



# **EPU Research Papers**

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**HEGEMONY OF VIOLENCE:  
CONFLICT RESOLUTION  
PRACTICES IN STAR TREK:  
VOYAGER**

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*"I appreciate your optimism, but in this case weapons."*

*-Captain Kathryn Janeway, Star Trek: Voyager  
Equinox, May 1999*

Since 1966 the world of *Star Trek* has provided viewers with entertainment and inspiration. Recent technological innovation reveals the extent to which inventions have been shaped by the popular American television show. Researchers at MIT are working on a type of "tractor beam of light to pick up, hold, and move around individual cells and other objects on the surface of a microchip" (Network World, 2007). A team at the University of Washington is experimenting with a tricorder-like tool that uses high-intensity focused ultrasound rays to create images (Network World, 2007). Another team at Perdue University has developed a theoretical design utilizing nanotechnology to create an optical cloaking device that could make objects invisible by bending light around them (Network World, 2007). A less extreme example of how *Star Trek* has changed daily life are obvious is the cell phone, which is like the communicators from the original series but have even more functionality. More generally, renowned technology designers such as Apple co-founder Steve Wozniak and PalmOne designer Rob Haitani have confessed that *Star Trek* influenced them as they worked on technology that is now a ubiquitous part of our present lives (Evangelista, 2004). Ex-World War II pilot Gene Roddenberry developed *Star Trek* during the Cold War era. He envisioned a universe in the mid-23<sup>st</sup> century where—after a nuclear war and the development of faster-than-light travel—humanity has eliminated war, money, poverty, hunger, and disease and has joined other sentient beings to form a United Federation of Planets. Peace is the basis of relationships between humans (*Star Trek*, Wikipedia). The storylines revolve around the characters and their experiences as they explore

space. The *Star Trek* franchise includes six series—*The Original Series* (1966-1969), *The Animated Series*, *The Next Generation*, (1987-1994), *Deep Space Nine* (1993-1999), *Voyager* (1995-2001) and *Enterprise* (2001-2005)—and ten feature films (*Star Trek*, Wikipedia). It is widely accepted that the shows and movies are allegorical and address some of the political and social issues for the period in time of each series. Roddenberry himself said by creating "a new world with new rules, I could make statements about sex, religion, Vietnam, politics and intercontinental missiles. Indeed, we did make them on *Star Trek*: we were sending messages and fortunately they all got by the network" (Johnson-Smith, 2005).

But the programs have been more than simple commentary on current socio-political concerns; they have influenced how generations imagine what their future will look like. Furthermore, viewers have grown up trying to create what they have seen on *Star Trek*. This imagining of an ideal future extends past the technology and into the less explicit domain of the socio-cultural and political. For many, *Star Trek* represents an inspiring and hopeful ideal of the future. Wrapped up in its messages of racial and gender equality and the peaceful, poverty-free future of humanity are traditional ideas about conflict management and violence. Despite the premise of a united human race peacefully exploring the universe, characters in *Star Trek* reinforce at a higher societal level conventional uses of violence as justified for defense and as the most efficient method to solve complex problems. There is a lack of commitment to dialogue and peace building when encountering alien species. Furthermore, violence and/or the threat of violence are used within the episodes themselves to create tension, increase suspense, or conclude the show.

This paper will explore how the characters *Star Trek: Voyager*, rely on the threat of violence or violence itself to solve problems. This is contradictory to the show's internal notion of humanity living in peace after learning how destructive violence can be after a nuclear world war in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. *Voyager* is the fifth show in the *Star Trek* television franchise and ran for seven seasons from 1995 to 2001. The series follows the adventures of the Starfleet vessel USS *Voyager*, which becomes stranded 75,000 light-years from Earth while pursuing a ship from a resistance movement. The journey home is expected to last 75 years and takes the crew of *Voyager* through uncharted space where they encounter new species of aliens and unknown life forms (*Star Trek: Voyager*, Wikipedia). Through analysis of selected episodes, I will reveal how easily the characters use violence and the extent to which they rely on it. An episode where diplomacy is used to solve a conflict is examined. A discussion on how the tactics of conflict management used in the show reinforce accepted ideas about conflict and violence at a larger social level will be included. But first, a look at why analyzing popular television culture is a valuable undertaking and why violence on television is so pervasive. Also be a brief exploration of how conflict and violence is used in the narrative of the television show and what that might expose about societies assumptions about conflict and peace.

### **Why Popular Culture?**

In her article "Going Cultural: *Star Trek*, State Action and Popular Culture", Jutta Weldes looks at how popular culture, namely *Star Trek*, helps to create a reality of international relations that is understood and accepted by the populace, which creates acceptance of

foreign policy, the structure of its dominant discourse, and state action. She begins by arguing for the academic analysis of both popular and mass culture, which she defines as the artifacts of a society that are consumed by people, but not produced by them (Weldes, 1999). Culture includes the many and varied discourses wherein meanings are constructed and practices created. Weldes identifies that ideas on foreign policy are produced by state officials, but argues that such rhetoric is delivered “more pervasively, in the mundane cultures of peoples’ every day experiences” (Weldes, 1999, p. 119). As a result, popular culture generates a backdrop of meanings that help to compose public ideas of foreign policy. Weldes is articulating the large role popular and mass culture has in the reproduction of popular social ideas and accepted norms thus making certain behaviors appear commonsensical. So, popular culture is, as Hall called it, a “the culture of consent” (cited in Weldes, 1999, p. 119). *Star Trek*, she says, reproduces practices and behaviors in the social consciousness of consumers of such culture, which reinforces these actions as normal and acceptable.

