

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY
SCHREYER HONORS COLLEGE

DEPARTMENT OF FILM-VIDEO AND MEDIA STUDIES

THE EVOLUTION OF UHURA:
REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN IN *TREK*

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Fall 2010

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements
for a baccalaureate degree
in Film-Video
with honors in Media Studies

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Abstract:

The Evolution of Uhura: Representations of Women in *Trek* will be a primarily textual character analysis* of the ways in which the character of Uhura has evolved and transformed over the past forty years. In the paper, I claim that *Trek* films have always had both positive and negative representations of women, and that "NuTrek" fails and succeeds in ways that are different from but comparable to those of "classic" *Trek*. I will devote the first half of my paper to Uhura's portrayal in *Star Treks* I through VI. The second half of my research will focus on the newest film, *Star Trek* (2009). I will attempt to explain the character's evolution as well as to critique the ways in which NuTrek featuring the *Original Series* characters manages to simultaneously triumph and fail at representing the true diversity of women.

- * my interpretation of how different characters can be "read" as either positive or negative representations of gender; my own interpretation will be compared and contrasted with that of other *Trek* scholars, and I will be citing sources both in feminist literature and media studies literature (and some combinations) to back up my own conclusions about the films.

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Acknowledgements:

For their patience as I wandered through the research phase and then as I hammered through writing and revising, I would like to thank Rebecca Bender, Barbara Bird, Paula Droege, Kevin Hagopian, and Jeanne Hall. You all were essential to this process - thank you.

"There are many good reasons for studying popular fiction. The best, though, is that it matters."

- Tony Bennett and Graham Martin

Introduction, Literature Review, and a Brief History of *Trek*

"These are the voyages of the starship Enterprise - her continuing mission to seek out new worlds and new civilizations - to boldly go where no one has gone before."

- Opening Credits Voiceover for *The Next Generation*

"We will not be successful in rebooting *Trek* unless we can get women to go see the movie," says director J.J. Abrams during the opening of the director's commentary on *Star Trek* (Abrams, 2009). He comprehends that in an age when getting your audience into the theater has become more challenging than ever before, it is unwise to ignore any segment of the potential viewing population. *Star Trek*, in particular, has a vast and complex female viewing audience - one of the largest for a science fiction franchise, beating out the *Star Wars* -franchise female fandom by a significant amount (Tenuto, "The Myth of the *Star Trek* Fan"). The reinvention of any media franchise can be a tricky process, and *Trek*, with over twenty-two days - 575 hours - worth of television series and films that span the past four decades, is a media behemoth (Paramount).

The very first incarnation of *Star Trek* was a television pilot conceived and produced by Gene Roddenberry in the late 1960s. Marketed to the networks as a science fiction version of the popular TV show "Wagon Train" (or, as Roddenberry called it, "Wagon Train to

the Stars") what is now known as *Star Trek: The Original Series* was a show that amalgamated a kind of soap opera, western, adventure story into a new kind of science fiction (Shatner, *Star Trek Memories*). The hour-long episodes followed the adventures of the brash Captain Kirk and his crew as they encountered and overcame a new "alien of the week" for three consecutive seasons.

Following original *Trek's* remarkable success in syndication during the 1970s (despite an earlier ratings failure and cancellation), five other TV series were hatched, their runs spanning the decades from 1973 to 2005 - *The Animated Series* (1973-1974), *The Next Generation* (1987-1994), *Deep Space Nine* (1993-1999), *Voyager* (1995-2001), and *Enterprise* (2001-2005). There have been eleven feature films - *The Motion Picture* (Wise, 1979), *The Wrath of Khan* (Meyer, 1982), *The Search for Spock* (Nimoy, 1984), *The Voyage Home* (Nimoy, 1986), *The Final Frontier* (Shatner, 1989), *The Undiscovered Country* (Meyer, 1991), *Generations* (Carson, 1994), *First Contact* (Frakes, 1996), *Insurrection* (Frakes, 1998), *Nemesis* (Baird, 2002), and *Star Trek* (Abrams, 2009). Such a quantity of diverse media begs for analysis, and most facets of the *Trek* universe have been intensively critiqued by a wide spectrum of media scholars. The following sections attempt to briefly outline this body of research and to detail the ways in which it has influenced my own.

One of the primary challenges of textual analysis today is that there is so much extra-textual material available on DVDs - material that may have been cut for a variety of reasons from the version of

the film shown in theaters. The textual analysis of film is designed to suggest ways in which audiences might read and interpret visual materials. As in literature, it becomes important to clarify exactly which "version" of the creative work is being critiqued. The propensity of studios to release and re-release director's cuts, special editions, extended editions and so forth means that for any single film there may be three or four different cuts of that film available to the public. For the purposes of this study, the main text considered will be the theatrical release versions of the *Star Trek* films and the conclusions about characterizations that can be drawn from this text. Of course, as I personally have seen more than one version of some of the films, as well as more than a few "behind the scenes" featurettes, it is likely that some of this will influence my readings of the films and my interpretations of the characters. The following character analyses, then, will be generally focused upon the versions of characters and story presented in the theatrical releases of the films, but will also include references to behind-the-scenes information and deleted scenes when appropriate and pertinent to this work.

Before going any further into details about the *Trek* universe and the particularities of it, I would like to define a few of the feminist terms and rubric I will be using in my analysis. "Sex" as used in this work refers to the biologically male or female sex. "Gender" means having to do with the norms associated with being identified as either male or female in general American society.

Therefore, one example of a "gender stereotype" or "feminine norm" might be a female crew member who is expected to wear a dress. In addition to making little sense within the military structure of the narrative, it is problematic because wearing the sensible pants and shirts of the male crew members seems prohibited (for *Original Series* characters), and it seems extremely unrealistic that *all* of the women in Starfleet would voluntarily wear identical miniskirted outfits, regardless of their job functions. This is one example of a problematic gendered representation of female characters in *Trek*.

Because "feminism" is an extraordinarily nebulous term with a wide range of definitions and categories, I will attempt to clarify each use of "progressive," "positive," or "feminist" with a reference to a specific feminist scholar's definition of the term. For instance, in the above example of miniskirts, Sandra Lee Bartky's descriptions of traditionally feminine modes of appearance might be used to explain the ways in which female crew members are marked as a sexual "other" and what this means in terms of their power on the ship.

I intend to use diverse pieces of feminist literature in my analysis due to the enormity and complexity of *Trek*, as well as because different theorists will be more relevant to particular areas of criticism. My work builds on that of previous scholars who have also combined a study of popular culture and media representations of gender, sex, femininity and masculinity. The following section is a brief review of the theorists who have previously done work on *Star*

Trek, have written on feminism, and/or are specialists in representations of women in film and other visual media.

Robin Roberts' book, Sexual Generations - Star Trek: The Next Generation and Gender provides an in depth look at the TV series *The Next Generation* (1987 - 1994) and the ways in which that series represented sex, gender, and feminist issues. Her work has strongly influenced my own, and I will be drawing upon the style Roberts uses in my critiques of the *Original Series* characters and the ways in which they are represented within the films. Beyond Roberts, I will also be using the work of David Greven, who reimagines the *Trek* universe by presenting an alternative reading of many of the television series and films. Greven's book, Gender and Sexuality in Star Trek suggests that the fanbase associated with *Trek* is exceedingly aware of the franchise's frequent undertones of alternate sexuality, and Greven attempts to illustrate the ways in which *Trek* can therefore be read as a subversive text. Though my own work deals only with relationships and sexualities explicit within the text, I will briefly discuss some of the ways in which these "implicit" readings might affect the assumed relationships of the characters.

