. It was something like 149,863. I call it in, and there's silence.

The person said, "How did you know that?" I said, "I counted them. I was there in 1984. A buddy and I, one Sunday morning, we counted every single frickin' one of those."

Worth the Suffering

I take notes on *The Neighbors*. Have you seen *The Neighbors*? It is brutal, but last year he asked a question and actually it was one of those famous questions. He loves asking school nicknames from sitcoms or TV shows and he asked from that episode, and I had it in notes. It was worth like a 175 points.

The Effects of Staying up Late

I saw [a teammate], was it the first year we took to the Top 10? [He] stayed up for all 54 hours, and he got sleep deprived...He was sleep deprived and then he got drunk. You know we were up celebrating until four, and I took him home. You know I wasn't drunk that much. I took him home at four o'clock and he was just like speaking in tongues. Like, he was in the front seat of my car, and he had no idea where he was, what he was doing. He was randomly talking because he was just so sleep deprived.

APPENDIX C
GLOSSARY OF TERMS

- 500-Pointer:** This is in reference to a question in the annual contest that is worth the maximum of 500 points. This is indicative of two things. First, it communicates that a question will very meaningful to the final standings of the contest. Second, it indicates that only one team successfully answered the question because of the pari-mutuel scoring system. (In contrast to a Small-Pointer)
- 90FM:** The name of the university radio station from which the annual contest is broadcast.
- Answer Sharing:** A source of controversy among participants of the World's Largest Trivia Contest. A collection of top-ten finishing teams is believed by many other teams to share answers with one another during the contest. The sharing of answers during the contest is in violation of the rules of the contest, but it is difficult to prove and enforce.
- Awards Ceremony:** At the conclusion of each annual contest, the final standings for all participating teams are read. The top-ten finishing teams are individually called by the contest organizers and invited to

receive a trophy in person at the radio station. This is referred to as the awards ceremony.

Defense Team: This describes a second team registered by a team for strategic purposes. A defense team typically serves two potential strategic purposes. First, it can be used to water down point values of a question. In this case, a defense team is used when a team is torn between two potential answers. They call in the answer they are most confident about with their primary team identification number, and they call in the answer they are less confident about with their defense team number. This way, if the less-confident answer is the correct one, the total points will be watered down for other teams that got the question correct. A second strategic purpose is that calling in an answer (right or wrong) can be done to tie up the phone lines, making it more difficult for other teams to call in their answers.

Eck: The nickname of the co-writer of the World's Largest Trivia Contest, John Eckendorf.

Big-Pointer: This is in reference to a question in the annual contest that is worth a lot of points. This is indicative of two things. First, it communicates that a question will be particularly meaningful to the final standings of the contest. Second, it indicates that very

few teams successfully answered the question because of the pari-mutuel scoring system. (In contrast to a Small-Pointer)

Headquarters: This is the space in which teams play in the annual contest. There is no central location for the annual contest, so teams are able to play from any location. Most of the teams involved in this project maintained a year-round headquarters.

Hot Corner: A nickname created and self-applied by a group of players on the Festivus for the Rest of Us trivia team. The hot corner is notably made up of participants who do not contribute as much to resource collection throughout the year but is particularly skilled at locating answers online.

“In” / “Down”: The language used within the Festivus for the Rest of Us headquarters to systematize the process of phoning in an answer. “In” is used to signal that a team member has reached an operator. “Down” is used to confirm acknowledgement of this by the rest of the team.

Joe’s: The name of a bar in downtown Stevens Point that is frequented by top-finishing team members of the World’s Largest Trivia Contest. Most notably, contest participants visit the bar on the Thursday night before the contest and on Sunday night between the completion of the contest and the beginning of the awards ceremony. Members of the community who identify high

salience are known to frequent Joes regularly throughout the year, often to discuss topics related to trivia.

Network: The team name of the winningest team in the history of the World's Largest Trivia Contest. This team sometimes goes by different derivations of this name (i.e., "Work the Net").

New Trivia Times: The New Trivia Times is a document that is provided to all registering teams at the time of registration. The document contains a number of pictures that will be sources for questions throughout the contest as well as advertisements from sponsors and the official contest rules.

The Oz: The nickname of the writer and organizer of the World's Largest Trivia Contest, Jim Oliva.

Phone [Line] Burning: The practice dialing and redialing a team's assigned number, often by multiple members of the same team. The purpose of phone burning is to maximize the opportunity for getting through to the operator.

Phoning In: The phase of the contest in which a team has decided upon an answer and has begun to call that answer in to the designated phone number.

Point: Short for Stevens Point, the city from which the annual contest is hosted.

- The Point Cup:** The Point Cup is the name for the traveling trophy awarded to the winner of each annual contest.
- Receiving the Call:** This is a phrase used by a number of participants to describe the reception of a phone call shortly after the contest has concluded from the contest organizers to invite one's team to the awards ceremony. It is a signal that the team has placed in the top-ten of the contest.
- Running Questions:** On both Saturday and Sunday morning of each contest, teams send representatives to a central location where they are tasked with answering a series of questions about the surrounding area. They have a limited time to answer each of the questions, forcing participants to run to each of the locations that are used to pose the question.
- Small-Pointer:** This is in reference to a question in the annual contest that is worth very few points. This is indicative of two things. First, it communicates that a question will not be particularly meaningful to the final standings of the contest. Second, it indicates that many teams successfully answered the question because of the pari-mutuel scoring system. (In contrast to a Small-Pointer)
- Snippet Questions:** At three times throughout the duration of each contest, an audio recording composed of brief snippets of eight different songs is

played over the air. Teams are tasked with identifying the names for each of the eight songs in each recording. The full recording is typically about 12 seconds long. Each snippet lasts for between one and three seconds.

Stone Clue: During each contest, teams are tasked with following clues to complete a scavenger hunt around Stevens Point and its surrounding communities. The ambiguous clues are read over the air, and teams are expected to drive to follow those clues. At three times during each contest, teams receive a stamp at one of the destinations of the scavenger hunt. Points are awarded to teams who collect the stamps.

Stone Group: Contest teams are divided into multiple groups, and teams only follow the clues given to their group. In the 2014 World's Largest Trivia Contest, there were two groups, "Group A" and "Group B".

Team Identification Number: Each team is assigned a four-digit number at the time of registration for the annual contest. When phoning in an answer, each team first gives the operator their unique four digit number, so that the operator is able to identify who is providing the answer.