In a related paper, international relations specialist Newman (2001) analyzes the parallels between diplomacy in *Star Trek* and the United States. He calls social reproductions “re-representations” of the world, which are constitutive of the social environment. The role of the social scientists is “to investigate social worlds so that we can understand them better...[and] the starting point must be those re-representations” (Newmann, 2001, p. 603). Cultural phenomena, like that of television programs such as *Star Trek*, are second-order representations whereas representations in the physical world are first-order. Academic study is predominately on first-order, however, “if social worlds are made up of representations, there is no inherent reason why first order ones

should be more constitutive than others” (Newmann, 2001, p. 603). He goes on to identify these phenomena as reality constituting and belong to what Michel Foucault refers to as the archive. This is the forms, mnemonics and techniques, which make saying, writing and storing ideas, meanings, beliefs, etc. possible (Newmann, 2001, p. 604). Forms mentioned by Foucault as examples include ritual recital, pedagogics, festivals, public performance and entertainment (Foucault, 1954-1988). Despite this, second-order representations still remain under studied by academics.

In the case of conflict behaviors, which this essay will explore, the understandings that culture influences how behaviors are reinforced and accepted can readily apply. Popular culture re-creates the traditional response to conflict—violence or the threat of violence—and in some cases, such as certain television programs or specific episodes, glorifies it. Violence as the most efficient and effective way to manage conflict is affirmed in cultural discourse and this process serves to reinforce at a larger social level that violence is a productive and tolerable way to respond to conflict. Again, we see a culture of consent permitting, if not subtly encouraging, violence. These messages about conflict and violence are communicated through both first- and second-order phenomena, and both areas appear to be under analyzed. Since television, as Storey (1996) described it, is *the* popular cultural form of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century it is a critical space for the production and circulation of meanings, and thus, an ideal place to begin analysis of second-order representations.

## Television as Social Tool

Since its invention in the 1920s, television has played an increasingly prominent role in shaping our social understandings and cultural norms. In his book *Television and the public sphere: Citizenship, democracy and the media*, Dahlgren writes about television's role as a socio-cultural experience. He explains that:

“What appears on the screen is encountered and interpreted by viewers, and then enters into their social worlds through social interaction, being reinterpreted and inserted in a vast array of discourses. Moreover, television and elements of its output—modes of discourse, themes, topics, forms of humor, etc.—are intertextually circulated through other media...television links the everyday world to the larger symbolic orders of social and political life.” (Dahlgren, 1995, p.39)

Television is a mechanism of socialization for our culture. It provides ideas on how to function in the social world and this includes what to do when faced with situations of conflict. The viewer at some level juxtaposes experiences that occur in everyday life with the discourses presented on television. The show serves to sometimes confirm them, sometimes frame them in a mythic way, sometimes challenge or contradict them. (Dahlgren, 1995, p. 148) This process of digesting social norms seen on television is a pleasure according to Friske. The activity of making sense, of exploring the text and sub-text and even questioning the reality of it are all part of this enjoyment. “While pleasure can emerge from particular meaning generated, just the fact of making some kind of sense – of appropriating the text for oneself – offers a mild sense of pleasureable empowerment” (cited in Dahlgren, 1995, p. 148). Saenz argues that television provides audiences with an incessantly problematized store of implicit social knowledge that individuals then use to produce their own social meanings and behaviors (Saenz, 1992, p. 39). The concept of implicit social knowledge utilized by



Saenz is derived from the anthropologist Michael Taussig and is defined as “an essentially inarticulate and imagistic, non-discursive knowing of social relationality” (cited in Saenz, 1992, p. 39), which viewers interpret and make use of for their own purposes.

Each episode of *Star Trek* is hinged on a problem. Viewers can participate by using their social knowledge and understanding of social meanings to try and solve the problem as the story unfolds. Or, viewers can take a passive role by only watching how the characters choose to resolve it. The solution most often presented by the characters of *Star Trek* is the threat of violence or violence itself. Diplomacy is encouraged in the world of *Star Trek*, however, once the first attempt at diplomacy fails violence is presented the only possible second response. Through the reinforcement of this social meaning, violence is seen as the practical and natural response to conflict management. A feedback loop is occurring wherein viewers anticipate the characters will use violence to solve the problem. The characters turn to violence, which reinforces the viewers’ belief that violence is the best and ultimately only course of action. Opportunities to critique its use and question the legitimacy and suitability of violence both in the context of the program and in the reality of the viewers are reduced.

