

After Jerry's Death: Achieving Continuity in Deadhead Identity and Community

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Abstract:

Fan bases are often national or even global in scope with individual members separated by great distances. In the past, it would have been challenging for fans to form communities including people who did not live in the same geographic location, but recent improvements in communications and transportation technology have facilitated their development (Adams 1998). One such community surrounds the Grateful Dead, a North American rock band that had played together for thirty years when its lead guitarist, Jerry Garcia, died of a heart attack early in the morning of August 9, 1995 during his stay at a rehabilitation clinic in Forest Knolls, California (Wilgoren 1999). Today, more than fifteen years After Jerry's Death (AJD), Deadheads still identify themselves as members of a community and are still loyal to the remaining original members of the band, attending performances of the bands they comprise such as Furthur, Phil and Friends, Ratdog, the 7 Walkers, and the Mickey Hart Band. From the vantage point of almost two decades AJD, it is clear that both the remaining members of the band and Deadheads have contributed to the persistence of this community, but that not all Deadheads participate in it actively and not all Deadheads who do participate in it do so in the same ways. The ways in which Deadheads contributed to the persistence of their community after Jerry's death thus provides the focus of this case study of how fan communities deal with such a change.

Keywords: Grateful Dead | Deadheads | Jerry Garcia | sociology

Chapter:¹

The broader depiction of fans beginning in the early 1990's as not only consumers, but producers (Fiske 1992, Jensen 1992), and not only individual fanatics, but members of communities with shared norms, values, and interpretations of texts (Brower 1992, Jenkins 1992), marked a turning point in research on fans. This more comprehensive perspective on fans raises important

sociological questions about how these communities address collective issues and, especially in the case of music communities and others focused on performers, whether and how they survive beyond the death or retirement of an individual or group that is the focus of their attention and initial reason for their existence.

Fan bases are often national or even global in scope with individual members separated by great distances. In the past, it would have been challenging for fans to form communities including people who did not live in the same geographic location, but recent improvements in communications and transportation technology have facilitated their development (Adams 1998). One such community surrounds the Grateful Dead, a North American rock band that had played together for thirty years when its lead guitarist, Jerry Garcia, died of a heart attack early in the morning of August 9, 1995 during his stay at a rehabilitation clinic in Forest Knolls, California (Wilgoren 1999). Today, more than fifteen years After Jerry's Death (AJD), Deadheads still identify themselves as members of a community and are still loyal to the remaining original members of the band, attending performances of the bands they comprise such as Furthur, Phil and Friends, Ratdog, the 7 Walkers, and the Mickey Hart Band. From the vantage point of almost two decades AJD, it is clear that both the remaining members of the band and Deadheads have contributed to the persistence of this community, but that not all Deadheads participate in it actively and not all Deadheads who do participate in it do so in the same ways. The ways in which Deadheads contributed to the persistence of their community after Jerry's death thus provides the focus of this case study of how fan communities deal with such a change.

The theory used to frame this case study is Peter Marris' (1974) theory of loss and change. Establishing connections between the realms of psychology and sociology, he describes the experience of change as one analogously shared by individual and society. Writing at a time when functionalist theory was being criticized as excluding the possibility of change, Marris (1974, 2) boldly asked: "How can we account for the stability of social institutions in ways which do not seem to deny the likelihood of change; or explain change without discounting the resilience of patterns?" From Marris' perspective, all changes involve a degree of loss, thus reactions to change inevitably involve grieving. Understanding the processing of grief as the key to reconciliation between change and stability underlies the theoretical relevance of the current study.

Activating and shaping the entire grieving process is what Marris refers to as the *conservative impulse*, defined as that instinct that seeks consistency or continuity to make sense of the world and everyday life. Jerry's death, which in Marris' terms represented a *crisis of discontinuity* for Deadheads, opened a window of access to accounts of the initial stages of the grieving process. Marris' theory of loss and change depicts this process with four main components: (1) the beginning state of *status quo*, (2) the disturbance represented by *change*, (3) the *perception of change*, and (4) the effort towards *reintegration*. We use the term "status quo" here to refer to the situation that existed before change occurred—called "thesis" or "equilibrium" by some theorists. In this case study, the status quo is Deadhead identity and community before Jerry's death. The term "change" can refer to a range of disruptions to the status quo, from minor ones such as relocation or graduation from school to major ones such as war or environmental disaster. In this case study, the change considered is Jerry's death. Any change, no matter how trivial or serious, can be perceived in one of three ways: as one that can be addressed as an

incremental or substitutional change, as an opportunity for growth, or as an irreconcilable loss. As Marris (1974, 25) explains, these labels as perceptual lenses are not intended to provide clear-cut and steadfast parameters; he details that “in reality, we are likely to perceive the changes we encounter as all these at once—part substitution, part growth, part loss—in varying degrees.” It is, however, the initial response to grief and the associated perspective on change that dictates the ultimate resolution or lack of resolution of grief and determines the path of reintegration into society.

Throughout this process, the conservative impulse, the instinctive drive to preserve continuity, favors interpretations of change as incremental or possible to address through substitution. So although some Deadheads perceived Jerry’s death as an irreconcilable loss that led them to withdraw from the community or as an opportunity for growth that led them to focus on other aspects of their lives, some Deadheads demonstrated the conservative impulse and sought ways to preserve continuity in their Deadhead identity and community. Describing the mechanisms they used to preserve continuity in their lives is the focus of this chapter. Understanding how the Deadhead community survived Jerry’s death will contribute to an understanding of how other geographically dispersed fan communities might persist in the face of similar changes.