In addition to my research on gender analysis within the body of *Trek* studies, I will also be considering the broader work of many feminist film scholars. One of my primary influences has been Laura Mulvey, who writes about the ways in which women are objectified in film and what this cultural objectification means to feminists. I will also be using the work of feminist theorist Catherine MacKinnon

to provide a point of reference as I dissect the power structures within the *Trek* universe and critique the ways in which these structures may be less "progressive" and more "reactive." Finally, the third feminist theorist I will be using to discuss norms of feminine appearance as they relate to structured power is Sandra Lee Bartky. As film is a primarily visual medium, and the objectification and sexualization of female characters is of particular interest to my research, Bartky's work will strongly influence my critiques of *Trek* women's physical appearance.

Trek and feminist scholars whose work I have not cited above but who have been absolutely instrumental to my work on this subject include Jan Johnson-Smith, Steve Neale, and Michele Marie Casavant. As part of my broader research for this subject I also read many of the cast and crew's autobiographies about their experiences with *Trek* as well as several books analyzing and critiquing *Trek* fandom, such as Tulloch and Jenkins' Science Fiction Audiences: Watching *Doctor Who* and *Star Trek*. It seems essential that any complex critique of the *Trek* franchise must acknowledge its millions of fans and must consider the reasons why these individuals remain loyal despite the inherent critical problems within the *Trek* vision of "utopia." My research will thus attempt to analyze the change, growth, and development of Uhura from her beginnings in 1969 through her development in the films between 1979 and up through the latest 2009 installment. I will add to much work that has already been done on female characters in *Trek*. However, the body of work on the character Uhura and the women who

appear in the films is comparatively small, and this is where my research and analysis will be focused. I will discuss the ways in which these particular characters show an evolution of *Trek* women over the decades, as well as how they do and do not reflect the occasionally feminist narrative of *Trek*.

A Brief History of *Trek*

The very first incarnation of *Star Trek*, known now as *The Original Series*, lasted only three short seasons when originally aired between 1967 and 1969, but became a huge hit in syndicated reruns during the 1970s, and eventually gained so much popularity that six films featuring the original cast were produced. The second TV series, *The Next Generation* (1987-1994), was a huge hit both when on the air and in syndication, and spawned its own four film series. There have been six distinct television series totaling over thirty seasons (see detailed listing on page 2). Creator Gene Roddenberry always claimed that although it may appear to be just another "space opera," *Star Trek* was meant to spur deeper thought and discussion of present day issues under the guise of entertainment, and to encourage dialogues about such issues among its viewers. It is certainly true that *Star Trek* has a widely publicized image as a "progressive" television series more willing than other shows to bring up controversial topics, but it remains to be seen if such commendations are justified.

Like *Star Wars* (a franchise whose popular success encouraged the expansion of *Trek*), *Star Trek* boasts an enormous fan base, and spans nearly every type of media - from television to video games to fanzines to literature to feature films. [Star Wars: Episodes IV, V, and VI were released in 1977, 1980, and 1983. The first *Star Trek* film was released in 1979.] My study will begin by analyzing *The Motion Picture* (Wise, 1979), *The Wrath Of Khan* (Meyer, 1982), *The Search For Spock* (Nimoy, 1984), *The Voyage Home* (Nimoy, 1986), *The Final Frontier* (Shatner, 1989), and *The Undiscovered Country* (Meyer, 1991) through the lenses of the character of Uhura and the progression of female "guest stars" who appear in the different films. I will discuss the ways in which these characters are or are not "realistic" portrayals of the actual diversity of women, and what these representations mean when considered through a lens of feminist critiques. Finally, I will explain why the female characters included in the newest film, *Star Trek* (Abrams, 2009), represent a mixed bag of progress and regression when compared to their predecessors in the franchise.

Part I: Nyota Uhura, Communications Officer, U.S.S. Enterprise

"Hailing frequencies open, captain." - Uhura, TOS

Since her conception in 1967, the character of Nyota Uhura has been held high by the networks as a prime example of *Trek* diversity and progressivity in the categories of both gender and race. Most hardcore fans of the franchise are aware of Nichelle Nichols meeting with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and his admonition that she must remain on the series (despite feeling underappreciated) to provide a role model for young black children throughout the country (Nichols, 164). There has been much made of *Trek's* bravery in the filming and airing of the "first primetime interracial kiss" between the character of Uhura and Captain Kirk (*Plato's Stepchildren, TOS, 1968*).

Conversely, there are a wide variety of scholarly studies which critique this notion of Uhura as heretofore unseen "progress," and suggest that her role has been overblown beyond its actual impact. Media theorists Daniel Bernardi, Robin Roberts, Deborah Tudor, and Eileen Meehan provide widely diverse critiques of the many aspects of *Trek*, but all agree that while those interested in the promotion of *Trek* make great claims about diversity and positive representation, the reality of the television series and the films give a much different picture.

Before beginning a film-by-film chronology for Uhura, I would like to present a more general analysis of her character as she

evolves through *The Original Series* (1967 - 1969) and the films (1979 - 2009). For my summarizations of the other (all male) characters in *The Original Series (TOS)*, please see the Appendix.

Nyota Uhura is the only female regular in the *TOS* cast who also appears in all of the films. (Nurse Christine Chapel, who had a supporting role in the series, appears only briefly in one of the films.) Her job is as the communications officer for the U.S.S. Enterprise, the flagship of Starfleet for the United Federation of Planets. Her skills include proficiency at the communications position, exceptional linguistics talent, singing and dancing. Which of these skills appear most emphasized and frequent in the films is a point I will return to later. Unfortunately, her character has only minor screen time and very little development in most of the first six *Trek* films, something that changes somewhat significantly in *Star Trek* (2009). Her inferior status in the *Original Series* films gets better over time, particularly in *The Final Frontier* (Shatner, 1989) as well as the 2009 film, *Star Trek* (Abrams), in which she is romantically involved with Spock.

The type of semi-informal character critique I have done above is a shortened and simplified form of that which I will attempt in the rest of this paper. My original intent when writing this paper about Uhura was to highlight the ways in which one of the most notable black female television characters has made an imprint on the "big screen" stories of her franchise. Unfortunately, my research suggests that because of an extreme focus on the characters of Kirk and Spock, many

of the films shunt all of the supporting characters (even many of the other males) to extremely minimal background status. The following section charts the character's beginnings and uses the work of feminist theorists to explain why the male dominated culture of the television industry caused the character of Uhura to evolve in the way she did.