### **Television and Violence**

Violent entertainment is a pervasive part of television programming. Goldstein (1999) has written extensively about this in an effort to understand why violence is such an attractive form of entertainment. He suggests that “there may be a small audience that actually demands violent images in its entertainment...but for the majority of consumers

of violent imagery, the violence is a means to an ends, a device valued more for what it does than what it is" (Goldstein, 1999, p. 274). But what violence does depends on the viewer, so it can have many functions within a program. Researchers Boyanoowsky, Newton and Walster (1974) identified that violent entertainment is used as a coping mechanism for audiences when faced with real violence with their community. With *Star Trek*, this was undoubtedly true with the original series as it was created in the Cold War era. The continued popularity of the program for generations reveals that other influences must also be at work. Another researcher, Zilliman, wrote about violence on television as a form of cathartic moral justice. "Implicitly justified hatred and the associated call for punitive action allows us to uninhibitedly enjoy the punitive action when it materializes. Negative affective dispositions, then, set us free to thoroughly enjoy punitive violence." (Zilliman, 1998, p. 202) There is a definite moral dimension to *Star Trek* where the members of Starfleet and their allies are the good guys and there are enemies, often clearly identifiable, who are bad. It is understood that Starfleet does not start conflicts willingly. It is dragged into them. When conflicts arise between these two groups, the good guys are reluctantly forced to turn to violence because they have been attacked. They use force defensively. This immediately places Starfleet in a morally respectable position. Viewers, who identify with the humans of Starfleet, are relieved of any potential guilt over the killing of alien species or bad guys even before the violence begins. This is because Starfleet, as the good guys, will always be right and justified. An additional appeal of violent imagery is an outcome of what sociologist Elias (1982) called the "civilizing process", a way to fill the void left by not experiencing the real thing. *Star Trek: Voyager's* audiences are likely participating in this civilizing

process, but with a future orientated perspective. Since the fictions of Star Trek takes place hundreds of years into the future, no viewer could know how they would respond in a conflict situation with an alien species. The problem here is viewers are already accepting that the future of humanity will include conflicts with alien species that are so severe that diplomacy will not work on a regular basis and so violence will be regularly required.

From an external perspective, violence in *Voyager* is used to create drama, move the story along and create an environment where a tension-filled conflict arises and is neatly resolved within 40-ish minutes. In light of how culture and television shape and form our social meanings and understandings, this is problematic. Firstly, because of the time pressure of a television program, the quickest way to resolve a conflict in an engaging manner is through direct violence. It allows for clear winners and losers, especially when one side—in this case Starfleet—is technologically superior and usually morally right. This reinforces that violence is a quick and easy way to manage complex conflicts. Secondly, that conflict and violence are used to create drama and/or move the plot forward reveals, I believe, an attitude viewers have about peace and peaceful relations: it is boring.

Newman addresses in a pragmatic tone claiming that there are “standard reasons” why institutionalized diplomacy is underutilized in *Star Trek* episodes. He writes that:

Harmony is duller than conflict. Even in institutes, which seemingly specialise on peace research, interest fastens on unruly entities at war and in conflict, not on societies at peace and in harmony. The key reason for this may be a human proclivity for variation. As Leo Tolstoy observes at the outset of *Anna Karenina*, all happy families have the same story to tell, but every unhappy family's story is unique. (Newmann, 2001, p. 619)

So, the unchallenged assumption is that violence makes for exciting and entertaining storytelling. Peaceful navigation of the conflicts of life is somehow lackluster. One reason for the excitement of violence is identified by war correspondent Chris Hedges in his 2002 book *War is a Force that Gives Us Meaning*. "We believe in the nobility and self-sacrifice demanded by war...we discover the communal struggle, the shared sense of meaning and purpose, a cause" (Hedges, 2002, p. 158). In *Star Trek*, war is represented by the ongoing violence with alien species. Each episode viewers are invited to join the communal struggle with the crew of *Voyager* and participate in the purpose of exploring the universe. That the struggle is so intense increases the pleasure of watching *Voyager* win. The pressure placed on the producers of *Star Trek* to attract audiences to keep advertising dollars added to the attractiveness of violence creates an environment where violence is relied on and over exploited in television programs.

All of these above mentioned factors combine in *Voyager* to create a cycle of reinforcement that is counterproductive to developing a society where violence is not the response to conflict. Cultural phenomena shape our social norms and help to make behaviours commonsensical. Television is the most popular and far-reaching cultural device today and *Star Trek* is one of the most popular American television programs. Television is an instrument of socialization because it reflects and creates issues and situations relevant to the lives of viewers, thus allowing them to make sense of the meanings and apply them accordingly. When violence is used to quickly and regularly in a television program to solve conflicts the social message viewers internalize is acceptance of and dependence on violence. As I will show in the following analysis of

selected episodes, the predominant meaning reinforced within the universe of *Star Trek* about conflict management is that violence is the most efficient route to resolution. The violence-free methods of conflict management this essay considers in place of violent responses includes basics such as conflict-mapping (R. Rivers, lecture, Working for Peace in Conflict Zones, EPU, October 8-13, 2007), dialogue (Galtung 2004), empathy, reducing othering and embracing unity through diversity (R. Danesh, lecture, Unity-based Conflict Resolution, EPU, March 24-28, 2008), negotiation, and mediation.

