

‘Til Series Finale Do Us Part?: Fan Commitment and the Long-running Series **Tony Esposito**

Modern technology has changed the way our society gleans information from viewing television shows. From TiVo to internet forums, these forms of communication have been used by fans to analyze and study cultural artifacts as ways to inform others of the discursive meanings individuals derive from these respective shows. From music to sports, fandom has been studied in differing disciplines in the field of academia. The discipline of communication has an extensive array of academic writing that deals with fandom and its relationship to the study of popular culture. Therefore, it would seem fruitful to study fandom as it relates to the seminal ABC series, *Lost*. The show has been described as the first program that resembles a video game, meaning people are not only involved watching it, but are involved actively on blogs in constructing their own theories about the show. There has been a broad amount of research on spoiler television; however, I want to focus more on the construction of reality among people involved in both watching the show and reading blogs about the show.

There are too many blogs on *Lost* to highlight in this small paper. But if one were to look at these web sites it would be evident that the show has been studied from various perspectives. One of the more compelling theories is that the island is either heaven or hell, even though in the final episode it was revealed that heaven was part of the island. Audiences that view the show can go online to see what other fans have discerned from the show. In addition, they can discuss the program face to face, read articles on line, and post their comments on the show to other members of this diverse community. These forums highlight the transactional mode of communication between participants that assists in creating a culture of *Lost* fans that helps create a dialogue of the show that is missing from critics in the conventional media. It would be different from such FOX shows as *Glee* and *American Idol*, because *Lost* requires a more thorough analysis of the topics discussed in various episodes of the show.

Lost is an original show. It has been labeled as one of the most intellectual shows of the last ten years. It's multiple threading and readings are not groundbreaking, but its characters and plot lines were anomalies in the area of mainstream television. HBO has pushed the boundaries of cable television with such shows as *The Wire*, *Six Feet Under*, and *Big Love*. *Lost* would also be included in this cannon of germinal television programming. The characters on the show are lost souls. These souls include a junkie, a lottery winner surrounded by bad luck, and a doctor who is searching for his emotionally abusive father. These story lines have been unfolding on the show for years. In addition, these story lines have been discussed in detail on the vast array of blogs that are provided for discussion among *Lost*'s diverse audience.

These hard core fans act like video gamers that acquire compound readings of the show's characters. Fans scan the blogs searching for information that validates their own theories about the show. In a sense, like the various reality shows such as *Survivor*, *Lost* fans may live vicariously through the characters displayed in the episodes. In addition, people employing blogs receive information from other fans of their own identification with members of this community, and their own discursive views

on the importance of a character as it relates to their own life experiences. For example, the character of John Locke, comes to the island in a wheel chair only to walk again, is someone that is often times displayed on episodes as somebody the island saves and allows him to become healthy again. The theme of redemption seems to permeate numerous episodes of *Lost*. Other areas such as race, beauty, class, and drugs are some of the issues highlighted in different episodes. These are not exhaustive, but indicative of some of the themes present in the show.

Ryan and Jen Ozawa created a fan podcast that cracked the I Tunes top ten. In a sense, both the viewers and bloggers are involved in both the mystery and suspense of the show. There seems to be a contest between fans to solve the puzzle. Therefore, it acts as a link between fan participation and their overall commitment to solving themes established in varying episodes of the show. This was evidenced by fans reactions to the shows final episode. Reading some of the blogs and discussion on the show is like understanding an important cultural critique of a significant rhetorical event that happened on mainstream television.

Employing *Lost* as the show under study, it is overt to signify the importance of fans about the implications of the show to their own frames of reference. Studying various blogs, magazine articles, and face to face communication, provides communication scholars a rich discourse on the impact of the show on an audience that appreciates differing viewpoints and ideologies. Critics can discuss the significance of the show to the general population, but compiling distinct voices of the show from a fan's perspective, provides one a more holistic approach of the impact of *Lost* to the area of cultural studies.