The 1960s television entertainment industry was almost exclusively controlled by male directors, producers, and studio executives. In her text Feminism unmodified: discourses on life and law Caroline MacKinnon explains the dominance analysis of sexual relations, and her analysis sheds some startling light on the early situation at *Star Trek*. According to MacKinnon,

The question of equality, from the standpoint of what it is going to take to get it, is at root a question of hierarchy, which—as power succeeds in constructing social perception and social reality—derivatively becomes a categorical distinction, a difference. Here, on the first day that matters, dominance was achieved, probably by force. By the second day, division along the same lines had to be relatively firmly in place. On the third day, if not sooner, differences were demarcated...(40)

The beginning of the (still inconclusive) tug-of-war between feminism and *Star Trek* parallels MacKinnon's explanation of dominance perfectly. As the 60s drew to a close, feminist and civil rights

movements gained traction in much of the rest of the United States, but Hollywood was clinging to the less progressive past - tightly. Many shows produced around that time promoted ancient stereotypes that illustrated an obstinate blindness to the progress and change that was actually occurring outside the studio doors.

At this time, TV writer Gene Roddenberry was seeking a creative way of discussing some of these popular issues in a fictional TV series that might make it through the vast array of censors and networks somewhat intact. Science fiction was his ideal vehicle, and *Star Trek* was born. Roddenberry sold his concept to NBC, which allowed him to produce a pilot episode for their perusal (Shatner, *Star Trek Memories*). What follows is a discussion about how that pilot both succeeded and failed at changing gender norms, and how it can be studied as a template for future discussions of sex and gender in *Trek* as well.

In the very beginning of *Star Trek*, one character stood out as a new breed of TV heroine - her name was "Number One," and she was the second-in-command on the starship Enterprise. Cool-headed in a crisis, logical, unemotional, and extremely intelligent, Number One was a far cry from the average 60's TV female. She, and all of the other female officers in the very first pilot of *Star Trek*, wore pants and shirts identical to those worn by their male counterparts - at a time when June Cleaver was still turning up in heels to fix Ward's supper. Even more strikingly, this pilot episode allowed these women true power on the Enterprise; women were visibly present in the room

when important command decisions were being made, and Number One was left in charge of the ship whenever the captain was away.

Roddenberry's new science fiction pilot had treaded where no one else had dared.

Unfortunately, as it turned out, there was a reason why other aspiring TV writers and producers had stuck to traditional definitions of femininity, and Roddenberry's optimism was quickly shut down. The white male executives at NBC in the late '60s were less than charmed by the unconventional women in Roddenberry's original vision, and they worried about what advertisers would think. Their reluctance to cede power to a woman, even a fictional one, illustrates MacKinnon's first step in dominance strategy. "On the first day that matters, dominance was achieved, probably by force" (Mackinnon, 40). Not only did network execs scrap the original pilot in which Number One appeared, they went so far as to threaten series cancellation if the character was not totally eliminated (Shatner, Star Trek Memories). Thus, in order to get his "progressive" program on the air, Roddenberry reluctantly cut Number One (despite the fact that the part had been given to his mistress, Majel Barrett), and promoted the repressed, unemotional, and strictly logical male alien Spock to the position of first officer (Shatner, Star Trek Memories).

Still dissatisfied with the innovation in Roddenberry's idealistic vision of the future, the network execs provided a few more suggestions that bring to mind MacKinnon's third point in dominance theory - demarcation of sexual difference. Female officers were

reduced from the utilitarian and comfortable pants and jackets to tiny mini-dresses, tall Go-Go Boots, and tights. For a show that contained many parallels to the military, the idea of dressing any of its members - who are intended to do anything besides remain seated on the bridge - in such impractical clothing is a clear and unfortunate delineation of difference and subordinate status. Sadly, the mini-dress would remain the gendered uniform of choice for female officers for decades to come, despite the sheer illogic of dressing constantly active individuals in such a costume, and the incapacitating effects it inevitably had on those who wore it.

Finally, after a multitude of alterations to the original *Star Trek* such as those listed above, network execs allowed Roddenberry to proceed with what was left of his vision. As the first season got rolling, truly developed female characters appeared on a sporadic basis and were consistently romantically conquered by Captain Kirk before the first commercial break (or shortly thereafter). On the regular recurring cast list, random female ensigns frequently appeared with Captain Kirk's coffee, but the chances for these women to be the focus of the episode or develop in any of the ways that the male characters did were severely limited.

One notable exception is the second season episode *Dark Mirror* which not only gave significant power to the female "consort" of the mirror Kirk, but also allowed Uhura a significant role. In the episode, Uhura uses her sexuality to put a leering Sulu in his place, she wears even less clothing than her traditional miniskirt, and she

carries the same hand weapons as the male bridge crew. She also has an action sequence in which she overpowers Kirk's mirror universe "consort." For more in depth analyses of the character of Uhura and her evolution, Dr. Deborah Tudor's *Neoliberalism and Global Cinema: Capital, Culture, and Marxist Critique* edited by Jyotsna Kapur and Keith Wagner, Routledge, forthcoming 2010.

In the 2009 adaptation of *Trek*, in which one might have expected to see "Number One" reappear as the second-in-command to the revived Captain Pike, a genuinely powerful female officer is nowhere to be seen, replaced without a whisper by the coolly masculine Spock. The loss of lead female characters with clear power and command authority - particularly Number One - was a blow to feminine representation in *Trek* that decades later has not yet healed.

Sandra Lee Bartky's article "Foucault, Femininity and the Modernization of Power," discusses Foucault's panopticon and outlines the norms of feminine appearances. Bartky states, "...these disciplinary practices must be understood in the light of the modernization of patriarchal domination..." (Bartky 65-66). Thus, Bartky claims that it is patriarchy which influences modern woman's constant self-criticism and her obsession with make-up, hair, and physical appearance. She also uses Foucault's panopticon and the idea of the self-policing citizen to explain the ways in which women force themselves to conform to societal expectations in terms of appearance and behavior (Mackinnon, 65-66).

As noted above, much of the *Star Trek* universe and the Hollywood franchise were conceived by, ruled over, and quantifiably dominated by men. It should not be surprising that the proportion of female to male characters in *Trek* reflected this unbalanced situation, and the women who do appear frequently subscribe to Bartky's norms of feminine appearance. Bartky begins her discussion of appearance by listing the different ways that men and women walk and even sit: how a woman must constantly watch her movements so as not to appear too "loose" towards men; how she must walk in shoes that are highly inconvenient for that purpose and serve mainly to decorate her feet rather than assist her in movement; how she seems constantly tense while men spread out, relax and move about as they wish, unrestricted by uncomfortable apparel (Bartky 67-69).

In the latest *Star Trek* film, female characters wear a new variation on the miniskirted uniform that was so ubiquitous in *The Original Series*. In fact, the first time the character of Uhura appears onscreen in the 2009 film, it is not her face that we notice, but the camera following her legs and rear as she threads her way through a crowded bar. We only see the front of her when she turns to greet some friends she is passing. This creation of Uhura as an "object" to be gazed upon rather than as a "subject" to take action illustrates many of Laura Mulvey's arguments about women who are acted upon rather than initiators of action themselves. According to Mulvey, "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The

determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure which is styled accordingly" (*Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Cinema*, 11).