THE DEADHEAD COMMUNITY PROJECT

The data on how Deadheads reacted to Jerry’s death presented here were collected as part of the Deadhead Community project which began in summer 1987 when independent study students at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro conducted a survey of Deadheads in the parking lots at shows (N=286). This project continued as Rebecca Adams, the first author of this chapter, took a class of students on tour in summer 1989 (Adams 1991b). Since that time, she observed ninety-one Grateful Dead shows and nine Jerry Band concerts (1989–1995) and at least as many other performances by Grateful Dead survivors, performances of jam bands, and other Deadhead gatherings (1995-present). She monitored on-line conversations on rec.music.gdead beginning in 1989, oversaw eighty-four observations of shows and seventy-seven open-ended interviews by twenty-one students in that same year, collected 177 responses to three mailed questionnaires with open-ended questions (1990–1996), conducted interviews with important Deadheads and key members of the Grateful Dead organization, and has corresponded extensively with Deadheads. In 1998, the Grateful Dead organization collected responses to a self-administered questionnaire during their twenty-two-venue national Furthur Festival Tour and hired Adams to analyze the data (N=6020) (Adams 2010). Throughout this research process, she has also collected artifacts, photos, videos, recordings of performances, and Deadhead and mainstream media.

The analyzes included here are informed by all of these data, but letters and e-mail messages Adams received from Deadheads when they were in mourning are central to the analyzes presented here. The initial letters were sent to her spontaneously due to her visibility as a Grateful Dead researcher; the first was written on August 21, 1995. Subsequent letters and email messages were sent to her in response to articles she wrote for the Deadhead press *AJD*. The first of these articles (Adams 1995a) included her email address and the last two (Adams 1995b, 1996) also included invitations to Deadheads to write to her. Although six additional letters or email messages arrived after May 20, 1997, this is the last date of the 150 analyzed in this

chapter. The email messages and letters were analyzed using The Ethnograph v5.0 for Windows (Seidel 1998), a program for the analysis of text-based data. Codes included the concepts discussed by Marris as well as those resulting from a grounded-theoretical analysis of the letters and email messages. While the available data focus on responses within two years of Jerry's death, thus limiting observations, it is the progression from these initial stages of grief that set the stage for the entire process and outcome. Observations made and media published since these letters were received do provide some insight into ongoing Deadhead efforts to preserve continuity in their identities and community.

In the following sections, we organize this information on Deadheads and their responses to Jerry's death in terms of Marris' model. First we describe the status quo—the Deadhead community in 1995 before Jerry's death. Then we discuss the ways in which Deadheads expressed the conservative impulse as a response to grief. Finally we describe the ways in which some Deadheads achieved continuity and preserved the community through making incremental changes to their lives and by finding substitutes for touring with the Grateful Dead. Throughout these sections, unless cross-references are explicitly included, each quotation from the letters and email messages sent to Adams was written by a different Deadhead. We have included demographic information on the correspondents when they spontaneously included it, which forty-six of them did. Return addresses and signatures were stripped from the files to preserve the anonymity of the correspondents: we knew little about most of them, not even their genders unless they were revealed in what they wrote. We conclude with a summary of the ways in which one fan community adapted to the death of a performer and persisted beyond this death. We also describe what was revealed about this community by taking the lead from the authors in Lewis's (1992) volume and viewing the members as producers as well as consumers, and as members of communities rather than as individual fanatics. Finally, although these findings suggest how other fan communities might deal with the death of a performer or other types of loss and change, we discuss how the data limit generalizations.

THE STATUS QUO: THE GRATEFUL DEAD AND DEADHEADS BEFORE JERRY'S DEATH

Deadheads, as Grateful Dead fans are called, traveled from venue to venue to hear the band play, sometimes staying "on tour" with them for extended periods of time. The roots of this migrating community are in the hippie culture that grew up in the Western United States during the 1960s. The Dead were the "house band" for the Acid Tests, public psychedelic celebrations held in 1965 and 1966 before LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide) was illegal. By late 1966, the Grateful Dead were headquartered in San Francisco, California, at 710 Ashbury, near its intersection with the Haight, the symbolic heart of the hippie community. From this address, it was a short walk to the Golden Gate Park where the Grateful Dead often gave free concerts for their increasing crowd of fans (Adams and Rosen-Grandon 2002; for more detailed histories of the Grateful Dead, see Jackson 1983; Perry 1984; Gans and Simon 1985; Gans 1991; Troy 1991). The community continued to grow in size after its inception in the 1960s and by the 1990s, the Grateful Dead was considered the most successful touring band in concert history. It was the top-grossing touring act in 1991 and 1993 and finished in third place in 1995, despite having completed only two of their typical three tours. They played 2,314 shows during their career, often to sellout crowds of more than 50,000 people (Scott, Dolgushkin, and Nixon 1997; Simon 1999).

When Jerry died, in addition to a large concentration of Deadheads in the San Francisco Bay Area, Deadheads lived everywhere in the United States and in many foreign countries as well. This is not surprising: during its career the band played at least once in forty-five states and thirteen foreign countries (Scott, Dolgushkin, and Nixon 1997; Adams 2010). In 1998, approximately 290,000 Deadheads were included on the Grateful Dead organization's mail distribution list (Cameron Sears, personal communication).² This list was far from complete. Not only have these fans been involved in the community over a long period of time, but they have been intensely involved. On average the fans who the Grateful Dead surveyed in 1998 had seen their first show in 1984 or 1985, had traveled 1,223 miles to attend a show, and had seen sixty-one shows (Adams 2010). Deadheads did not attend shows merely for entertainment or to socialize with like-minded people. Many of them reported having spiritual experiences at shows, which provided them with an additional motivation to attend (Sutton 2000). Although the spiritual experiences of Deadheads varied widely and included feelings of *déjà vu*, out-of-body experiences, connecting with a higher power, and living through the cycle of death and rebirth, the most commonly mentioned experiences were inner and outer connectedness—self-revelation and unity with others (Adams 1991a). Although dancing and drugs surely contributed to these experiences for some Deadheads, others attributed their occurrences, at least in part, to the power and trajectory of the music (Goodenough 1999; Hartley 2000). “Getting it” is an expression Deadheads use to describe the process of learning to perceive shows as spiritual experiences and to understand “these spiritual experiences as inseparable from the music, the scene, and a cooperative mode of everyday existence” (Adams quoted in Shenk and Silberman 1994, 106). Thus by having spiritual experiences at many shows over a long period of time, Deadheads developed feelings of closeness, a high level of commitment to the band and a high level of identification with the community.