### **A Close Look at *Voyager***

Of the *Star Trek* franchise, *The Original Series* and *The Next Generation* have been analyzed rather frequently while researchers have overlooked more recent series, such as *Voyager*. Since the timeline of *Voyager* happens about a century after the original series, it stands to reason that the humans of the series would have continued to learn about how to cope with conflicts. Each crewperson on a Starfleet does have access to the daily log entries from any previous ship. In fact, the captain of *Voyager* consults the logs of previous captains' in preparation for confrontations. However, the crew of *Voyager* displays conflict management practices that differ little from even today's humans and show a propensity for violence. For the purpose of this essay's analysis, two central characters need to be introduced: the first is the captain Kathryn Janeway, the first female in the captain's role in a *Star Trek* Series. The other is commander Chakotay, who is the first officer. In the series these two characters rely heavily on each other to make decisions for the crew of *Voyager*. Their leadership styles differ with Chakotay often stepping into the role of what could be called a peace builder. The two

styles create dramatic tension on an interpersonal level in the episodes. Four episodes from the seven seasons of *Voyager* will be analyzed. Episodes have been selected for conflicts that are between other alien species encountered in the voyage and for the complexity or uniqueness of the conflict. One episode has been selected as an example of a diplomatic resolution.

### **Waking Moments**

In this episode from the fourth season, the *Voyager* crew mysteriously falls asleep and is forced to remain in a dream, which they have trouble distinguishing from reality. Chakotay discovers aliens who live in the dream world are keeping the crew in a state of sleep. The aliens fear *Voyager* is trying to kill them in the waking world. Chakotay takes this information to Janeway and she assumes there is a violent conflict. Chakotay wants to try to dialogue with the alien race before going into defensive mode. This initial diplomatic response is typical of *Voyager* episodes and is particularly typical of Chakotay. He does not want to assume that the aliens are trying to harm them despite Janeway's insistence that they are under attack. Since Starfleet's motto is to peacefully explore, often one character in the episode will want to attempt non-violence approaches with the new aliens. However, when he goes to peacefully engage the new species by talking to an alien in the dream his approach and language is threatening. The peaceful intention exists but the actual practice is non-existent. The alien attacks him, but during the fist fight, Chakotay is able to talk to the alien and gets instructions on how to get out of the alien territory where upon the crew will wake up unharmed. This turns out to be a deception and the crew wakes into a communal dream where the

aliens have seized control of *Voyager*. Janeway and the crew plan a violent take back of the ship. Chakotay realizes what is happening and wakes up.

At this point in the narrative Chakotay shows no desire to continue dialoguing to find a diplomatic solution. For viewers who are, as Dahlgren wrote, interpreting and internalizing messages from television into their social experience (Dahlgren, 1995), the initial behavior by Chakotay sends a positive message: when in a conflict situation, try to engage the other party. But, he so readily abandons peace building at the first problem they encounter with the alien species. The value and power of peaceful diplomacy is undermined. Using violence and force to overcome the conflict—especially when the other party is using those methods—is encouraged. Janeway's behaviour in the dream world serves to reinforce this logic. Leading the revolt to reclaim the ship, she arms herself with a large phaser rifle—that looks like a futuristic machine-gun—and threatens to shoot any aliens that get in her way.

Meantime in the waking world, Chakotay has a new plan. Having found where the aliens are sleeping he decides to completely eradicate the whole species with torpedoes. The aliens had only one chance to be diplomatic and because they chose not to cooperate Chakotay feels justified in using extreme violence to get the crew to safety. He falls asleep and tells the aliens he will destroy all of them unless the crew is released. The aliens agree and let *Voyager* return to its journey home. The desired outcome of *Voyager* is achieved through the threat of extreme violence. Success of such means subtly communicates to viewers that escalating violence in a conflict situation is not only appropriate, but it works and no option is too extreme. The crew of *Voyager*, with whom the viewers relate, are permitted to use such tactics because they have been attacked.

Since they are victims, the use and threat of violence is deemed justifiable by the internal logic of the episode, which rewards *Voyager* for its actions.

## **Equinox**

In this two-part episode between seasons five and six, *Voyager* discovers another Starfleet ship, the *Equinox*, in their region of space after responding to a distress signal. The other ship is in bad shape and many of its crew dead after repeated attacks from an undiscovered alien species. Janeway invites the remainder of the *Equinox* officers onboard while her crew fixes their ship.

In this conflict, *Voyager* arrives and without question sides with the other Starfleet ship. This immediately creates an 'us' versus 'them' arena. *Voyager* has made a subtle assumption that the aliens are the ones who are wrong before any type of conflict assessment. Janeway or her crew never question the dynamics of the conflict or try to learn the cause of it. A crucial cornerstone of peace-building is multi-partiality and conflict analysis (R. Rivers, lecture, Working for Peace in Conflict Zones, EPU, October 8-13, 2007). They do not demonstrate multi-partiality nor take appropriate time at any point in the episode to clearly understand the conflict. Also in this scene, there is implicit othering, which is the act of defining who a group is by who it is not. This social practice is taken one step further as *Voyager* protects those people it is similar to before even trying to understand what is happening.

After a series of attacks from the aliens, *Voyager* designs a defensive tool to trap the aliens. Meanwhile, the crew of the *Equinox* are planning to steal this technology from *Voyager*, get back to their ship and continue back to the Alpha quadrant, where Earth is.



