Inconspicuous Fandom: Exploring Subtle Female's Expressions of Science Fiction and Fantasy Fandom through Dress

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INCONSPICUOUS FANDOM: EXPLORING SUBTLE FEMALE’S
EXPRESSIONS OF SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY FANDOM
THROUGH DRESS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Textiles, Apparel Design, and Merchandising

by

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August 2016
This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Ginger Gale Smith. She has shown her love and support throughout my education in infinite ways. There were many times when finding a balance between school life and home life felt unachievable. In these times, her guidance, reassurance, and support helped me achieve this balance. I am happy to have a mother who provided encouragement and passed on to me a love of learning. I am also fortunate to have a mother who is a fellow academic who willingly shared her experiences and expertise concerning research methods and proper use of grammar and syntax. Thank you, Mom, for all the ways you have supported me throughout my educational pursuits.

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Abstract

The purpose of the research was to understand women’s motivations for wearing inconspicuous fan dress (IFD) within various settings and social contexts, and to explore how IFD contributes to fans’ social and personal identities and personal distinctiveness. Prior to this research, there was one study conducted on fan dress (Shipley, 2010). Previous researchers studied fan cultures using the concept of brand community, but did so within limited social contexts (Kozinets, 2001; Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001; Schau, Muniz, & Arnould, 2009; Shipley, 2010; Thompson, 2009). Other researchers focused on costume relating to fandom rather than everyday forms of fan dress (Chen 2007; Mishou, 2015; Schau et al., 2009; Taylor, 2009). A qualitative research design was selected due to the exploratory nature of this topic. Thirty-three online and in-person interviews were conducted with females who wore dress related to science fiction and fantasy films and television series. Participants wore a variety of fandoms, which included Star Wars, Marvel Comics (Avengers or Deadpool), DC Comics (Batman), and anime fandoms like Sailor Moon. The interview data were managed using NVivo qualitative analysis software and analyzed using the constant comparison method (Creswell, 2007; Reddy-Best & Pedersen, 2015). Four major themes emerged from the data in the current research. These included: (a) types of fan dress, (b) personal motivations, (c) social motivations, and (d) impression management. By comparing the results to concepts found within a pre-existing theoretical framework combining Erving Goffman’s (1959) Dramaturgy, Social Identity Theory, and the concept of brand community, it was found that for some participants, wearing forms of IFD functioned as a secret code, indicating that she was a “real” fan. It was also discovered that female fans gain distinctiveness within mainstream culture by managing impressions. At the same time gain distinctiveness within their fan cultures by taking part in “feminine
The results led to the development of *The Taxonomy of Fan Dress*, which provided a more holistic view of female fans’ dress practices and a deeper understanding of how different types of fan dress function within fan cultures.
Chapter 1.  
Introduction

Purpose of the Study

A prominent scholar of media fandom, wrote, “fewer people admit to being fans... And no one should have to hide who he or she is” (Booth, 2013, p. 79). Similarly, Kozinets (2001) noted some Star Trek fans felt apprehension toward wearing Star Trek uniforms for fan club board meetings and favored other forms of fan dress instead, such as a t-shirt or sweatshirt. Some fans felt uniforms invited “ridicule” (p. 75) and would reinforce “stigmatic mainstream perceptions of Star Trek fans” (Kozinets, 2001, p. 76). Likewise, female Twilight fans carefully managed their impressions at a ComiCon, a comic book convention or “con,” by wearing Twilight gear, rather than full costume, so they would not be perceived as embodying the media stereotype of the Twilight fan that depicted them as “feverous, mad, hysterical, obsessive, rabid, ravenous, and frenzied” (Shipley, 2010, p. 8). Fans are often marginalized and denied status from mainstream society due to negative fan stereotypes and the need to justify their devotion to a source of media, such as science fiction and fantasy films and television shows. Due to these negative perceptions, fans may not be motivated to express their fandom overtly through dress.