Uhura's complicated struggle to be both subject and object can also be seen in earlier films. At the beginning of *The Wrath of Khan* (Meyer, 1982), Uhura contributes new information in the opening scene by revealing the distress call from the starship *Kobayashi Maru* and by sending and receiving various other communications throughout the sequence. Her function in this scene is significantly more than, "Hailing frequencies open, captain." It is later revealed that this has all been a simulation, but this does not entirely discount its "realness" and Uhura's importance in terms of screen time and significance to the narrative. In the later cinematic "reveal" of the newly refurbished *Enterprise*, Uhura is present in the shuttle - a change from *The Motion Picture* when only Kirk and Scott were present for the new ship's "reveal" (Wise, 1979). However, once the shuttle docks, Uhura seems to become Kirk's personal assistant as he hands off the book he received from McCoy earlier in the film to her so that he can go inspect the ship. Surely she is a high enough ranking officer that he could have handed it to a cadet (or better yet, simply carried it to his quarters himself)?

For a large portion of the film, then, Uhura remains a background character, uttering simple technobabble lines and staying out of the way as Kirk, female scientist Carol Marcus, and male crewman Chekov advance the plot. After a space battle with the *Starship Reliant* - an

enemy vessel that has been taken over by the genetically enhanced supervillain Khan - Uhura is the one who delivers the news to the bridge that the U.S.S. Reliant wishes to negotiate the terms of the Enterprise's surrender. It is a line of major dramatic import that contributes significantly to the tension in the scene and the plot. Of course, it is important to note that every time Uhura contributes new information to the narrative she is usually acting as a mere conduit between two much more important male characters, simply conveying the messages which they are sending to each other through her. Also, this is Uhura's last moment of significant interaction and dialogue in the film. Though she is present in many later bridge scenes, she is more of a human prop or "extra" than a contributing character in any significant sense. The story becomes much more about the Carol-Kirk-David triangle and by the end is focused entirely around Spock's death.

Uhura's performance in *The Search for Spock* (Nimoy, 1984) is rendered so minute as to be almost negligible. There is only one scene in which her character has more than one or two lines of dialogue, and she is then left behind on Vulcan as the entire rest of the all male bridge crew journey to save Spock. The only other female with a role worth noting in this film is Saavik, and her character does little more than support the character of Kirk's son, David, and then fade immediately into the background when the heavily male Enterprise crew arrives to save them.

In this film the villains are also predominantly male. All of the Klingons on the evil Kruge's ship are male. In fact, the only female Klingon to appear in this film is killed by Kruge in an early scene. Kruge chooses to destroy the ship she is on and she accepts her death because Kruge tells her, "you know too much, and now I have to kill you." He makes this choice in spite of the fact that their dialogue prior to this exchange suggested some kind of romantic relationship between the two of them - one which Kruge is apparently willing to sacrifice with little thought in order to assure his mission and capture of the "genesis weapon." Kruge's easy dismissal of her character is yet another illustration of problematically distributed power relations. He also presents a particularly harsh version of masculinity that is so bent on violence it ignores all other emotion.

In *The Voyage Home* (Nimoy, 1986) it is difficult to find a single scene in which Uhura plays a pivotal role, contributes in a significant way to the plot, has any substantial amount of dialogue, or is the "featured" character in the scene. Things start out promisingly when she and Chekov are given their own subplot, but when Uhura is beamed back to the ship first, she misses out on the subsequent chase scene, and is not even included on the away mission to the hospital to rescue the captured Chekov. Additionally, in all of the scenes in which the entire crew is in the frame, she becomes a tiny background figure. Previous theorists have noted that because of her position at the very back of the "bridge" one can conclude that

Uhura is a minor character. I would argue that there is only some validity to this argument, as Spock's station is also at the very back of the bridge, and he is very much a major character. However, it is certainly true that Uhura's background position accurately mirrors the depth of her character in many of the scenes in *The Voyage Home* (Nimoy, 1986).

In the beginning of *The Voyage Home* (Nimoy, 1986) Uhura has small bits of dialogue. The trend I have observed in these older films, as well as in NuTrek (theorist's term for the 2009 reboot of the franchise [Tudor, 2010]), is that while Uhura may receive a reasonable amount of screen time and the promise of a significant role in the plot at the beginning of the film, the farther along the film gets and the more the plot develops, the less screen time and dialogue her character actually receives. *TVH* also suggests that Uhura cares about Spock, something that was subtly hinted at but never made explicit during *The Original Series* (Paramount, 1967-1969). Throughout *TVH* (as well as in *The Motion Picture* (Wise, 1979) and *The Wrath of Khan* (Meyer, 1982) Uhura, Chekov, Sulu and Scottie are bonded as a subservient foursome to the Spock, Kirk, McCoy triumvirate. This hierarchy is rather less apparent in NuTrek, where Uhura gains a kind of access to the threesome and particularly to Spock through her relationship with him. However, in *The Voyage Home* (Nimoy, 1986), the difference between the lower four crew members and the top three male leads is fairly explicit in the ways in which Kirk divides tasks and

in the differing amounts of screen time and dialogue the characters comparatively receive.

It is also worth noting that when *TVH* was released, Uhura was wearing pants and a uniform identical to that of the rest of the command crew. Whether this is due to the "progressiveness" of the 1980s or more the fact that Nichelle Nichols was beginning to age past the point where her youth and legs were selling points is unclear. The latter seems unlikely, as she reappears in a skirt in the subsequent film, *The Final Frontier* (Shatner, 1989), and even does a highly suggestive dance covered only by palm leaves (*The Final Frontier*, Shatner, 1989). Costuming in each of the first films changes dramatically, though less so as the films begin to be produced more closely together. The following are a sequence of figures showing the progression of Uhura's costuming from *The Motion Picture* (Wise, 1979) through *Star Trek* (Abrams, 2009).

Figure 1 - Uhura in *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (Wise, 1979)



Copyright Paramount, 1979

Figure 2 - Uhura in *Star Trek: The Wrath of Khan* (Meyer, 1982)



Copyright, Paramount, 1982

Figure 3 - Uhura in *Star Trek: The Search for Spock* (Nimoy, 1984)



Copyright, Paramount, 1984

(Uhura wears pants in this film.)

Figure 4 - Uhura in *Star Trek: The Voyage Home* (Nimoy, 1986)



Copyright, Paramount, 1986

(In *TVH* Uhura switches between pants and skirts depending on the situation.)

Figure 5 - Uhura in *Star Trek: The Final Frontier* (Shatner, 1989)



Copyright, Paramount, 1989

Figure 6 - Uhura in *Star Trek: The Undiscovered Country* (Nimoy, 1991)



Copyright, Paramount, 1991

Uhura receives generous screen time in *The Final Frontier*, is given more power than in previous films, and is allowed to contribute to the plot in substantial ways for a longer period than in the preceding films. There is also the explicit suggestion of a love interest between Uhura and Scottie, something that is not at all apparent in previous films. While it is difficult to attribute Uhura's increased role to any single factor, it is certainly noteworthy that her importance to the "ensemble" aspect of the cast dramatically increased for *TFF*. In fact, it increased to the point that she is credited *before* George Takei in the opening credits. In each preceding *Trek* sequel she was credited last in the original crew. Finally, while each of the male characters of the "lower foursome" mentioned above is forced to play the fool for comedic effect in this film, Uhura does not. The following section outlines these claims in detail.

First, Uhura is shown in early scenes to have some kind of special relationship with Scottie. She brings the both of them dinner, and they talk about how they were supposed to spend their shore leave together. Both touch each other's faces and act fairly intimate. Then, when the red alert begins to sound, Scott dismisses it as just another technical glitch while Uhura goes to check, and she finds a genuine call from Starfleet giving the ship new orders. She, the communications officer, has been shown to be more aware and in more control than the chief engineer in this scene.