THE CONSERVATIVE IMPULSE TO PRESERVE THE STATUS QUO AJD

Almost one year AJD, an astute Deadhead wrote, “I still miss Jerry Garcia very much and have come to realize that his dying will have as great an effect on the rest of my life as becoming a Deadhead has had.” Although Deadheads who spoke immediately AJD almost all lamented his passing and celebrated his inherent value as a human being, many of them, even in the early stages of mourning, also expressed their concerns about how his death would affect their own way of life, identity, and community. In the language of the Marris model, they were worried about how Jerry's passing would disrupt the status quo. As one Deadhead wrote: “. . . as sad as I was about Jerry, my most urgent thoughts when I heard the news were about us, the Deadheads. What was going to happen to this wonderful community Jerry had built?” Or as another said, “What I will miss the most is certainly the gathering itself. I truly felt more at home at a show than I do at home. An intense calm always filled my soul at shows because I was around thousands of people I could trust and love unconditionally. And for the most part that's exactly what I could expect in return. I don't know where I'll get that from anymore, and I don't know how to really explain it to anyone who didn't really **live** it.” A seminary graduate expressed the sentiments of many: “We must continue—for he was not the only one called. We are all called to allow that inspiration at the center of our being to manifest.”

Some focused specifically on what it was about the community they would miss, such as connections with friends: “During those first painful days of mourning I thought a lot about the friends we had made loving connection with at shows, parting each time with hugs and smiles but not exchanging addresses—often not even last names. I wonder if we will ever meet again. I think we all subconsciously took Jerry and the Dead for granted, believing that they would always be there to keep us together and to provide the musical, spiritual and emotional balance of our lives.” Another Deadhead said it more succinctly: “What now? . . . I miss everyone.” Others focused on how the shows made them feel: “Any time I left for a show I would tell my mom that I was going to a group therapy session. I was going to be with 20,000 of my closest friends. I was going to THE SHOW!! Now where will I get my therapy?” Still others noted the importance of spirituality, described shows as providing “spiritual health insurance,” or lamented that “there are fewer and fewer places to ‘experience’ it.” When questioned about “the meaning of it all” when Jerry died, one Deadhead said he responded by asking people “to imagine being very religiously inclined and then imagine what it would be like if suddenly they woke up one day and there were no more churches.”

Many were aware that it would be harder to cope during certain times of the year than others, depending on when they usually went to shows. Whether it was a seasonal tour or special shows that always occurred at the same time of the year such as “the Chinese New Year’s shows at the Oakland Coliseum,” Deadheads were worried about missing the structure and rhythm attending shows provided for their lives: “As the spring approaches, my friends and I are mentally prepared for a tour to begin, but it’s not coming. And when it gets closer and closer still, it gets more difficult . . .” “This spring was to be my 15th Spring Tour . . . I keep preparing . . . and like a ton of bricks the ugly truth is realized—NO MORE SPRING TOUR! Even when I couldn’t catch at least one show in the fall, I knew anticipation of a spring tour would get me through. Now there’s this big empty hole and I sit and flounder and wonder what to do.” Or as another commented: “I’m sure, once the summer hits, and there is no tour, I’ll miss him more.”

Deadheads’ perspectives on the future of their community varied. Some were positive about it: “I always say that as long as there are Deadheads and concert tapes, Jerry will live on. We are a strong community and I think it will live on. It has to.” Others were worried: “I’ve mourned Jerry but I also mourn what this seems to be doing to the community. I get depressed reading r.m.gd sometimes.” A 35-year-old woman who had seen hundreds of shows wrote: “I hope that it won’t end, but the threads that bind the rope together are loosening. Friends, very close friends, that we literally grew up with, got married with, and raised our children together with, are distancing themselves. . . . [T]he loosening of the friendships that spanned two decades is disheartening.” Another Deadhead lamented: “What are we supposed to do now? With no Jerry it’s hard. It’s even hard to face the day. Where will all my sisters and brothers go, that have no homes? How will we earn our money now? But the most important question of all is how will I stay connected to my family? G.D. shows connected us; it was like a big family reunion at every show. Hopefully we’ll all be joined, together soon, I’m not sure how, but hopefully!” A 17-year-old who had been to eighteen shows offered a proposal: “WE NEED A PLACE FOR HEADS TO GO. I mean something like this Memorial Day weekend. I think having it twice for each season -spring, summer, and fall—would be great. We need it to be regionalized though. So everyone can go. In order to keep the family alive we need new off spring. New blood.”

ACHIEVING CONTINUITY: THE PRESERVATION OF DEADHEAD IDENTITY AND COMMUNITY THROUGH INCREMENTAL CHANGE OR SUBSTITUTION

Given the conservative impulse and the tendency to want to preserve the status quo, the question is how did Deadheads preserve continuity in their identities and community? Responses to any loss are complex and multifaceted and Deadhead reactions to Jerry's death were no exception. Although some Deadheads viewed Jerry's death as an opportunity for growth or an irreconcilable loss and left the community AJD, others remained actively engaged and found ways to preserve their identities and their way of life as Deadheads. Although those who remained in the community inevitably also viewed Jerry's death as a loss and perhaps also as an opportunity for growth, here we have artificially treated the reactions of those Deadheads quoted here as if their only concern was continuity.

Some of the mechanisms Deadheads employed to preserve continuity in their identity and community were already in place, but since Jerry's death they have either increased in importance or the emphasis on them has increased. For example, thanks to technology, Jerry left a rich musical legacy in the form of recordings of most of his live performances with the Grateful Dead and others. Before Jerry's death, these tapes had allowed Deadheads to keep in touch with the experience between shows (Adams 1992). AJD, they helped preserve continuity for Deadheads by allowing them to continue to listen to Jerry's music, not just to remember it, but also to continue to experience specific shows for the first time. As a Deadhead who worried about what would happen to the community that Jerry built wrote, "The magic is still there—[the music] still transports to some higher level of consciousness and makes me feel good. This has always been a deeply religious and spiritual touchstone for me and it still is! As somebody said in one of the tributes, 'we will never forget this music—it is woven in our bones.'"