Dress items containing a visible relationship to a source of media fandom could be a “marker” of “conspicuous fandom,” (Thompson, 2015, p. 112). For Jane Austen fans, a marker of conspicuous fandom is “jewelry made from dominoes or other game pieces covered with colourful Regency-era images” (Thompson, 2015, p. 112). Merriam-Webster Incorporated (2015, para 1) defined the term conspicuous as “very easy to see or notice” or “attracting attention by being great or impressive.” Another example of a marker of conspicuous fandom is Twilight gear such as a t-shirt that has a “direct tie through imagery... or text” to a specific media source (Shipley, 2010, p. 21). Fans wear these markers of conspicuous fandom or
conspicuous fan dress (CFD), as it was referred to in the current study, while attending fan conventions, such as ComiCons comic book conventions, or “con[s],” (Shipley, 2010). San Diego ComiCon (ComiCon International (CCI)) was ranked as the top fan convention worldwide and is among the many conventions that take place in the United States annually (Albert, 2015). FanCons.com (Adequate.com. 2015) lists over 300 conventions that were scheduled in 2015 that focused on a range of popular culture genres including science fiction and fantasy, comic books, anime and manga, and video games. Upcoming cons.com (2015) reported that there will be approximately 90 science fiction conventions in 2016. The attendance at San Diego ComiCon exceeded 130,000 fans in 2015 (Cross, 2015). In 2013 at this event, as a whole, attendees spent “well over a hundred million dollars in five-seven days throughout the greater San Diego area” (Golden, 2013, para 2). This included the money spent on fan dress.

In order to avoid negative fan stereotypes, and like the Twilight fans mentioned above who wore Twilight gear, rather than full costume (Shipley, 2010), fans may choose to wear a marker of inconspicuous fandom or inconspicuous fan dress (IFD). An example of IFD would be a “shirt with only text and not any photos” worn by a Twilight fan because she felt it would not be recognizable by individuals who were not Twilight fans (Shipley, 2010, p. 36). Such dress items may be classified as a marker of inconspicuous fandom or IFD using Merriam-Webster Incorporated’s (2015, para 1) definition of the term inconspicuous, “not very easy to see or notice” or “not conspicuous.” These may include dress items that contain imagery that is less visible and/or more covert.

Because fans are often stigmatized, they may choose to manage impressions in a variety of settings and social contexts by wearing IFD. Impression management is a way for an
individual to control what they communicate and subsequently, control how others respond to
and treat that individual (Goffman, 1959; Lancaster, 2014). Impression management practices
that serve to “focus on creating favorable impressions of the brand” and “manage stigmas”
associated with it (Schau, Muniz & Arnould, 2009, pp. 34-35) have been noted to be among fan
cultures that have been classified as brand communities (Schau, et al., 2009). Because fans are
often marginalized and denied status from mainstream society, they work toward achieving
status and personal distinctiveness within their fan cultures through obtaining cultural capital, or
knowledge of their source of fandom, instead of competing with outside groups for status
(Brown, 1997; Holt, 1998; Schau et al., 2009).

Dress has played a role in attaining cultural capital or “subcultural capital” within
subcultures where dress is an important indicator of subcultural affiliation (Brill, 2007; Cherry &
community literature has shown that the creation and wearing of accurate costumes have
contributed to individual members’ cultural capital, it has provided no evidence that fan dress in
general or IFD serves the same purpose (Chen 2007; Mishou, 2015; Schau et al., 2009; Taylor,
2009). Furthermore, while literature examining subcultures of consumption have turned its
attention to women’s attainment of cultural capital and status in comparison to that of men’s, the
brand community literature, specifically that examining fan cultures, has not focused on
women’s subcultural capital and status within male-dominated fan brand communities.

Women, in general, are more sensitive to stigmas than men, which may cause them to
feel more pressure to engage in impression management (Mun, Janigo, & Johnson, 2012).
Female fans, in particular, may feel increased pressures as they are a part of these marginalized
brand communities, but they are often viewed by their male counterparts within their own fan cultures as being “orgiastic” or as a “groupie” (Shipley, 2010, p. 7) and "feminine fandom is often referred to pejoratively as fangirling or squee" (Cherry, 2013, p. 108). As a result, the consumption of fan media and merchandise by women is unwelcomed by men, as it has been noted in the Star Wars brand community, resulting in the failure of male fans to accept women within their fan base (Travis, 2013). This perspective not only limits female fans’ freedom of expression (Shipley, 2010), but results in them obtaining a lower level of cultural capital and subservient status in relation to men within the same fan culture or brand community (Brill, 2007; Martin, Schouten, & McAlexander, 2006).