Janeway learns that the members of Equinox started the fight with the aliens. They have been harvesting the aliens and using them as a source of power to speed up their journey home.

Throughout this, Chakotay continuously suggests to Janeway that they should try dialoguing with the aliens, but Janeway is solely focused on dealing with the Equinox. Janeway and Chakotay take extreme, opposing and stereotypical attitudes on how to deal with the conflict; Janeway engages in violent tactics and Chakotay acts as a peacekeeper. Her desire to get revenge is questioned only by Chakotay. This is part of the underlying military structure of *Star Trek* that provides for viewers a comfort level through the familiar hierarchical structure and rigid clear rules regarding right and wrong. Once Janeway learns that the Equinox is responsible for starting the violence the focus of the conflict shifts. *Voyager* is no longer trying to kill the new aliens or protect Equinox. The new conflict is about Janeway and the Equinox who has dishonored Starfleet's principles. Hedges in *War is a Force that Gives Us Meaning* looks at how notions of restoring honor through violence and punitive measures has motivated humans to kill since before the Ancient Greeks (Hedges, 2002). In this episode, viewers watch as Janeway rationalizes her revenge and only Chakotay tries to talk her out of it. This traditional logic of justification of violence is reaffirmed as acceptable even hundreds of years into the future.

The Equinox crew successfully returns to their ship after stealing *Voyager's* defensive weapon as well as their shield generator. They leave *Voyager* to be attacked by the aliens. Now without shields or weapons, Janeway agrees that talking with the aliens would be worth a try. The only time diplomacy is seriously considered is when *Voyager*

is largely defenseless and there are no other options for a violent solution. The message communicated here is that peaceful attempts to resolve conflict are secondary to violent ones. When a party is in a position of weakness these attempts are made.

When they try to communicate with the aliens Chakotay orders the crew to put down their phasers—which they have been using to fight off the aliens attacks—saying: “Someone has to start trusting someone around here.” Janeway disagrees and overrides his order saying: “I appreciate your optimism, but in this case weapons.” Even while engaging in a dialogue, the crew is encouraged to remain armed. There is an overt lack of trust that peaceful approaches can create a path to resolution. You must always be ready to fight even when discussing with the other party. It seems contradictory that this is the logic and approach of a species that has figured out how to exist peacefully and productively on its own planet.

The aliens do not respond positively to the first efforts at dialogue and continue attacking the ship. Janeway returns to chasing the *Equinox* and fighting off the aliens, but Chakotay continues to push for dialogue. During an argument about which course of action would be best, Janeway defends her desire for vengeance against the *Equinox* and says she will go to any lengths to get it. Viewers watch as the most powerful person of the ship admits to having no limits to restoring Starfleet’s honor. This logic is normalized in the context of the episode since only one character (the stereotypical peace builder) questions her actions. It is accepted since Chakotay appear to change her mind and through the process of socialization discussed above the viewers internalize it, which all together reinforces much worn paths of argument for justifying violence and killing. While pursuing the *Equinox*, *Voyager* manages to kidnap one of

their crew and Janeway is prepared to let the aliens kill him if he doesn't tell her where Equinox is hiding. Janeway herself calls the situation "poetic justice". Chakotay interferes by saving the prisoner and asks him about how to communicate with the aliens. The prisoner explains that another species can talk to the aliens, so Janeway agrees to get in contact with them. As Janeway acts more out of line with the spirit of Starfleet captains—by threatening to kill the captured Equinox crewmember and risking the lives of the *Voyager* crew by chasing Equinox into a dangerous atmosphere—and Chakotay undermines her authority by interrupting her interrogation viewers are able to choose a character with whom to identify. Does Janeway have the right strategy? Is Chakotay's path of peace the best option? This tension creates engaging and enjoyable drama that serves to propel the remainder of the episode.

When *Voyager* contacts the species that can communicate with the aliens do not want to cooperate so, again she uses threats of violence until they agree. At this point in the narrative, Janeway relieves Chakotay of duty because he is getting in her way of bringing the Equinox crew to justice. This development reinforces for viewers the social understanding that the peaceful route is not what is most effective or desired.

When talking to the aliens Janeway explains that *Voyager* does not want to hurt them and makes a deal that they can destroy Equinox if the aliens leave *Voyager* alone. Diplomacy and cooperation between *Voyager* and the aggressive aliens becomes a pact to annihilate Equinox. Obviously, this is not a peaceful solution to the conflict. In the meantime, the captain of Equinox, who is overcome with guilt, beams his crew to *Voyager* and pilots his ship away from *Voyager* as the aliens attack and destroy it. This move by the Equinox captain reinforces the moral judgment of *Star Trek*—he was

wrong to use living beings as fuel—but it does not address the rightness or wrongness of Janeway's approach. Once the *Equinox* is destroyed the aliens withdraw. Janeway reinstates Chakotay without much discussion of the events. She also incorporates the *Equinox* crew into her crew, but at lower ranks and with many restrictions. At the close of the episode when Chakotay is reinstated, he and Janeway do not have a dialogue about what happened; only a few metaphoric words are exchanged. Janeway does not confess an epiphany that her behavior was itself against Starfleet honor or that her choice of actions were wrong. As such viewers are coaxed to believe that Janeway was perhaps justified in her willingness to use violence to solve the conflict even though Chakotay's option of dialogue and negotiation could have reached a resolution. No overt condemnation of either violence or peace is presented since the *Equinox* captain resolved the conflict. In a way the viewers can choose for themselves whose actions would have been most effective. However, ultimately, if the *Equinox* captain had not sacrificed himself, Janeway was fully prepared to continue deliver the *Equinox* to the aliens in order to preserve her crew and ship. So, by way of insinuation, violence is presented as the correct path to the resolution of this conflict.