Other Deadheads wrote that "[a]ll I have now is the music;" "[e]ven today I sometimes find myself crying while going down the road listening to a tasty tape—but now they are happy tears;" "rather than feel sad I was glad there was thirty-years-worth of music;" "I know Jerry's dead, and I know I'll never get to go to a real show, but I do know that I can listen to the music and I can feel the spirit of the Dead;" "[d]espite not being the happiest guy in the world, and being treated like shit my whole life, I still have a chance to smile when I'm listening to the music;" "I listen to the music and give thanks again;" "the music makes me incredibly happy by zapping me back to some special show, song, back road highway on the way to a show, etc.;" "[i]t's the only way I can let them go—by playing their music;" and "I feel his presence often and believe that he is still around—we just need to know how to listen."

Deadheads of all ages expressed similar sentiments about the importance of the music. A Deadhead who had been seeing shows since 1967 wrote, "I still love listening to the music . . . and still feel loads of joy." A 37-year-old who described herself as a college-degreed designer for an appliance company said, "the music means more to me now than ever—an hour or two, sometimes several hours a day to help, to remember, to press on." Similarly, a 35-year-old who "should have been a child of the sixties" said, "[S]ince August, I've bought four Dead CDs and will continue to listen to their music." Another Deadhead born in 1975 who commented that his "parents were hippies" and "the Grateful Dead were just a small part of the soundtrack of my life" said of Jerry, "[E]ven just listening to him sing on a tape moves me, creates the magic."

As one Deadhead astutely noted:

With the tapes, the Music Never Stops! I am especially partial to 1st gen from FOB DAT tapes, where the music is really crispy, but u can still hear the roar of the crowd at the appropriate times. When I listen to those tapes, I relive the joy and it warms my soul to know I experienced such wonderful highs, and they will always be with me—the “Help>Slip>Frank” from 7/21/94 Deer Creek, the “Casey Jones” from 12/16/92 Oakland, the “Promised Land” from 9/4/91 Richfield, the “Scarlet Fires” from 5/21/92 Cal-Expo, 8/25/93 Shoreline, 12/19/93 Oakland, the “Bertha” with Branford from 12/10/93, the “Blow Away” in Albany 3/26/90, the saint of Circ 7/29/94 Buckeye Lake, “Midnite Hour” 7/31/94 Palace, I could go on and on. So I would encourage you to try and look at it that way. That’s why Jerry left us the tapes I think.

One young man who had never been to a show discussed his love of the Grateful Dead’s music and made it clear that it was by listening that he had begun to identify as a Deadhead, suggesting that the legacy of recorded music might not only keep old members engaged but also entice new members to join the community even AJD: “I myself never made it to an actual Grateful Dead show . . . Yea sometimes I get chills hearing or even thinking about the Dead and I’ve never even been to a show. Since the band died I’ve started my boot collection, to hear what I missed all of those short thirty years. So never let the music die or you might yourself. I know I was nuts without it in jail . . .” He signed his letter, from “a forever-time Deadhead.”

Some of those who wrote recognized that not only would they continue to enjoy and benefit from the music as individuals, but that its existence ensured the preservation of the community as well: “We are all going to run into each other again, we can never get out of this exclusive club because within us the music will always ring.” “I’ve found reassurance and guidance through the music and comfort through the community. Just because he’s gone, doesn’t mean we are.” Another explained: “As millions of us continue on the bus . . . we must remember that though the man is dead, his music and art will never be. No matter how many years pass from now till eternity the Grateful Dead, Jerry Garcia, and the legions of Deadheads will always and forever, NOT FADE AWAY.”

Deadheads celebrate the size and diversity of their community by proclaiming, “We are everywhere!” Their distinctive fashion and symbols had always had made it possible for Deadheads to identify each other outside of shows and other community gatherings, and the large size of the community had contributed to the frequency of such unplanned encounters (Adams 1999). In the aftermath of Jerry’s death, however, Deadheads increased their conscious efforts to seek out and construct opportunities for interaction with other members of their community, whether as individuals or in groups.

In some cases Deadheads had already been involved in one of the many Deadhead subgroups or sub-networks and merely had to continue this involvement to stay engaged. Tape-traders were one such network (Harvey 2009). A woman who had left the scene for a corporate life many years before wrote: “I’m building my tape collection again . . . and connecting with kind souls.” Similarly, a man who was grateful for 30 years of music said: “Trading tapes . . . has created

friendships with people I would otherwise not have met.” Another said: “I’ve been getting on by doing more tape trading (especially with younger, newer Deadheads).” Another such subgroup is the Wharf Rats (Epstein and Sardiello 1990), a group of Deadheads who strived not to use drugs and alcohol. A Deadhead who had been clean and sober for two years wrote: “One of the things I do to stay connected is going to Wharf Rat meetings. Me and another guy, Rich, started a meeting every Friday night in Garden City NY for clean and sober Deadheads. It has been very helpful for me—and fun!”

Another mechanism that was already in place in some parts of the United States was local annual Deadhead gatherings, often held in rural areas. Some of these annual gatherings continue and have been supplemented by other annual events; many of the newer events are held on what is now known as “Jerry Day.” Jerry Day was established in response to a suggestion by Jerry’s second wife, Caroline “Mountain Girl” Garcia, who is viewed by most Deadheads as his widow, even though the two were no longer married at the time of his passing. In an article in the same tribute magazine where Adams published one of her solicitations for letters, Mountain Girl wrote, “Perhaps it would be a good idea to set aside a day to remember Jerry each year. His birthday, August 1, is a possibility. Good summer weather to go to the park with kids and dogs, share a picnic, walk by a lake, be with friends. Love one another. Play together. If we were a big circle, we can be many small circles and pass that good feeling around again and again” (Garcia 1995, 14). As the Deadhead who considered shows to be therapy sessions wrote after reading Mountain Girl’s article: “My friends and I have chosen August 1st of every year to get together to talk about past shows and memories and to light a candle for Jerry. We have all marked out our calendars for ‘Jerry Day.’” Although Jerry Day is now celebrated in many places and by many “small circles” of fans, often the event does not take place on August 1, but sometime between that date and the date of his death, August 9. As one reporter noted, “In San Francisco, ‘Days Between’ refers to more than just a title of a Grateful Dead song. They are the days each year between Aug. 1 and Aug. 9 in which San Francisco celebrates iconic musician Jerry Garcia” (Aldax 2010). In 2011, the ninth annual Jerry Day was held at the Jerry Garcia Amphitheater in McLaren Park, near his childhood home on Harrington Street. The venue was named after him after his death and it was where the first unofficial Jerry Day celebration was held in 2002 (Aldax 2010; *Bay City News* 2011).