Additionally, the brand community literature examining fan cultures have only done so within limited social contexts such as fan websites, forums, message boards, and fan conventions (Kozinets, 2001; Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001; Schau et al, 2009; Shipley, 2009; Thompson, 2009). This research will simultaneously add to the bodies of literature of brand community and fandom studies. As previously mentioned, much of the brand community literature has focused on costumes rather than everyday forms of fan dress (Chen 2007; Mishou, 2015; Schau et al., 2009; Taylor, 2009). The study of Twilight fan dress at an Official Twilight Convention was an exception (Shipley, 2010). However, the study was conducted within limited settings and social contexts. Furthermore, the author wrote:

With the commercial franchise, there is now official and licensed gear that gives fans another way to show their support for the series other than dressing up as a character. The fact that the practices are changing, at least within the Twilight fandom, only shows even more the need for research to be done in the area (Shipley, 2010, pp. 37-38).

Many studies concerning female fandom have focused on participatory behaviors such as writing fan fiction (Becque, 2012; Coppa, 2014; Meggers, 2012), producing fan art, and
engaging in activities such as crafting, costuming, and knitting (Cherry, 2013; Fuller, 2013; Chen, 2007, Taylor, 2009; Thompson, 2009), but to date, no studies have focused on wearing fan dress. Furthermore, while many studies have focused on the personal and social significance of these participatory activities and acknowledged the difference between masculine and feminine fan behaviors, they have not addressed the level of status that female fans achieve as the result of these behaviors with male-dominated fan brand communities. Because science fiction and fantasy fans are the most stigmatized (Booth, 2013), this study focused on these fan cultures, and the purpose of the study was to understand women’s motivations for wearing IFD within various settings and social contexts, and to explore how IFD contributes to a fan’s social and personal identities and personal distinctiveness.

Specific Objectives

This research explores science fiction and fantasy female fan’s motivations for wearing IFD within various settings and social contexts. The research also explores how IFD contributed to a fan’s social and personal identities and personal distinctiveness by achieving three primary objectives:

1. To explore science fiction and fantasy female fans’ motivations for wearing IFD within various settings and social contexts.

2. To examine how science fiction and fantasy female fans’ IFD contributed to their social identity.

3. To investigate how science fiction and fantasy female fans’ IFD contributed to the construction of their personal identity and distinctiveness.
Research Questions

To explore the first two objectives, the following research questions and sub-questions were developed using Erving Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgy and the concept of brand community:

1. What are female fans’ motivations for wearing inconspicuous fan dress?
   a. How do their dress practices differ within various settings and social contexts?
   b. How do motivations differ according to their dress practices and setting/social contexts?

To investigate the third objective, the following research questions were developed using Social Identity Theory and the concept of brand community:

1. How does women’s inconspicuous dress contribute to the construction of social identity?
2. How does women’s inconspicuous dress contribute to the construction of personal identity and distinctiveness?

Definition of Terms

1. Conspicuous fan dress (CFD) - Drawing from Merriam-Webster Incorporated’s (2015, para 1) definition of the term conspicuous as “very easy to see or notice” or “attracting attention by being great or impressive,” conspicuous fan dress includes dress that has a “direct tie through imagery . . . or text” (Shipley, 2010, p. 21) that is seen and easily recognizable by individuals who are not part of the fan culture to which the image or text belongs. Thompson (2015) explained that dress items
containing this visible relationship could be a “marker” of “conspicuous fandom,” (p. 112).

2. DIY fan dress – DIY (Do-It-Yourself) fan dress is fan dress designed, made, or altered by the wearers themselves.

3. Fan – A label applied to an individual who is “an ardent admirer or enthusiast” (Merriam Webster, Incorporated, 2015, para 53) that also signifies his/her “membership within a larger subculture of other fans . . .” (Jenkins, 2013, p. 21).

4. Fan culture - A culture that is made up of a group of fans that are connected through shared values, practices, and desires that center on a specific media (Chen, 2007; Stenger, 2006).

5. Fan dress – Dress that may be generally defined based on Shipley’s (2010) definition of “Twilight gear” (p. 21) and Roach-Higgins and Eicher’s (1992) definition of dress. Shipley (2010) defined “Twilight gear” (p. 21) as the clothing and accessories worn by Twilight fans that had a “direct tie through imagery . . . or text” to the Twilight books or movies (p. 18). Roach-Higgins and Eicher (1992) defined dress as “an assemblage of modifications of the body and/or supplements of the body” (p. 1). By this definition, dress includes accessories such as jewelry or key chains and body modifications such as tattoos. Therefore, fan dress may be generally defined as any form clothing, accessory, or body modification that is related to a form of media of which the wearer is a fan (Shipley, 2010).

are brainless consumers who will buy anything associated with the program or its cast . . . devote their lives to the cultivation of worthless knowledge . . . place inappropriate importance on devalued cultural material . . . are social misfits who have become so obsessed with the show that it forecloses other types of social experience . . . are feminized and/or desexualized through their intimate engagement with mass culture . . . are infantile, emotionally and intellectually immature . . . are unable to separate fantasy from reality. . . . (p. 10).