## **Scorpion**

This is another two-part episode that took place between the third and fourth seasons. *Voyager* enters into the territory of Starfleet's on going archrival, the Borg, as it continues the trip home. They are a race of cybernetic humanoids whose mission is to assimilate all life into the Borg race to achieve perfection. Immediately the whole ship is in high alert preparing for battle by increasing force fields, modifying phaser guns and

developing battle strategies. To prepare, Janeway reads entries about the Borg that call them “utterly without mercy...beyond redemption, beyond reason” and that they “are as close to pure evil as any race ever encountered”.

Within the fantasy of *Star Trek*, the Borg is the opposite of Starfleet. They do not allow for any diversity. They forcefully assimilate any species they can. They demonstrate no diplomatic skills. In addition, the Borg is technologically superior to Starfleet and so pose a serious threat since ships like *Voyager* have little offensive or defensive response for them. It is assumed that no diplomatic opportunities will appear in any confrontation with the Borg and this is reinforced in the entries Janeway reads. The entries also emphasize the othering that is consistent within episodes of *Voyager*. An enemy species, already separate and distinct from humans, is further othered in this case through demonization and by revisiting previous encounters to relive past wrongs. This behavior is wrapped up in preparations for attack and so accepted as necessary, however, it encourages othering of the enemy, which increases the chances for conflict (R. Danesh, lecture, Unity-based Conflict Resolution, EPU, March 24-28, 2008). Again, viewers are presented with covert messages that actions that lead to conflict, such as othering, are standard practice and even required for adequate preparation.

*Voyager* soon discovers another unknown species is attacking the Borg and easily defeating them. A crewman sees an opportunity pointing out that the other species is a potential ally for *Voyager*. Janeway and Chakotay are cautious and assume the worst about the new aliens. In this series of scenes, we see missed opportunities for peace building. Once again, the crew of *Voyager* does not take any time to assess the conflict they have discovered. Instead, they anticipate violence and are preparing to engage in

it. The moment where diplomacy is considered is fleeting and outright dismissed by the superior officers.

The aliens begin to communicate telepathically with a crewmember of *Voyager*, but the messages are unclear. She says that it is these new aliens *Voyager* needs to be worried about, not the Borg. The aliens want to “destroy everything”. It is clear that there is room for misinterpretation in these messages, but no member of the crew—ever Chakotay—attempts to consider other understandings. During a fact-finding mission on a badly damaged Borg ship, *Voyager* learns the aliens are called Species 8472 and the Borg has little information about them. An 8472 alien appears and attacks one of *Voyager*’s crewmen. This is the first overt action by the aliens that they intend to attack *Voyager* too. He slowly begins to die as the alien cells destroy his human cells. The doctor begins an experimental treatment using Borg technology to destroy the alien cells and is successful.

Janeway sees this as an opportunity to create an alliance with the Borg. If the Borg let *Voyager* through their space Janeway will give them the technology to kill the aliens. What appears as an alliance is almost blackmail and manipulation by *Voyager*. They are capitalizing on the Borg’s weakness and using their technological advantage as leverage to get what they want. On its own, this approach could be considered clever, but the technology is designed to kill another life form. *Voyager* is relying on violence to get what it wants. In brainstorming sessions and discussions, Janeway and her crew never think to approach and talk with 8472 or try to analyze the situation to come up with other solutions that do not involve killing anything. Outside of the narrative, this alliance is a way to create dramatic tension by applying ideas of diplomacy with the

most evil characters of the show. The message for viewers here is again that violence is acceptable in tense conflict situations, particularly where the other party has used violence against your side.

Chakotay disagrees with the plan. That he does is a subtle indication to viewers that the Borg are not to be trusted since his attempts at peace building are predictably morally correct in the series. He anticipates that the Borg will double-cross *Voyager* and assimilate them once they get the technology to kill 8472. He suggests that *Voyager* backs off from the conflict and raises a moral objection saying: "We'd be giving an advantage to a race guilty of killing millions. We'd be helping the Borg assimilate yet another species just to get home." Janeway points to the wounded crewman to justify the alliance and pushes the idea further by suggesting that *Voyager* might be helping the section of the universe by killing this species. Despite his reluctance, Chakotay agrees to Janeway's orders. A tense alliance is made with both *Voyager* and the Borg in a constant struggle to keep the most power. Work begins on small torpedoes and a "weapon of mass destruction" intended to wipe out a large number of the aliens. Again, there is the implicit belief that in such circumstances the best and only course of action is to destroy the other, the evil, the enemy.