Second, when Sulu and Chekov are hiking in the woods, they become lost and Uhura has to find them. She sees through their suggestion that they were "caught in a blizzard" - rather than lost due to their own error - by consulting her computer and telling them that the weather is clear, and consequently promises them that "their secret is safe with her" (*The Final Frontier*, Shatner, 1989). Throughout this sequence it becomes Uhura's job to go and fetch everyone else who is still on the planet. Her outfit changes from the skirt she wears on the bridge to the pants she wears to go fetch the men - the first acknowledgement that perhaps versatility and variability in costuming could be a good thing. *The Final Frontier* (Shatner, 1989) is the first film in which she wears *either* a dress or pants, depending on the context of the scene (or nothing at all, later in the film).

When Uhura does her "erotic dance" in order to distract the Vulcan terrorists so that the away team can sneak into the city, she wears only giant palm leaves as she dances in the sand in front of a giant moon. Despite the fact that Nichelle Nichols was over fifty when this scene was filmed, she is still portrayed as an extremely desirable woman. In this scene, Uhura turns the usual power equation of sexualized object somewhat on its head when she reveals herself to be the one in control of the situation. The men who have been lured away from their posts as guards by her dancing and song are captured by the Enterprise crew.

The voyeuristic nature of Uhura's distraction is somewhat problematic when considered within the structure of Laura Mulvey, as

Uhura becomes more object than subject. I would argue against this claim of objectivity by suggesting that while there are problematic elements to Uhura's dance, her dialogue and her obvious power at the conclusion instead allow for a more positive interpretation of this scene. For instance, according to theorist Sandra Lee Bartky, "The current body of fashion is taut, small-breasted, narrow-hipped, and of a slimness bordering on emaciation; it is a silhouette that seems more appropriate to an adolescent boy or a newly pubescent girl than to an adult woman" (Bartky, 66). By 1989, actress Nichelle Nichols did not have this particular shape, though she certainly had a body that still fit into the narrow range of what most people would consider "attractive." However, she was shown to be a sexy older woman - something that was quite rare at the time. I would also suggest that the idea that a fifty-something woman can still be erotic and can "distract" so many men to be a blow to common notions of feminine sexuality and aging, and a highly positive one.

In the film *The Final Frontier* (Shatner, 1989), there is a scene involving a birth and the character of the Romulan emissary/representative. The rest of the film *The Final Frontier* is dominated by male characters, their interactions with the male "God," and a focus on the original crew (which as previously been established as disproportionately male). The most unique of these is the small scene which shows Spock's birth - it is a scene which Kirk, McCoy, Spock and Sybok all witness as part of Sybok's "ability" to help individuals overcome personal pain. In this scene, Spock's human mother, Amanda,

gives birth to Spock with the help of what appears to be a Vulcan midwife. The actual birth is depicted in shadow on the stone wall, and then the (still bloody) baby is shown to Spock's father, Sarek. Sarek frowns at the baby, calling it "so human." This is the first *Trek* movie to feature childbirth, something that is not repeated until *Star Trek* (Abrams, 2009) shows the birth of Kirk. Perhaps because of a fear of breaking with canon or of repeating something that had already been done in a previous installment, a new version of Spock's birth was cut from *Star Trek* (Abrams, 2009). It is atypical to show childbirth in an action movie, and I would argue that this is a positive feature of *Trek*, one that allows representation of something that happens to real women. It is problematic in that the birthing sequences are generally focused on the male characters rather than the female mother characters, but is progressive in that it is included at all.

The above analysis highlights my main reasons why *The Final Frontier* (Shatner, 1989) deserves the most credit of the original series films analyzed thus far for depicting Uhura in an increasingly feminist and progressive way. Her character gets a chance to wear a variety of clothing that does not perpetually limit her movement, has significant dialogue and actions that contribute to the idea that she is an intelligent and valuable member of the crew, and appears in several scenes that significantly advance the plot of the film. Thus, while *The Final Frontier* (Shatner, 1989), still contains many flaws in

terms of overall female representation and feminist idealism, the version of Uhura presented in this film is absolutely an advancement.

The Undiscovered Country (Meyer, 1991) represents a complicated step forwards and backwards for feminist representations in *Trek*. The film provides a small supporting role for Uhura, one that is clearly less significant and important than her role in *The Final Frontier* (Shatner, 1989). The film does include three other significant female characters, two of which turn out to be traitorous, and one of which begins as an enemy but turns out to be an ally. Due to the many new characters in this film and the complexity of the plot, there is little time spent on the development or participation of any of the main characters outside of Kirk and Spock. By the end of the film, however, the entire main bridge crew is shown to have come to a new sensibility about the Klingons - a kind of "mass" character arc. Uhura retains her ability to switch between pants and a skirt in *The Undiscovered Country*, and is shown wearing the skirt when on the ship itself, and the pants when attending formal functions like the debriefing that opens the film.

At the beginning of *The Undiscovered Country* (Meyer, 1991), the Klingon moon has blown up, changing the balance of power and forcing the Klingons to forge a peace agreement with the Federation. In the opening scene of the film, Captain Hikaru Sulu on his new starship the *Excelsior* witnesses this explosion. In the aftermath of the shock wave, the only female crew member in the background of the bridge crew asks "Should we report this, sir?" and Sulu replies, "Are you

kidding?" It seems disproportionately unlikely that the individual to ask such a "stupid" question should be the only female present in the room. This is one example of *Trek's* problematic portrayal of additional female characters in *The Undiscovered Country* (Meyer, 1991).

In the second scene, Uhura appears with the rest of the main bridge crew to be briefed about the catastrophe. Around the huge conference table in the briefing room sits a mixture of Starfleet brass. The vast majority of these individuals are men; female admirals and/or crew members make up less than one-fifth of the group. This scene is typical of much of the film; it is dominated by men and particularly focused on the characters of Kirk and Spock. Uhura delivers only a few lines near the beginning of the sequence, and this is typical of the film. Throughout most of *The Undiscovered Country* (Meyer, 1991), Uhura is little more than a conduit for information that is passing between the Enterprise and some other ship. It is common in media theory to refer to Uhura's character as that of a "glorified secretary," and in this film, she seems quite stuck in that role (Joyrich, 71).

Over the course of the film, Uhura's actions are limited to: lying to Starfleet about inoperative communications systems, disdaining a Klingon general at dinner, "monitoring" situations (see explanation below), and generally supporting the decisions of the senior staff without ever really contributing her own ideas to situations. In the previous sentence, by "monitoring situations," I

mean that there are multiple scenes in which Uhura seems to be the only link to wherever something is happening - be it at Starfleet, on a Klingon world, or on another starship. In this way, she does have a kind of power and access that even the current acting captain, Spock, lacks. For instance, in the scene after the one in which Kirk and McCoy are taken prisoner, it is Uhura who reports this information to the crew. However, as soon as she reports new information, her duty ceases, and the officers clustered around her tend to wander back to whatever it was they were supposed to be doing. In this way, she is little more than a conduit - an object rather than an active subject.