7. Fangirl – A female fan that loves “a number of nerd-and fan-beloved fantasy and science fiction series” and “is defined not by the specific sci-fi and fantasy cultural icons she adores, but rather by her unhidden adoration for a whole class of uncool things” (Morris, 2013, p. 52). Essentially, a fangirl is a female fan of a range of science fiction and fantasy films or television shows.

8. Fangirl stereotype – described as “eroticized” and “manifested in the images of screaming teenage girls who try to tear the clothes off the Beatles or who faint at the touch of one of Elvis’s [sic] sweat-drenched scarfs [sic], or the groupie servicing the stars backstage after the concert in rockamentaries and porn videos” (Jenkins, 2013, p. 15).

9. Inconspicuous fan dress (IFD) – fan dress that contains imagery that is less visible and more covert or that is not instantly recognizable or familiar to individuals who are not part of the fan culture to which the image or text belongs. It may also include dress items themselves that are “not very easy to see or notice” due to their small size, such as a ring, or the fact that they are mostly hidden from view, such as a wallet. Combinations of garments or costume elements that may appear to be contemporary fashion but mimic a character or relate to a specific media source are also included.
10. Ironic fan dress – Drawing from Thompson’s (2015) discussion of Jane Austen crafts for Jane Austen fans, ironic fan dress is that which is “quirky or idiosyncratic” (p. 114) or has an “ironic use” (p. 115). An example of this would be the *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* project bag featured and discussed in Thompson’s (2015) article that contains romantic Regency images along with blood splatter.

11. Mash-up – Refers to fan dress items that contain imagery or text that combines two or more fandoms, such as *Star Wars* and Leone’s 1966 film *The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly* (DeRosa, 2013).

12. Memes – Slogans featured on merchandise that are familiar only to fellow fans. Fan dress items that feature memes, such as buttons that reference the conspiracy behind the Sherlock Holmes character Moriarty, may be a form of IFD (Poore, 2014).

13. Science Fiction and Fantasy fandom – Drawing from the definition of fandom, one’s affiliation with a fan culture (Henry Jenkins as cited in Stenger, 2006, p. 26; Brown, 1997, p. 13), the Science Fiction and Fantasy fandom is comprised of individuals that have a “fanatical enthusiasm for science fiction and fantasy” media that is related to either science fiction or fantasy or a blend of the two genres (Morris, 2013, p. 51). Fantastical elements, such as magic, are found in many works that are classified as fantasy, while futuristic technology and space travel are notable elements in science fiction genres (Hill, 2015). Jenkins (2013) described the science fiction fandom as one that “maintained close ties to the professional science fiction writing community” and where “fan conventions play as central role in the distribution of knowledge about new releases and in the promotion of comic books, science fiction novels, and
new media productions” (pp. 46-47). However, because fantasy films have become more popular among mainstream audiences within the past decade, due in part to *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, this description could be extended to the fantasy genre as well (Sergeant, 2015).
Chapter 2.
Review of Literature

The review of literature will provide an extensive description of science fiction and fantasy fans, stereotypical perceptions and portrayal of these fans, and how these stereotypes influence fans’ choices to wear varying forms of fan dress. The chapter will also provide an extensive review of literature related to Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgy theory presented in The Presentation of Everyday Life, the concept of brand community, and Social Identity Theory, and, Pierre Bourdieu’s (1984) theory of cultural capital. The application of these theories and concepts to this research will also be discussed.