In the aftermath of Jerry’s death Deadhead gatherings were held more frequently than once a year in some local areas, sometimes in large venues and other times in smaller ones: “In Santa Cruz we’ve been having dances almost every other weekend so that we all can still get together and celebrate the tremendous experience we have all cherished . . . As Bobby said at the memorial—it is now up to us to keep the spirit alive.” Similarly a Deadhead who resided in Pittsburg mentioned: “Also there is one bar in town that has a weekly Grateful Dead night with a DJ. (They also book the Dead cover bands and related groups). And I’ve been feeding killer soundboards to the DJ and bar manager for years—I’m kind of their tape god <beam> and frankly it’s a lot of fun.” The same Deadhead who shed happy tears while listening to a “tasty tape” wrote: “A local radio station (Z-93) picked up the Grateful Dead Hour soon after Jerry’s death in August and has sponsored a monthly Grateful Dead Listening Party @ various locations around Atlanta. These parties are getting bigger (and more organized).”

One of the mechanisms that was already in place for ensuring continuity of the Deadhead community was the Internet. The large number of Deadheads in cyberspace was immediately obvious when Jerry's death was announced: "[They] consoled each other electronically—no surprise given the Dead's reputation for connecting with its fans on the Internet. Shortly after word spread of Garcia's death, dozens of chat lines on several on-line services were filled to capacity. (Caro and Carlozo 1995, 20) Similarly Piccoli (1995 A10) noted, "Computer on-line services ballooned with messages expressing shock and sorrow; one California-based Deadhead computer network, the Well, shut down when overloaded. . . . On America Online, the Grateful Dead space swelled with notices of candlelight vigils to be held in cities across the country . . ." Deadheads continued to use the Internet as they mourned, developing tribute websites (Gans 1995) and supporting each other across distances.

Even in the immediate aftermath of Jerry's death, Deadheads already realized how important the Internet would be to the continuation of their community. A TV news anchorman in a mid-sized city noted: "We stay connected thanks in large part to the net—email and websites." A 15-year-old who was introduced to the Grateful Dead when he was 12 years old but "didn't really get it until 2, 2 ½ years ago" commented, "How am I getting by and keeping in touch with other heads now that there's no shows and no Jerry? Well, I am one of the many who frequents America Online for the sole purpose of communicating with and meeting other Heads. That really boosts me when I need it." A 37-year-old married college graduate who owns his own forestry consulting business observed: "But by being able to go online and keep up with the rumor mill and by sharing my own thoughts and feelings, I began to realize that this in itself was life after the Dead—it was keeping the spirit alive." A 26 year-old graduate of Cornell University commented, "I've never been on the Internet, or done e-mail or any of that, but I'm hearing so much about the resources and support available out there, that I think I'm pretty close to investigating it. I've fought to keep computers out of my life as much as possible, but I must admit that they're probably the most direct route to some of the info I want to access." The Deadhead quoted earlier who asked "What now?" wrote simply, "Online works for me."

The overwhelming response of Deadheads to Jerry's death was, however, that "the music must not stop . . ." and ". . . in one form or another the tribal gathering must continue." Some Deadheads found comfort wherever music was played: "I can't recall a show I've attended where I didn't see someone who was at least dressed as a Deadhead." As the same Cornell University graduate quoted above indicated, others chose specific genres of music as a replacement for the Grateful Dead: "And one really positive, tangible thing that has been a direct result of all of this—Mike and I have gotten more into BLUEGRASS and so have several of our Deadhead friends. We needed new music, with no memories or associations, that would be uplifting and challenging and psychedelic, and Bluegrass does it for us."

Some listened to cover bands. A Deadhead who had recently relocated wrote: "I have been filling the void by going to see a very good Dead tribute band. They play almost monthly at the University of Iowa. There is always a good turnout and everybody dances . . ." Similarly a college student from Washington, D.C. noted, "There is a local Dead cover band called THE NEXT STEP that plays in Georgetown." The same Deadhead who proposed Deadheads need a place to go commented, "I made it a point to follow Solar Circus (the band) everywhere after August. That helped a little too." The Wharf Rat quoted earlier wrote: "Another thing I do is to

go out and see Dead-related concerts and Dead cover bands. . . . The Zen Tricksters have been around for years also. . . . They are excellent. They actually tour all over . . . but they play the New York area all the time. We are very lucky to have them around here.” To substantiate this Deadhead’s claim that they were lucky to have the Zen Tricksters in their area, it is worth noting that two of their members eventually played with members of the Grateful Dead and subsequently joined Dark Star Orchestra, the most successful cover band AJD though none of the Deadheads who wrote to Adams mentioned it at all. Three of the members of Dark Star Orchestra had played in New York area cover bands in the 1970s: Jeff Matson played with the Volunteers which became the Zen Tricksters in the late 80s, Rob Barraco played with Timberwolf and then the Zen Tricksters, and Rob Eaton played with Border Legion (Jeff Matson, pers. comm.).