There is one very brief scene in *The Undiscovered Country* (Meyer, 1991), which makes little sense to me and simultaneously elevates and denigrates the character of Uhura. In it, the entire bridge crew is scrambling around the communications station attempting to translate Klingon using large, dusty books. Whoever made the decision that this would be a humorous element of the film seemed to glaze over the variety of plot difficulties it presents. First, *The Undiscovered Country* (Meyer, 1991) has been explicitly noted as a film meant to parallel the end of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union (*Peacemaking, TUC Special Features*, 1991). It is exceedingly difficult to believe that anyone at a "cold war" with anyone else would have *no one* on a military vessel containing over three hundred people who could translate the language. More puzzlingly, that Uhura herself was completely incapable of translating the language was also peculiar. As the communications officer and

having been shown in previous films to be particularly skilled at language and at her job, it seems problematic that she should be portrayed as ineptly as she is shown to be in this scene. The only redemption seems to be that all of the other characters are equally confused and incompetent, which makes the oversight slightly less offensive. Overall, however, *The Undiscovered Country* (Meyer, 1986) is a step backwards both in development of the character of Uhura and in positive representations of other female characters.

PART II: NuTrek v. "Classic" Trek

Star Trek (Abrams, 2009) garnered \$75,204,489 in box office receipts on its opening weekend of May 5, 2009, and had made over \$385,494,555 globally by its theatrical close several months later (boxofficemojo.com). In the years after *Star Trek: Nemesis* (Baird, 2002), the franchise seemed quietly dead, run into the ground from decades of sequels. But when rumors circulated in 2008 that work had begun on a new *Star Trek* film, it threw *Trek* fan communities into an uproar. Speculation began immediately about what type of film it would be, whether it would be "true" to the 1960s TV show and the subsequent films, who would be in it, etc. (www.startrekmovie.com/forums). As was mentioned in the opening of this analysis, the fan community of *Star Trek* is highly influential. However, because of its sheer size, length of existence, and diversity, it is also rarely homogenous in opinion. This diversity of interpretation is also apparent in the scholarly work of those who have studied the franchise.

It is noteworthy, then, that there was so much speculation about whether the newest film would be "true" to the original work. True in what way? Representations of the characters? The technology? The plotlines? The subplots? Surely none yearn for the CGI of yesteryear, when the only way to make ships appear in space was to hang tiny plastic models in front of green screens and then carefully plot miniature camera angles around them? Additionally, previous

sections of this analysis establish that while there are many constants in *Trek*, the films themselves have very different themes, styles, and even characters.

Some of the more "diehard" fans anticipated disaster from the start, "Why can't they just let it be?" they moaned, "The classic episodes are so...classic." For verification of these claims, one may check almost any *Trek* related blog site or forum. In each and every one there is a vocal minority of fans who believe the 2010 film was a desecration of all that *Star Trek* once was. There was an incredible internet response to each and every step of the pre-production, production, and even post-production process. Director J.J. Abrams and writers Bob Orci and Alex Kurtzman even got online to talk to fans about the story and the production process (trekmovie.com). *Star Trek* has always walked a fine line between cult classic and mainstream success, and the newest film, *Star Trek* (Abrams, 2009), has perhaps straddled that line better than previous installments in the series (Carroll).

Upon first viewing, *Star Trek* (Abrams, 2009) appears to be in the same vein as so many films today; it is a "rebirth" or "reboot" of a franchise that has consistently paid out for decades. It is clear however, that this version of *Trek* differs quite significantly from past incarnations. My argument in this section is that these differences include more positive representations of women - an improvement over previous films, but I also recognize the large number of flaws in the current installment. Included amongst these

"positive" changes are - one of the most complete characterizations of Uhura yet (as well as the most screen time for her character), the presence of females who are not Uhura on the bridge and in peripheral visuals, and the decision to show character's mothers as well as the emphasis on the importance of these individuals to the lead male characters decisions and lives. The primary negatives of the newest film are that the story still focuses on the relationships between the male characters, both mothers receive rather abbreviated storylines, the character of "green girl" is a less than positive one, and even the "new" characterization of Uhura is not, perhaps, all that she could be. I will explore these claims one by one before coming to any definitive conclusions.

The film opens on the USS Kelvin as the ship explores an anomaly in space. A young first officer, quickly revealed to be George Kirk, father of James Kirk, must take over the ship when the Captain is killed by the enemy. Kirk must then "go down with the ship" in order to save the lives of his crew, his wife, and his newborn son. All of this happens in the pre-title sequence of the film. Immediately following this scene is a cut to young James Kirk's troubled youth as he drives his father's antique car off of a cliff into a quarry and then to young Spock getting into a fight over an insult to his mother.

Star Trek's (Abrams, 2009) opening sequence has many elements typical of action movies. The conflict is set up, the main character's "origin story" is shown, and many things explode. What makes *Star Trek's* opening scene somewhat atypical is the additional

element it manages to squeeze into those first few moments. A woman gives birth. We (the audience) do not "see" the actual birthing process, but we see the new mother and new infant, as well as most of the steps leading up to the birth, intercut with the impending demise of the ship and the decision of the baby's father, George Kirk, to sacrifice his own life to save the lives of the crew and his family.

It is a fascinating sequence with which to start the film, one so strong that it comes *before* the title. While the child, Kirk, becomes the more important character over the course of the film, the emphasis on the mother and the emotional impact of this scene adds a much stronger dimension to the opening than if, say, the mother and child were not present on the ship at the time of the encounter. George Kirk might still have sacrificed himself for his crew, but the emotional impact of the scene would not have been nearly so high as watching a wife lose her husband and the father of her newborn son.

It is also important to note that George Kirk is highly emotionally invested in the birth of his child, and that he remains in extremely close contact with his wife as he prepares to destroy the ship (and in doing so to die himself). This emphasis on the husband-wife relationship also adds to the dramatic tension of the scene; perhaps proving that family drama can increase the richness of a story and make it more engaging. The movie has other overtones of family dynamics as well - Spock's father comes to fetch him when he gets into trouble at school; his mother tells him she will love him unconditionally; Spock and his father have a conversation about real

emotion after his mother's death. All of these instances together show a different kind of masculinity than that found in many of the *Original Series* films.

Abrams and the creative team behind *Star Trek* acknowledge that the opening sequence was a kind of last minute editing decision (Abrams, 2009) - which is certainly interesting when considering that a surprising number of Hollywood editors are women, and on *Star Trek*, editors Maryann Brandon and Mary Jo Markey are both females (imdb.com). Because film is a collaborative art, it is rarely possible to give special credit for an entire film, or even a single scene to any individual person. Many people do not think first of film editors when they think of the top individuals in a creative team, and in fact, no one but hard core Trekkers or individuals with a special interest in film may ever know the names of Maryann Brandon and Mary Jo Markey. Nevertheless the imprint of their efforts can certainly be felt in the 2009 *Trek* film, and is explicitly acknowledged by the higher ups in the production staff (Abrams, 2009).

One thing I would like to note at this point is the absence of Kirk's mother figure later in the film and the increased prominence of Spock's. Neither of Kirk's parents appears onscreen in his scene of youthful rebellion (though the voice of his stepfather may be heard over the car's phone system). Spock's father comes to fetch him at school after he has gotten in trouble for fighting, but we do not see his mother until he is nearly a grown man, when she lovingly tells him that he can choose whichever path he wants for his life; she will love

him unconditionally. In the very next scene, his mother's humanity (the human species signifies a kind of "race" in this context) is insulted by the Vulcan Science Academy, and Spock refuses their offer of admission and chooses to enter Starfleet instead.