Fans

The term fan is used to describe an individual who is “an ardent admirer or enthusiast” (Merriam Webster, Incorporated, 2015, para 53). This definition was adopted for the present study. A renowned fandom scholar, Jenkins (2013) explained:

‘Fan’ is an abbreviated form of the word ‘fanatic,’ which has its root in the Latin word ‘fanaticus.’ In its most literal sense, ‘fanaticus’ simply meant ‘Of or belonging to the temple, a temple servant, a devotee’ but it quickly assumed more negative connotations, ‘Of persona inspired by orgiastic rites and enthusiastic frenzy’ (Oxford Latin Dictionary). As it evolved, the term ‘fanatic’ moved from a reference to certain excessive forms of religious belief and worship to any ‘excessive and mistaken enthusiasm,’ often evoked in criticism to opposing political beliefs, and then, more generally, to madness ‘such as might result from possession by a deity or demon’ (Oxford English Dictionary)” (p. 12).

Jenkins (2013) further explained that “the abbreviated form” of the term was used to describe “follower of professional sports teams” in the late 19th century and earlier, “women theater-goers,” described “Matinee Girls,” who attended the theater (p. 12). In these instances, fan was used in a “somewhat playful fashion,” but “never fully escaped its earlier connotations of religious and political zealotry, false beliefs, orgiastic excess, possession, and madness,
connotations that seem to be at the heart of many of the representations of fans in contemporary discourse” (Jenkins, 2013, p. 12).

*Fan* is also a generally accepted term used in the academic field of fandom studies, as well as the term “aca-fan,” which refers to an academic who studies “fandom or popular culture” and identifies as a fan (Jenkins & Scott, 2013, p. xii). Because of its widespread use within academia, the term *fan* will be used in this research without restraint.

**The Fan Stereotype**

Stemming from the definition of fan, the common fan stereotype verbalized by Henry Jenkins (2013) in his book *Textual Poachers* was that fans:

- are brainless consumers who will buy anything associated with the program or its cast . . .
- devote their lives to the cultivation of worthless knowledge . . . place inappropriate importance on devalued cultural material . . .
- are social misfits who have become so obsessed with the show that it forecloses other types of social experience . . . are feminized and/or desexualized through their intimate engagement with mass culture . . .
- are infantile, emotionally and intellectually immature . . . are unable to separate fantasy from reality . . . (p. 10).

Although this stereotype was originally applied to *Star Trek* fans, it has been applied to fans of both science fiction and fantasy (Booth, 2013). For example, in the film *Fanboys* (Astrowsky et al., & Newman, 2009), hardcore *Star Wars* fans are portrayed through a character who is “overweight, living in his family’s garage, obsessed with minute details of *Star Wars*, and overbearing with his emphatic love of the franchise” (Booth, 2013, p. 76). Morris (2013) explained that fans of the television show, *Dr. Who*, are “well aware that fanatical enthusiasm for science fiction and fantasy can be seen as uncool or associated with social ineptitude” (p. 51).

Although in recent years fan cultures are becoming more visible within popular culture (Jenkins & Scott, 2013), their acceptance by the mainstream has been questioned. Fans are part
of the “geek subculture” and have been identified according to the “pervasive archetype of the
gEEK or ‘nerd’” (Robertson, 2014, p. 22). A nerd or geek is characterized, as “asocial and
incompletely adult … sartorial disregard, bad hygiene and lack of social skills … a category of
human partitioned off from the rest of humanity” (Kendall, 1999, p. 263). Quail (2011) examined
the portrayal of male nerds in reality shows such as Beauty and the Geek and their acceptance in
popular culture, and found that nerds still may be viewed by the mainstream as “uncool” or the
“undesirable ‘other’” (p. 479).

Fans acknowledge the group’s marginal or low status as it is perceived by mainstream
culture (Jenkins, 1992; Shipley, 2010). Because fan cultures often fail to gain status in
mainstream culture, individual members of these fan cultures work toward achieving status and
personal distinctiveness within their fan cultures through obtaining cultural capital, or knowledge
found this to be true when they studied the Xena and Star Trek fan cultures under the lenses of
brand community, in which common brand community practices such as dressing in costume,
sharing their knowledge about the brand, and welcoming others into the community, aided in the
attainment of cultural capital and personal distinction.