Others focused their attention on other jam bands. A self-described “Deadhead in disguise” commented, “To be truthful, I find that right now, the only other band that does connect me in the same way Jerry did is the Allman Brothers.” Although the Allman Brothers’ audience, at least in the South, has overlapped historically with the Grateful Dead’s, most observers agree with Parke Puterbaugh (2009, 151) who wrote, “In the Dead’s wake, the jam-band field largely and logically fell to Phish . . .” Later in his book he comments, “[t]he year 1995 ended with what many fans consider Phish’s greatest tour (fall ‘95), greatest month of touring (December ‘95), and one of their greatest single shows (New Year’s Eve).” It was at this New Year’s Eve show that one Deadhead was reminded of the Grateful Dead:

My mind was ready for anything that night. At the end of Set II during “Mike’s Song” all of the band’s members left the stage except for Trey. Before I knew it there was a single spotlight on him as he stood there hunched over, almost motionless. Trey was fiddling around with the MIDI; he was playing “Space!!” This was the last thing I ever expected to hear again. If you closed your eyes you would think you were at a Dead show. So many thoughts, images, and memories raced through my mind at that point there is no way I could explain it.

Still other fans remained focused on the members of the Grateful Dead, catching performances by bands with one or more members of the Grateful Dead in them, or speculating about whether the remaining members of the Grateful Dead would play together again. A 30 year-old male who had attended 150 Dead shows and described himself as “single, very single” observed, “I’d love to see them regroup and go on without Jerry.” The Deadhead quoted earlier who fondly missed the “gathering itself” was “looking forward to the Dead playing again,” and concluded, “They will someday. And while Jerry may not be there, the resounding bass, perfect drums, and the fullness of Bobby’s chords will bring the memories back to real life. And I’ll finally get to see all my friends again in the only setting that will ever be truly appropriate to be with them: a show.

Another Deadhead asked, “So, any suggestions as to how to go about reuniting us with our loved ones or any information about if the Dead (minus Jerry) will tour again? I’ve heard countless rumors about touring (or the end of it), as I’m sure we all have.”

Perhaps to prevent a “Deadhead diaspora,” as the woman who said Dead shows provided spiritual health insurance called it, within a year of Jerry’s death, Bob Weir and Mickey Hart

announced that the first Furthur Festival would take place during summer 1996. As Gilbert (1996, N1) wrote in an article in the *Boston Globe*, “Furthur Festival, a gathering of Grateful Dead-related bands including Bob Weir and Ratdog, Mickey Hart’s Mystery Box, Hot Tuna, Los Lobos and Bruce Hornsby, offered Deadheads the first opportunity to commune since the death of Jerry Garcia a year ago this Friday.” As soon as the Furthur Festival was announced, some Deadheads began to speculate on what it would mean for the Deadhead community. A 28 year-old female who worked for a publishing company commented, “I often wonder, now that our loveable dancing bear brother Jerry is gone, how the scene will stay together. Is the Furthur Festival the wave of the future for us Dead Freaks? Will it be Rainbow gatherings? Local gatherings? Pagan festivals? I’m not sure where to begin, other than at Furthur Fest, for which I just received my mail order tickets today.” Others began to make plans to meet others there, including one Deadhead who hoped to meet Adams: “p.s. Don’t I recall you saying you were going to Shoreline Furthur? See you there? 202 N 11–15 is where I’ll be. I’d love to say hello to you. Enjoy!”

Some Deadheads were worried about how attending Furthur Festival would affect them, skeptical about whether it would be an adequate substitute for hearing the Grateful Dead, or convinced that it offered only a temporary solution to the challenge of reintegration facing Deadheads: “I am still adjusting to Jerry’s death . . . I can’t decide whether or not to go to the Further Fest, I am afraid it might just make me sad.” As the Deadhead who said Jerry would live on as long as there are concert tapes said: “At least we have the Further Festival to look forward to but it’s not the same.” The same 35 year-old woman who had been to hundreds of shows who was quoted earlier concluded, “No, the Dead will not continue. I don’t think the Furthur Festival will be a continuing thing. I honestly think it is a one-time deal, for this summer.” Others were optimistic: “Thus, the way I have coped with 8/9/95 is to look to the future—the Furthur Festival for instance has been a motivating factor and has kept me focused on the group endeavor we Deadheads have come to enjoy and thrive on. I miss going to shows; I miss the sights, smells, sounds, and the collective energy and joy I have experienced at each show.” The same appliance designer quoted earlier said: “Looking forward to Bobby, Mickey and Vince playing this summer. At least that’s the plan, so I’ve read.” The forestry consultant quoted earlier was also excited: “When Furthur Festival was officially announced, my emotions soared. The name itself conjures up various images of our collective past and what possibilities the future may bring!” The Deadhead who was determined to do a better job of staying in touch with people she knew from shows made plans to do so: “This summer I will see my brothers and sisters not only at the Furthur Festival, which I will attend at Deer Creek, Tinley Park (IL) and Alpine Valley . . . With the new version of summer tour, the Further Festival, just over the horizon, we are reminded how fragile some of those precious friendships really are.” Even “newbies,” as Deadheads call people attending their first show, made plans to attend: “I’m always going to have that feeling because I missed the original Grateful Dead but there ain’t nothing that’s going to keep me from FURTHUR and whatever else the boys decide to do together.”

Furthur Festival was healing for some Deadheads. A Deadhead attending Indiana University at Bloomington wrote, “Looking for somewhere to feel the love and some music some friends and I decided to take in some shows on the Furthur Festival tour. We traveled to Alpine Valley, Wisconsin on June 29 and had an experience. Bobby joined Bruce Hornsby onstage for a ‘Jack Straw’ that filled the place with wonder. I cried, looking over at Jerry’s place on a Grateful Dead

stage and I felt him there, watching all of us.” The Furthur Festival tour gave hope that the community would survive Jerry’s death. As the forestry consultant quoted in the previous paragraph wrote:

Well, Furthur has come and gone from the Deep South . . . I saw The Guys and heard The Music, I saw old friends that I only see at shows and I saw people I’ve never met yet I always see and feel like I’ve known for years as we nodded appreciatively. I bone danced, I laughed, I rejoiced and partook in the fellowship and celebration of life—life after Jerry—and I was not alone! By night’s end, it was very clear to me—we’re gonna be OK! . . . We’re still intact. We’ve got the spirit inside us, we’ve got each other for support, we’ve got the music to guide us . . . and I’m thankful that we at least have a pulse!