The character of Spock has always been extremely complex, and he quickly becomes just as much the focus of this story as Kirk. Spock's relationship with his mother is pivotal to his character development in this story - a relationship which is never touched on at all in any of the other films, though it was covered in a few television episodes of *The Original Series*. However, Spock's entire relationship with his mother changes in *Star Trek* (Abrams, 2009) because of a canonical change in which she dies in a transporter accident, something that never happened in the previous universe of events). In addition, Kirk's relationship (or lack thereof) with his family is also a point of interest in this story.

This emphasis on familial relationships, the importance of character's mothers, and the impact that these female figures have on the two lead male characters is something that is unusual for an action film, and even unusual for a *Star Trek* film. Many of the films which focus on the *TOS* crew treat the crew itself like a kind of amalgamated family and completely ignore the idea that these characters might have actual biological relatives somewhere. *The Wrath of Khan* (Meyer, 1982) introduces James Kirk's son, David, but he is immediately killed in the next film *The Search for Spock* (Nimoy, 1984) and neither he nor his mother are ever heard from again.

It is problematic that *Star Trek* (Abrams, 2009) also uses the worn trope of destroying the families of the lead male characters in order to incite in them a need for revenge. There are some fascinating unexplored story potentials in the challenges of being a heroic figure *with* some family somewhere. It might be some time yet, however, before *Star Trek* is ready to actually allow its main characters to have genuine families, at least in its films. This means that female family members and their relationships - mothers, sisters, grandmothers - will likely be the relationships that will remain unseen in *Trek* because of the franchise's predilection for male-male relationships to take precedence.

The cast of characters for the newest *Star Trek* film is still a predominantly male cast. Sulu, Chekov, and Scottie each have their own respective moments to shine, and even Bones becomes a third string character when contrasted with the Spock-Kirk relationship. Uhura does get a few additional minutes of screen time, the chance to exhibit her linguistic skills, and an opportunity to speak lines of dialogue that are not entirely "hailing frequencies open, captain" in the new film.

With reference to "hailing frequencies open, captain" and the idea that Uhura is no more than a glorified secretary, there is an early sequence in the 2009 film which can be read as an ironic reference to Uhura's less progressive characterization throughout much of *The Original Series*. In the Kobyashi Maru scene, Kirk is taking the "Kobyashi Maru" test for the third time. The test is a kind of

simulation designed to test Starfleet cadets' ability to respond to stress in tough command situations. In this scene, she is clearly unhappy with Kirk's command position, and her distaste resonates in her tone of voice and the sarcasm that drips from her communications updates. At one point in the scene, she icily reports to him that "Starfleet command has ordered us to rescue them." "Them" refers to a theoretical stranded crew included in the simulation. In this scene, Kirk takes extra steps to put Uhura back in her "place" with the line, "Starfleet Command has ordered us to rescue them, *Captain*." Uhura refuses to repeat back this line until later in the scene, when she tacks on the "Captain" with gritted teeth, and again much later in the film, when the situation seems bleak and the word is more of a desperate reminder to Kirk of his responsibility than a respectful acknowledgement of his power.

In *Star Trek* (Abrams, 2009) Uhura as the object of a male gaze is made an explicit part of the text of the film through the viewpoint of the audience and the character of James Kirk. First, audience members are encouraged to gaze upon Uhura through suggestive camera angles that isolate parts of her body - making her an object rather than a subject. Second, Kirk is shown to gaze at Uhura and makes specific statements about how she looks. Uhura is given some small piece of agency in her reactions to Kirk's advances; she flatly dismisses them. Unfortunately, this small bit of agency is taken away from her when some of her male classmates take it as their chivalrous duty to challenge Kirk in a fight over his treatment of Uhura. Throughout the

following verbal exchange and fight, Uhura becomes no more than background noise, her opinion uncouneted and ignored as the men fight over her.

However, it is obvious from the first sequence in this film that Uhura considers herself to be more intelligent and capable than Kirk. In some of her opening dialogue she says to Kirk, "I thought you were just a dumb hick who only has sex with farm animals." Additionally, despite his constant needling throughout the film, she refuses to share her first name with him. When she tells Kirk that she is concentrating at the Academy in "exolinguistics," she does not expect him to understand what that means, and is surprised at his grasp of the term. *Star Trek* (Abrams, 2009) forces Kirk to prove to Uhura and to his entire crew that he is more than simply an attention-seeking troublemaker; something that was simply assumed in previous films.

In this new telling of the origins story, Kirk might have all the nerve in the world, but nobody seems very interested in the wunderkind from Iowa until he forces his way into every situation. Kirk's "womanizing" in this film is kept to a remarkable minimum and is emphasized much less than the new romantic tension between the characters of Spock and Uhura. Though Kirk may ogle Uhura, and has a brief intimate scene with her roommate, he does nothing more than gaze at women for the rest of the film. This is the only film in which Kirk is seen to desire a woman which he has no chance of getting. In *The Motion Picture* (Wise, 1979), Kirk seems uninterested in female companionship. In *The Wrath of Khan* (Meyer, 1982), Kirk is

reintroduced to his former flame and the mother of his child, Carol Marcus. In *The Voyage Home* (Nimoy, 1984), Kirk has a flirtatious relationship with Dr. Gillian Taylor, until she leaves him to pursue new things at the end of that film. Taylor's easy dismissal of Kirk at the end of *The Voyage Home* (Nimoy, 1984) is progressive in that she chooses to leave him without a second glance, while he seems somewhat surprised by her independence.

It is also important to note that the Kirk of the first seven films was drastically different from the Kirk of the television series and consequently even further removed from the Kirk portrayed in *Star Trek* (Abrams, 2009). Because the timeline of the film is of these characters in *their* time before the events of *TOS*, their youthful characteristics are much more emphasized than in the other films, when they are all about thirty years older. In those films, Kirk was a much older man, dealing with issues of aging, being a father, (*TWOK*, Meyer, 1982) and other "mid-life crises." He had no romantic interest whatsoever in *The Motion Picture* (Wise, 1979). However, throughout both *The Wrath of Khan* (Meyer, 1982) and *The Search For Spock* (Nimoy, 1984), Kirk has the (semi)love interest of Carol Marcus. It is predictable, then, that Kirk's flames never lasted long, and that the reversion to the "good ol' boys club" at the end of the film seems inevitable. However, this makes the infringement of Uhura into that club all the more interesting.

The characters of Kirk, Spock, and McCoy can be considered personifications of the three elements of Freud's ego, superego, and

id, respectively (tvtropes.com). Spock is consistently logical, calculating, and unemotional; he has a mind like a computer and is clearly the most brilliant of the three. In stark contrast to him, McCoy is illogical, impulsive, and highly emotional; he frequently takes the "audience" perspective and needs anything complicated explained to him. Kirk is the decision maker who generally weighs the arguments presented by both Spock and McCoy, and creates the final strategy for dealing with a problem. This relationship is illustrated not only in their personal character interactions, but also in their hierarchy of roles on the ship. Kirk is the Captain, Spock is the First Officer, and McCoy is the Chief Medical Officer - respectively the first, second, and third in command.