Science Fiction and Fantasy Fans

Science fiction and fantasy fans are individuals who have a “fanatical enthusiasm for
science fiction and fantasy” media that is related to either the science fiction or fantasy or a blend
of the two genres (Morris, 2013, p. 51) and consider themselves to be a part of a wider
subculture (Jenkins, 2013, p. 21). Films or television shows within the fantasy genre usually
include fantastic elements such as magic, while futuristic technology and space travel are notable
elements in science fiction genres (Hill, 2015). Several films and television shows contain both of these types of elements. For example, *Star Wars* is considered to be a blend of science fiction and fantasy because it is set in outer space, utilizes fictional technology, and contains a magical or spiritual element, *the force* (Hill, 2015). In 1992, Jenkins (2013) described the science fiction fandom as one that “maintained close ties to the professional science fiction writing community” and where “fan conventions play as central role in the distribution of knowledge about new releases and in the promotion of comic books, science fiction novels, and new media productions” (pp. 46-47). This description could be extended to the fantasy genre because fantasy films have become more popular among mainstream audiences within the past decade, due in part to *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, a fantasy film series (Sergeant, 2015).

The extensive literature concerning science fiction and fantasy fans positions these individuals toward the top of “The Geek Hierarchy” (Coppa, 2104, p. 224), suggesting that these fans are the most stigmatized. The “Geek Hierarchy” is a joke that is widely circulated on the internet and featured on brunching.com (The Brunching Shuttlecocks, 1997-2003) in 2002. It has been described as “a revealing joke, one that gets at something true about fannish hierarchies and social structure” (Coppa, 2014, p. 223). The hierarchy is constructed of square boxes containing typologies of fans with arrows pointing to other square boxes. The legend of the diagram shows a downward-pointing arrow that indicates that it means the fans in which the arrow originate “Consider themselves less geeky than…” (Coppa, 2014, p. 223). For example, sitting at the top of the hierarchy is “Published Science Fiction/Fantasy Authors and Artists.” Below this are “Science Fiction/Fantasy Literature Fans” to which the arrow is pointing (Coppa, 2014, p. 223). On the next level are “Science Fiction Television Fans,” who are located above and “consider
themselves less geeky than” “Trekkies” (Coppa, 2014, p. 223). One interpretation of the hierarchy is that as one moves toward expressing themselves through less intellectual forms (dressing in costume versus writers or interest literature), he/she becomes more “geeky.” Writers and literature fans may possess more knowledge than other fans who take part in other practices, implying that they spend more time and energy partaking in fan-related practices. As a result of that interpretation, the hierarchy could then be read as ironic. It could also be perceived as ironic simply because those outside the featured fan cultures may perceive them all to be equally “geeky” (Coppa, 2014, p. 223).

**Fangirls and the Fangirl Stereotype**

A fangirl is a female fan of a range of science fiction and fantasy films or television show series. There is considerable crossover within the science fiction and fantasy fandoms among female fans. Morris (2013) stated that in addition to *Doctor Who*, fangirls at King’s College:

also love *The Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien books published 1954/1955; Jackson films released 2001-03), *Sherlock* (Moffat & Gattiss, BBC, 2010-present [{Moffatt et al. & McGuigan et al., 2010}]), and a number of nerd-and fan-beloved fantasy and science fiction series. The fangirl is defined not by the specific sci-fi and fantasy cultural icons she adores, but rather by her unhidden adoration for a whole class of uncool things (p. 52).

While female fans must contend with the general fan stereotype, they also must face the fangirl stereotype, previous described as often “erotized” or described as “screaming teenage girls” (Jenkins, 2013, p. 15). This stereotype was also applied to female *Twilight* fans, which were depicted as “feverous, mad, hysterical, obsessive, rabid, ravenous, and frenzied” (Shipley, 2010, p. 8). This stereotype may be reinforced by the prevalence of erotic fan fiction authored primarily by heterosexual women (Becque, 2012).
However, stereotypes may continue to stem from and be reinforced by discrepancies in fan competencies between genders. “Masculine fan competencies” are those found among male fans who “acquire detailed knowledge about production and other factual information” (Cherry, 2013, p. 107) and “feminine competencies” are found among female fans who “tend to be more invested in the emotions and relationships within the text” (pp. 107 - 108). These competencies are evident in creative fan works, which include writing fan fiction (Walliss, 2012). Fan literature by male fans tends to remain within the confines of the original storyline or plot, referred to as the “canon,” while literature written by female fans typically is “transformative,” often creating storylines that stray from the original canon (Walliss, 2012, p. 119). Female fans “re-read the texts to speak to their own concerns and interests” (Walliss, 2012, p. 130) and one way that they do so is by “shift[ing] the focus of attention away from the main (typically male) characters toward other, less-developed (typically female) characters” (p. 120). This often occurs when women are “faced with ‘masculine’ texts; texts that are largely written by and intended for males” (p. 130). Travis (2013) noted that the novels of the Star Wars Expanded Universe included a “variety of female characters with which to identify” and “the added benefit of novelization is that many of these characters and their relationships can be explored in depth, an aspect that many female fans enjoy” (pp. 51-52).