Alien ships attack the Borg vessel and *Voyager* who are working together. In the battle the Borg ship is sacrificed to save *Voyager* and the weapons along with a few Borg are beamed onto *Voyager*. Janeway is hurt in the fight and Chakotay takes over. Both the Borg and Chakotay intend to change the terms of the alliance now that the aliens are increasing attacks. Chakotay plans to drop the Borg off at the nearest planet, but the Borg hijack the ship and take it into 8472's territory. It is a different type of space that

exists parallel to the space of the Borg and *Voyager*. It is here that Chakotay learns that the Borg started the fight with 8472, by trying to assimilate them. Now 8472 wants to destroy the Borg and the rest of their galaxy for contaminating their world. Janeway recovers and learns of the developments. She decides that she must still use the weapons to destroy 8472 in order to save their space. Hundreds of alien ships are incinerated in the attack and *Voyager* leaves their space. Species 8472 does not pursue them. The Borg and *Voyager* terminate their alliance on tenuous terms and *Voyager* heads out of Borg territory.

In the end of this episode extreme violence is used to overcome the conflict. Despite the information that the Borg were lying about the causes of the conflict, Janeway still proceeds to destroy as many 8472 ships as possible. Her justification is fear and the threat of destruction made by the aliens. This logic is supported for viewers in the narrative since the ship is left alone by Borg and species 8472 as it continues on its journey out of their space. It appears *Voyager* has won another battle.

The other interesting and subtextual message in this episode is that of the othering and how it happens. Usually, the othering that occurs in *Star Trek* is between the crew of Starfleet and a foreign alien species. Here we see a peaceful but not conflict-free arrangement between two intense enemies with a long history. Both sides decide not to fight with each other because of the pressure of an external, powerful and threatening unknown. This happens only in the presence of another other. Without it there would be no opportunity for collaboration. Once it is removed the two sides return to being bitter enemies. Reading the situation in this manner, it would appear that humans are unable to forge partnerships with our enemies without another enemy appearing to fill the void.



If this is true, then the larger social meaning perpetuated by such a truth is that humans will forever have threatening enemies to manage in addition to violence being the most effective tool to manage them.

### **The Killing Game**

This episode is from the fourth season and is two parts long. In a trend against the typical episode style, the resolution of the conflict in this episode is reached through means other than violence. The crew of *Voyager* has been captured by an alien species called the Hirogen, who have implanted devices in them to believe they are characters in the holodeck (an interactive virtual reality on the ship). The Hirogen are hunting the crew in battle simulations to learn about how various species react when fighting. There are two holodeck programs running; one is about a famous Klingon battle and the other takes place in a Nazi-occupied French town during 1944. The Hirogen take on the roles of Nazi officers patrolling the town of St. Clare, with *Voyager's* crew as their prey as members of the French Resistance. The majority of the episode takes place within this program. In the simulation, Janeway is a French restaurateur and leader of the underground plotting against their Nazi occupiers. She works with other members of her senior crew who are part of the resistance movement. Chakotay plays the role of an American army officer leading the attacks on the town. The analysis of this episode will avoid the obvious conflict that the *Voyager* crew and the Hirogen are engaged in within the holodeck.

The Hirogen enjoy using the *Voyager* crew because they are more rewarding to hunt down and kill than the holograms. As they continue to turn the whole ship into a giant

holodeck to make the simulations larger, *Voyager's* doctor is on call to heal the crew when they are hurt in the simulation. He seeks an opportunity to free the crew by turning off the devices that are controlling Janeway and another crewmember named Seven. The two plan to release the rest of the crew and take back the ship. There is no question that this has to be done by violent means. Janeway and Seven do not even brainstorm other options. Until the crew is free no diplomacy is considered. An explosion inside the simulation (the American's air strike the Nazi headquarters) overloads the holodeck projectors and the fighting spills out onto the ship. Since the whole ship is now a holodeck, the characters can exist both inside and outside the traditional holodeck spaces. While the fighting continues between the Hirogen (Nazis) and the *Voyager* crew (American soldiers and French resistance fighters), Janeway destroys the computer controlling the crews' implants. The crew continues the battle, but no longer believe they are part of the simulation.

The leader of the Hirogen captures Janeway and they talk about what is happening:

Hirogen: "You don't realize what is at stake."

Janeway: "I know what is at stake, your sick little game."

Hirogen: "This is not a game!"

Janeway: "Then what is it?"

Hirogen: "I am trying to create a future for my people."

The Hirogen then explains he is worried his own culture is dying because of their lifestyle of wandering in scattered hunting parties. He believes if he could establish holoprograms using Starfleet technology his people could stay together and experience countless hunts of all kinds. Janeway sees an opportunity for a peaceful conflict resolution and the two establish a truce. She offers the holodeck technology to the Hirogen if they will stop their attacks and leave her ship. The dialogue between

Janeway and the leader of the Hirogen reveals his fears, insecurities and motivations for hijacking *Voyager*. The standard action of othering is reversed here as viewers watch Janeway empathize with her enemy and come to understand his position. The viewers participate in this process. This is peace building and diplomacy in action.

Unfortunately, one of the other Hirogen, inspired by Nazi philosophy, assassinates the leader and plans to kill *Voyager's* crew. The fighting continues with the Klingons from the second program joining the WWII simulation to support the *Voyager* crew. After days of intense fighting, a second truce is called between *Voyager's* crew and the Hirogen. The Hirogen agree to the original deal and leave *Voyager* in exchange for holodeck technology.