The press did not, however, describe the tour as a success: “There were all of those diehard Deadheads who looked forward to gathering together every year with their community of friends,” said Lee Crumpton, president of the Homegrown Music Network. He continued, “That was gone when Jerry departed, so the Dead organization put together the Furthur tour. But it wasn’t the same thing. Mickey Hart had his band, Bob Weir had his band and Bruce Hornsby had his band, but the music of the Dead wasn’t the focus” (Carlozo and Eng 1998, 2). Attendance at Furthur Festival, at least during the initial year, was not impressive. Dennis McNally, Grateful Dead publicist noted:

At the recent Furthur Festival, a Grateful Dead-style revival featuring Bob Weir’s band, Ratdog, and Mickey Hart’s Mystery Box, the parking lot Deadheads numbered only a couple of hundred at the Shoreline Amphitheatre and 30 other venues across the country. The Furthur tour, which attracted about 400,000, did best in the Northeast, where the Grateful Dead was most popular. (Stack 1996, E1)

At this early stage in the mourning process, possibly because they were not yet ready to let go of Jerry and to view his death as one possible to address through substitution, Deadhead reactions to Phish and Furthur Festival were not positive. The subsequent growth of these audiences supports this interpretation of this initially lukewarm reception of these experiences. Although Phish’s audiences grew much larger during the year AJD, at least partially due to migration from the Grateful Dead to Phish, none of the Deadheads who wrote letters to Adams during the immediate aftermath of Jerry’s death found Phish an acceptable substitute.

Even the Deadhead who was reminded of the Grateful Dead when Phish played on New Year’s Eve 1995 went on to write that what he had heard was “not equal” to what he “felt with the Dead.” As another, very young Deadhead wrote, “So now what? Phish?!*? There’s nothing like a Grateful Dead Concert . . . God I feel torn. It was all Jerry before. Now? I just want us all back together, somehow somewhere onetime—young and old alike. That was the best part of the experience—that strong, loving attachment to all facets of our family.” Another Deadhead recalled, “After that I just traveled around the West Coast and in late October I came out east and did Phish tour. I ended up going to 36 Phish shows in all. I had fun, but there is no way I can do it anymore. It was like I was catching bad vibes the whole time, but I felt like there wasn’t anything else to do.” The man who had been trading tapes with younger Deadheads wrote,

“After Jerry passed and I got a lot of my grief out at a Ratdog show, I went and saw Phish . . . While the show itself was great, it didn’t have the range of emotions of a Dead show. After that, went to another and began to collect Phish tapes. Don’t get me wrong. Phish is no substitute. But by going to their show . . . gives me a familiar feeling, though I’m not truly whole and satisfied after the experience. I guess it’s like withdrawal. It also is like a reunion with the community.” The 17 year-old quoted earlier who lamented that Deadheads needed a place to go said: “Phish shows don’t do [it] for me. Don’t get me wrong. I’ve been to nine Phish shows and like ‘em a lot, but Phisheads are not Deadheads.” Finally, a Deadhead admitted, “I went to a Phish show a few weeks ago and got to see a lot of friends and people that I used to at Dead Shows. But I must admit I felt kind of like a shithead because I wasn’t really at the show to see Phish, but instead to catch a glimpse of how I used to feel at shows. But in reality, I felt like a lot of people felt the same way I did, so it was a little sad. Not as much spirit, ya know.”

Similarly, Furthur Festival audiences were much larger in 1997 and 1998 than in the initial year in 1996, but in the early stages of mourning during which these letters were written, very few of the Deadhead correspondents reacted as positively as the Deadhead quoted above. As the 42-year-old lawyer quoted previously commented, “The two Furthur Festivals I went to were great—the next best thing to being there—but it wasn’t the same and nothing can be or ever will be. It’s a sad realization.” After Jerry died the “forever-time Deadhead” quoted earlier relocated from jail to drug rehab: “Since then I’ve made it to a couple of the Furthur shows, it’s a cool scene but not the Dead.” The Cornell University graduate added to what he had said earlier, “By the way—went to Further Festival—it definitely felt positive, but paled so in the inevitable comparison, it was sad.” While most Deadheads found it relatively lacking, one found it depressing: “I went to a few Furthur shows hoping that these would somehow help. Although seeing everyone was wonderful (Bob, Bruce, Mickey, Heads, etc.), the shows were gut-wrenching. I feel stupid and selfish to be acting this way; but it isn’t that I want to be sad; I just can’t seem to get my head up. To have experienced the idyllic joy that accompanies touring and the Dead’s music is a wonderful, precious gift; but now I feel like nothing can compare to this experience.”

Since the first Furthur Festival many other combinations and permutations of band members have played together for larger crowds. Each of them have played with one or more of their own bands, and sometimes two or more of them have played together. For example, in 1998 the Other Ones was formed and included Phil Lesh and others in addition to Bob Weir and Mickey Hart. Then in 2000 Bill Kreutzmann joined Weir and Hart, but Lesh sat out. Then finally in 2002, all of the remaining members of the Grateful Dead and others played together as the Other Ones, and in 2003, 2004, and 2008–2009, the “core four” played with others calling themselves “The Dead,” as opposed to “The Grateful Dead.” The list of bands including at least one member of the Grateful Dead is far from complete. During this time period, the distinction between “The Dead” and Dead cover bands began to blur, most notably when Rob Barraco, formerly of the Zen Tricksters, played with the Other Ones in 2002 and The Dead in 2003, and when the former lead guitarist from Dark Star Orchestra, John Kadlecik, joined a band called “Furthur” formed by Phil Lesh and Bob Weir in 2009.