Scholars, “largely acknowledge the online community as a female-dominated space, and one of the primary fannish activities in which females engage is the reading and writing of fanfiction” (Meggers, 2012, p. 58). Because, fan fiction written by female fans are often not in line with male fan competencies, female fans seek out spaces, typically online, where their female competencies will be appreciated. Forums on the website Ravelry (Ravelry LLC, n.d.), “a
social networking community dedicated to feminine handicrafting, ‘provide a space for intensely feminine fandom that some male-dominated, masculine fandom groups look down on’” (Cherry, 2013, p. 108). While there are many sites where fans of both genders interact, in such spaces “gendered fan behaviors emerge” as female fans take part in traditionally female activities such as knitting (Cherry, 2013, p. 108).

**Fan Dress**

Fan dress is generally defined as any dress item that is related to a form of media in which the wearer is a fan (Shipley, 2010). This definition is drawn from Shipley’s (2010) definition of “Twilight gear,” which the dress items contained a “direct tie through imagery . . . or text” to the Twilight books or movies (Shipley, 2010, p. 21). While fan dress may include clothing and accessories, this definition could be applied to body modifications such as tattoos in accordance to the definition of dress (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992, p 7).

**Fan Merchandise and Dress**

Fan dress has been noted to be among the many mass merchandised products available to fans (Brown 1997; Barker, 2010; Shipley, 2010; Quail, 2011). There are “voluminous material resources that are available for fans of products for Star Trek, Disney films, Harry Potter or Game of Thrones” (Cranfield, 2014, p. 75).

Among fan merchandise are licensed and unlicensed items relating to clothing and dress. Japanese anime fans can buy Japanese anime “licensed t-shirts, hats, and messenger bags” (Taylor, 2009, p. 19). The availability of internationally-available Japanese anime and manga merchandise relating to clothing and dress in general has been noted (Majaw, 2015). Likewise, fans of the independent film Napoleon Dynamite could purchase t-shirts and other items
featuring film stills (Quail, 2011). A variety of Twilight clothing and accessories have also been noted (Shipley, 2010, p. 21). Additionally, there are many examples of commercially-available Star Wars fashion merchandise, including t-shirt “mash-ups” (DeRosa, 2013, p. 24). Adult superhero merchandise related to Marvel and DC Comics films, including Marvel’s Avengers and Guardians of the Galaxy, is widely available, although the majority of it was marketed towards male fans (Kinnunen, 2016; Rampy, 2016).

However, merchandise made especially for female fans has entered the market. Her Universe is a fashion line released for women and girls by actress Ashley Eckstein who voiced the character Ahsoka Tano in The Clone Wars (2008), a Star Wars animated film (DeRosa, 2013). This clothing line is available online and includes a:

- racer back tank top and fashion tops featuring such beloved characters as Princess Leia, R2-D2 and Darth Vader, as well as a unique Princess Leia zip-hoodie and a fun Ahsoka Tano youth tunic created to help young girls feel just like Anakin’s Padawan learner on “The Clone Wars” (DeRosa, 2013, p. 24).

In describing the available Star Wars fashion merchandise, DeRosa (2013) concluded, “you name it, it’s available: earrings, necklaces, wallets, hats, watches, anything that isn’t a thimble, you can bet there’s a Star Wars image on it” (DeRosa, 2013, p. 24).

Other fan merchandise available for males or females is hand-crafted merchandise, much of which is produced by fans (Cherry, 2013; Fuller, 2013). Dr. Who items include The Fourth Doctor’s “iconic” scarf, which is available on “sites like Etsy” (Cherry, 2013, p. 109). Handmade “Buffy-themed” items include “faux album covers,” “a necklace featuring a replica of Faith’s knife” (Fuller, 2013, p. 116), a “‘wooden stake’ charm” (p. 117), “switch plates that feature
Buffy from the comic books” (p. 118), and jewelry “stamped with the famous last words spoken after the episode and end credits: ‘grr argh’” (p. 118).