This episode is a rare example of *Voyager* following through on its commitment to peaceful interaction with other species. It demonstrates that violence is not the only means to solving a conflict. A conflict can be transformed into a foundation for a lasting relationship. As Newmann points out in his essay about diplomacy in *Star Trek*, in this scene “the Federation has succeeded in building a foundation for diplomatic relations” (Newmann, 2001, p. 617). It also addresses the peace is boring problem that appears to afflict television consumers and therefore producers. While there is violence in the program to create dramatic tension and the leader of the Hirogen is shot and killed to further intensity the excitement, the ultimate solution is reached through peaceful negotiation. It is a positive example that episodes can be engaging without the threat of violence or actual violence to resolve the conflict.

## Impact of *Voyager's* Messages

*Star Trek: Voyager* clearly functions as a cultural phenomena that reinforces violence as a method to solving conflict. This essay has attempted to draw that connection by first exploring how cultural phenomena, such as television shows, have the ability to reinforce social norms. This is done by presenting re-representations of the social environment to viewers who then analyze and internalize the messages, both consciously and unconsciously, presented in the program. In *Voyager* the re-representations created have a tendency to rely on either threats of violence or actual violence to address inter-species conflicts. The reason for this dependence on violence is most likely external to the narrative of the series, such as attracting and retaining viewers through use of tense violent conflicts. While a small number of episodes use peaceful diplomatic means, the majority engages in violence. For viewers the messages being internalized by watching *Voyager* appears to be one that affirms violent measures as the most efficient way to resolve conflict. In episodes a diplomatic avenue is considered or attempted, however, once the enemy rebuffs it, *Voyager* enjoys the freedom to use any extreme of violence to gain the more powerful position in the conflict. Further reinforcing this position is *Voyager's* use of defensive violence. Weldes writes about this in her essay on *Star Trek* and diplomacy: "While *Star Trek's* heroes do use force...they generally do so only under provocation from hostile and dangerous aliens...When force is employed it is the regrettable but necessary reaction to a sometimes hostile environment, to the appearance of an external threat" (Weldes, 1999, p. 126). On a larger social level, this affirms a traditional social norm that the use of violence when being attacked is appropriate. It also serves to normalize the process of

othering those who are different in the social environment. In *Voyager* the environment is filled with strange and undiscovered others. The belief is that members of Starfleet approach these others peacefully under the banner of liberal multiculturalism is regularly promoted. Indeed, as Weldes writes, “the *Star Trek* universe rests on and serves to naturalize a series of differences that produce a hierarchical ordering of cultures, races, species, and life forms” (Weldes, 1999, p. 127). However, there is an additional consequence to such an action. By seeing them as different, as others the crew—and the viewers at home—can easily and quickly turn against them when conflict arises and so “a positive, although overtly denied and thus disguised, interventionism and militarism” is also adopted (Weldes, 1999, p. 127). For if the other is different and therefore more violent or problematic than those in Starfleet then the crew of ships such as *Voyager* are subtly permitted to engage in violence to reduce the threat. Militarism is inherent in *Star Trek*. A naval hierarchy serves as the structure for the whole system and may be part of the reason for the reliance on violence.

The essay is not to advocate that the threat of violence or violence itself should be eliminated from television. It is almost universally accepted that humans and conflict are inseparable. As Johan Galtung says the only human not in conflict is a dead one (J. Galtung, lecture, Advanced Conflict Transformation, EPU, February 25-29, 2008). But, the episodes of *Voyager* tend to rely on violence as a solution frequently. In light of the research that connects such messages on television to the social understandings of viewers there may be a need to consider what excessive dependence on such tactics do to how viewers see the world and act within it. As evidenced by the episode “The Killing Game” violence can be used in an episode to create dramatic tension or to move

the plot forward while the conclusion can demonstrate that diplomacy is the route to a lasting, peaceful solution.

The initial attempt of this analysis was to begin exploring how *Star Trek: Voyager* reinforces social norms that violence is an acceptable to solve conflicts. Further areas of study are obviously required. A quantitative analysis of all of the episodes of the series would yield interesting patterns for exactly how many times the crew of *Voyager* use diplomacy, the threat of violence or violence itself to resolve conflicts. Analysis of the other more recent *Star Trek* series may uncover other patterns of conflict resolution that support or undermine this essay's conclusions. Another avenue of study tangentially related to the topics raised here include an exploration of the pressures placed on the writer's of *Star Trek* series to use violence to attract viewers and whether or not that has increased since the original *Star Trek* series.

When he began *Star Trek*, Roddenberry believed he had envisioned and created a "new world with new rules", however his world is not so radically new when it comes to conflict resolution practices. He may have been able to break social norms about gender and race and address concerns about the war in Vietnam, but the choices his characters make encourage the hegemony of conflict and normalize violence as a solution to complex conflicts. What is truly troubling about the realization that *Star Trek* perpetuates social understandings of violence as a commonsensical and effective route to conflict management is that the program is a manufactured hope, an idealized idea of the future of humanity. So even in one of our most popular fantasizes we cannot and chose not to imagine a peaceful existence.

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## **Editorial**

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