Another development during this time period was the beginning of the growth of annual festivals, which are now fairly common and often feature members of the Grateful Dead, other

jam bands, or Dead cover bands. The Deadheads who wrote about attending festivals were foreshadowing the future: “Our friend who is good acquaintance w/ Wavy Gravy is helping run ‘The Kind Gathering’ . . . [It] is a creation and dream to get as many Deadheads together to share peace, love, unity, [and] 4 days of killer music (Robert Hunter, Bonnie Raitt, NRPS, Zero, Widespread Panic, etc., etc.), camping, and of course vending! We want to do it right!” Another Deadhead reported on similar efforts: “We have already started making plans to fill this void—perhaps a visit from Rat Dog or the Ship of Fools festival—but this will only satisfy part of the void.” The Deadhead who proposed that Deadheads need a place to go said Phish was not an adequate replacement, and going to hear Solar Circus helped summarize his feelings: “The bottom line is that I need to hook up w/ other heads. . . . I just bought 2 tickets for the ‘Deadhead Heaven: A Gathering of the Tribe.’” “Then, when ‘Deadallapalooza’ started being tossed around in earnest,” the forestry consultant quoted several times earlier, “we knew that we as a community might have a touring, musical future as well.”

CONCLUSION

The letters and e-mail messages analyzed in this chapter illustrate the extent to which Deadheads demonstrated a conservative impulse and the ways that they worked together, sometimes in collaboration with remaining members of the Grateful Dead, to achieve continuity in their identities and community. Although on one level most Deadheads would probably still agree today that no one can really replace Jerry, to achieve continuity, they have still developed or found substitutes for touring with the Grateful Dead, or made incremental changes to their lives. They listened to recordings of Jerry’s music; organized and participated in Deadhead subgroups and networks; planned and attended local annual celebrations; established and participated in sometimes more frequent local gatherings; connected with other Deadheads on the Internet; attended performances by or played in cover bands, other jam bands, or bands including one or more of the remaining members of the Grateful Dead; helped establish annual festivals by attracting national audiences or traveled to annual festivals outside of their local areas.

This data thus not only illustrates the resilience of Deadheads, but make it clear that far from being passive consumers, such fans actively participated in the creation of opportunities to enjoy music and other community activities. Deadheads did not have to start from scratch in developing mechanisms to achieve continuity of their community and identity, however. Many mechanisms were already in place, having been developed by the band and its fans over the years, perhaps not consciously to achieve continuity between shows, but with that effect. One consequence of Jerry’s death was the strengthening of this infrastructure in all of its contexts—locally, community-wide, and virtually. This infrastructure afforded opportunities for Deadheads to come together “in small circles,” whether local or virtual, immediately AJD when some Deadheads were fearful that they would never have a reason to unite again in a “large circle.” Although annual festivals were already becoming popular and some Deadheads already followed bands in addition to the Grateful Dead, these options became more important than before Jerry had died, as ways of preserving Deadhead identity and the Deadhead community. It is thus through dependence on and further development of an already existing infrastructure and renewed efforts to achieve continuity by both the band and their fans that the Deadhead community has survived Jerry’s death.

By the time these Deadheads corresponded with Adams, a new status quo was already forming and the continued existence of the community seemed highly likely. From the current vantage point more than a decade and a half AJD, given the continuous addition of new players to bands (both those that include members of the Grateful Dead and those that do not) plus the recruitment of young fans to the community, it even seems possible that this community will outlive the deaths of all of the original fans and members of the band. From discussions of the aftermath of Jerry's death in the popular media and the words of Deadheads themselves, it is clear that they are not only a quintessential example of fans who produce as well as consume, but also a prototypical example of fans who comprise a community with shared norms, values, and interpretations. Their connection shows itself through all the letters and email messages that they wrote, and the great sense of fear within them for the loss of connection with the greater community, as well as their resulting efforts to address that loss. The connection among Deadheads shows itself even more subtly in the expression of a shared language (Dollar 1999) and similar reactions to Jerry's death.

Although the data analyzed here were adequate to reach these conclusions, they did have limitations. First, because the letters and email messages were spontaneous expressions of grief, they were not consistent across correspondents. It was therefore impossible to consider how the individuals' characteristics might have shaped opportunities to achieve continuity. Second, the spontaneous unstructured nature of the data also meant that not all Deadheads, by the time they wrote, provided a complete account of the grief process that they had undertaken. Third, it is possible that the self-selection of correspondents and timing of their responses relative to the grief process led to an emphasis on the preservation of continuity in their correspondence and that some Deadheads who initially strived to maintain their identities and community ended up moving on after grief had run its course. Together the short time period during which correspondence was received and this incompleteness of their accounts meant it was not possible to illustrate the entire trajectory of the grieving process, the reintegration of Deadheads into the community, or the development of a new status quo. This data does illustrate, however, the range of ways in which Deadheads initially met the challenge to achieve continuity posed by Jerry's death.

The time period during which Jerry passed and the characteristics of the Deadhead community itself also affected the conclusions here. When the difference between the level of development of the Internet in the mid-90s and in the present is considered, the importance of the period of history in shaping efforts to preserve continuity is clear. Although Deadheads were early adopters of the Internet, the virtual context is clearly different now, and the findings are thus more relevant now than if the community had not already started using the Internet extensively before Jerry died. Similarly, had Jerry died more recently and the festival scene already been more developed, it is possible Deadheads would not have had to work so hard to find opportunities for interactions with other members of their community. Finally, the Deadhead community is rather famous for its longevity, size, geographic dispersion, and intensity. Another less developed community might not have fared so well. For these reasons, the case study should be viewed as a description of what can happen in fan communities, not of what will happen in all cases.

NOTES

1. This chapter is dedicated to Brant Burlison, professor of Communication and affiliate professor of Psychological Sciences at Purdue University, who passed away on December 10, 2010. When Jerry Garcia died in 1995 and Rebecca Adams was trying to make sociological sense of the impact his death was having on the Deadhead community, he recommended that she read Peter Marris' book, *Loss and Change*, which forms the theoretical foundation for this chapter. Without this recommendation, this chapter would have never been written.

2. This communication came in fall, 1998 when Cameron Sears was president of Grateful Dead Productions.

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