The newest film creates an alternate universe for the characters and features at least one scene in which this theorem is turned on its head. Kirk spends a majority of the film isolated from the rest of the bridge crew; no one wants to listen to his suggestions, and Spock has him thrown out of the ship for being insubordinate. Uhura, in contrast, becomes a member of the bridge crew early in the film when she demonstrates her skill at linguistics and takes over the communications position from a much more senior officer. However, by the end of the film, the correct hierarchy of roles has been established, and there are only a few early scenes where the triumvirate's positions of ego, id, and superego are not yet in place.

For instance, the film makes much more of the Spock-Kirk relationship than it does of the Kirk-McCoy or Spock-McCoy

relationship (despite the fact that the Kirk-McCoy relationship is forged first.) Additionally, while in prior *TOS* movies, only Kirk ever had a female liaison, in *Star Trek* (2009), Spock has the only female relationship, and it is with a series "regular" - something none of the male *TOS* characters has ever had before. Uhura's relationship with Spock has absolutely affected the interactions within the triumvirate, and her importance as a character overall.

Part IV: Conclusions

Overall, my research has allowed me to conclude the following: First, the character of Uhura absolutely gains more dialogue and relative power over the course of the seven films. Second, the newest *Trek* film gives Uhura more to do and say than previous installments in the franchise, but is still problematic in many ways. Third, it is important to consider the character of Uhura in a context with all of the other female characters present (or absent) in a film, because these things will strongly affect whether or not she receives large quantities of screen time or not.

Uhura is complicated because of the contradictions she embodies. As a black female character in a group of mostly white men, she is perpetually pulling double duty to represent race and sexuality. Over the course of forty years, the character of Uhura has matured into old age and been "rebooted" as a much younger version of herself; she has had explicit relationships with two different crewmates; she has been shown to be a world class linguist; she has worn as many different costumes over four decades as she has proverbial "hats" in her role as the communications officer. As *Star Trek* continues to grow and change with the times, it will be interesting to see where her newest characterization will lead. Actress Zoë Saldana who plays this newest incarnation of Uhura is known for her ability to act with men in action films - *The Losers* (White, 2010), *Avatar* (Cameron, 2009), *Pirates of the Caribbean: Curse of the Black Pearl* (Verbinski, 2003).

It seems possible she might receive her very own action sequence in the sequel. Will her relationship with Spock continue? What might that mean for the love-triangle between her and Kirk? Will Uhura receive lines of more complexity and import than the ubiquitous "Hailing frequencies, open, Captain" that seems to be her only function in too many of the films? Only time will tell how the franchise will adapt itself to a new timeline and a new characterization for Uhura. With luck, in this new universe, she can fulfill the mission set out by *Trek* and enunciated in the sixth *Trek* film, *The Undiscovered Country* (Meyer, 1991). "To boldly go where no man - no one - has gone before."

CHARACTER APPENDIX

Spock -

From the time of the first five-year mission, he was the first officer of the U.S.S. Enterprise. Beginning in *TMP*, Spock seems to be having his own mid-life crisis of a life philosophy ruled by logic v. one fuelled by emotion. Some of Spock's particular character traits include being a "know-it-all," always presenting the most logical option, disparaging emotional humans for their irrationality, struggling internally with his mixed heritage, and an intense but unspoken loyalty to his captain and the crew.

Over the course of his lifetime, Spock has embraced logic (*TOS*), found a kind of balance between logic and emotion (*TMP*), sacrificed himself for the greater good (*TWOK*), been reborn (*TSFS*), re-evaluated and chosen a much more "human" philosophy (*TVH*), been forced to betray his own (emotionally) insane half-brother (*TFF*), and finally, assumed responsibility for the assassination of a Klingon chancellor by one of his protégés. Also, in *Star Trek* (2009), he appears as an alternate reality version of himself (Spock Prime) in order to reset his own timeline. Plus, though he has NO explicit romantic entanglements in the first six installments of the *Original Series* movie franchise, "alternate reality Spock" has a serious relationship with Lt. Cmdr. Nyota Uhura in the newest (non-canon) retelling. Spock's historical lack of relationships and interactions with women is as notable as Kirk's plethora of them.

James T. Kirk -

He was the youngest ever captain of the U.S.S. Enterprise. By the beginning of *The Motion Picture*, he is a semi-retired "desk admiral" having his [first of many] midlife crises. Kirk spends many of his character's arcs in the films struggling to figure out how to hold onto his ship as the bureaucracy and his enemies continually try to take it away from him. As the films progress and the years pass, Kirk ages and becomes increasingly impotent and out of date - a relic of the past forced into a future where his "type" no longer belongs. *The Voyage Home* uses an odd reversal of this trope. The last two films in which Kirk appears (*The Undiscovered Country* and *Generations*) are the most emphatic about this point. In *The Undiscovered Country*, Kirk must overcome racism and a deep seated desire for revenge to promote a peace for future generations to enjoy. In *Generations*, Kirk is literally transported into a time that is not his own, and he dies to preserve a future he'll never get to see.

Specific points of interest about Kirk for this analysis include his treatment of and relationships with the women of his crew as opposed to his intensely homosocial relationships with his male crewmates, his relationship with the Enterprise and how it affects his relationships with these other women, and finally, the ways in which the character both is and is not typically "masculine."

Pavel Andreivich Chekov -

In both the original *TOS* films and the 2009 incarnation Chekov is the youngest member of the bridge crew (though by the time any of the *TOS* films were made, none of the main actors were under the age of 40.) Other important character notes are that he is fiercely Russian to an extreme of comedy, and (in *NuTrek*) can manage to do a surprising number of things for someone his age (19). His character lacks any strong arc, but he does provide welcome comic relief and the contrast of a somewhat younger character in the original six films.

Hikaru Sulu -

The Asian pilot of the U.S.S. Enterprise, Sulu hovers on the periphery of many episodes, and is the anomalous factor even in the 2009 film. (He is a replacement for a crew member who has the flu.) Sulu is known for his fencing ability and his skill at the helm, but receives only minor character development in the original films and just slightly more in *Star Trek* (2009).

Leonard McCoy -

He is the chief medical officer onboard the Enterprise. McCoy is perpetually disgruntled, crabby, cantankerous and highly emotional. In fact, his character is defined primarily by his opposite relationship to Spock. Because of his status as part of the main triumvirate, his is frequently the perspective of the audience used to explain the "technobabble" of the films. He generally provides the emotional half of arguments in which Kirk must choose between heart

and mind while Spock provides the more strictly "logical" perspective. McCoy is a less prominent (but still quite important character) in the 2009 film.

Montgomery Scott ("Scottie") -

He is the chief engineer on the enterprise. He can be assumed to be a close friend of James T. Kirk, is a wizard with Enterprise engines, and has no love interest in any of the films (though in the original films one *might* be read between him and Uhura; or maybe they're just good friends). He is a solid, dependable, secondary character defined mostly by interactions with Kirk, Spock, or McCoy. In the 2009 film, he is given more humor, but also has his traditional heroic moment, during which he pulls through brilliantly.

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- "Cultural Conversations" Documentary and Promotional Piece
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