**Fan dress consumption sites.** A number of chain retailers such as Wal-Mart, Target, Borders, and Hot Topic sell licensed fan clothing (Shipley, 2010). Unlicensed merchandise is sold online by well-known retailers such as CafePress (CafePress Inc., 1999-2016) and a number of lesser-known retailers and by vendors exhibiting booths at ComiCon (Shipley, 2010; Stenger, 2006). Handcrafted merchandise is sold by handicrafters and artists on websites such as Etsy.com (2015) (Cherry, 2013; DeRosa, 2013; Fuller, 2013; Thompson, 2015; Travis, 2013).

Some merchandise is sold exclusively at fan conventions or may be purchased there to save on the shipping costs one would pay if they were to order the merchandise from overseas (Taylor, 2009). A convention offers opportunities for consumption of fan goods (Brown 1997; Shipley, 2010; Taylor, 2009).

**Types of Fan Dress.** While many fan dress items may contain a “direct tie through imagery . . . or text” to a source of media, there may be different classifications of fan dress that are distinguished by the level of or even lack of visibility of the imagery featured on the item (Shipley, 2010, p. 21). As previously discussed, dress items containing an overtly visible relationship to a source of media fandom could be a “marker” of “conspicuous fandom,” (Thompson, 2015, p. 112). While markers of inconspicuous fandom have not been defined by the fandom literature, some Jane Austen crafters make and sell “romantic” items that have no connection to Jane Austen novels or movies, but are effectively marketed and sold as such to fans of Jane Austen (Thompson, 2015, p. 115). Drawing from Merriam-Webster Incorporated’s (2015, para 1) definition of inconspicuous, the term inconspicuous fan dress (IFD) was adopted
for the purposes of this study. IFD may include dresses and skirts containing small prints like those sold at Hot Topic that look like ordinary patterns from a distance, but up close they have images of characters or symbols related to fandoms (Hot Topic, 2015; Sage, 2015). Spoonflower Inc. (2008-2015) features fabric with inconspicuous prints with symbols and characters from Star Trek, Dr. Who, Harry Potter, Supernatural, and more that could be made into a dress item. Examples of these and other types of IFD are pictured in Appendix A.

IFD may also include merchandise that contains slogans or “memes” that are familiar only to fellow fans, such as buttons that reference the conspiracy behind the Sherlock Holmes character Moriarty (Poore, 2014). Also, according to Merriam-Webster Incorporated’s (2015, para 1) definition of inconspicuous, dress items themselves that are “not very easy to see or notice” which may be small in size such as a ring or mostly hidden from view such as a wallet, may also be classified as IFD. The definition of IFD may also extend to fashionable combinations of garments inspired by media characters such as the women’s trench coat, white shirt, and necktie combination inspired by the character Castiel in the television series Supernatural, shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. An ensemble inspired by the character Castiel in the television series Supernatural created by companionclothes on polyvore.com (n.d.). A possible example of inconspicuous fan dress.
Additionally, IFD may include fashionable clothing lines inspired by films or television shows or fashionable clothing lines that reproduce actual costumes worn by characters featured in these films or television shows. For example, a men’s clothing and accessory line featuring items from the film “Kingsman: The Secret Service” was created based on by the film’s costume designer exclusively for Mr Porter, a retailer that offers exclusive designer menswear (Moazami, 2015; Mr Porter, 2015). For women, a fashion line was launched based on character costumes of television series “Scandal,” which included a “Kerry Washington-esque plaid cape” (Stampler, 2014, para 2). These lines target fans. When Hot Topic’s “Cinderella” collection that included “fashion apparel inspired by costumes and iconic moments from the feature film” (“Hot Topic Announces New Cinderella Collection,” 2015, para 2), the Senior Vice President of Merchandising and Marketing of the company stated, “The collection has just enough twists to make it wearable, but is still a bit magical, for our fan girl customer” (“Hot Topic Announces New Cinderella Collection,” 2015, para 3).

Such inconspicuous ensembles may appear to be more along the lines of costume, rather than fan dress. This definition excludes cosplay costumes worn for fan conventions, but may include costume pieces that appear to be much like contemporary fashion. However, because of its fashionability, the outfit’s reference to the wearer’s fandom remains discrete. As Cherry (2013) explained, female Dr. Who fans and handicrafters were able to adopt “costume elements” into their “everyday clothing” because the original costumes were acquired from mainstream clothing stores (p. 110). The author explained, “This [the costume element] demonstrates their love of the programme or a particular character but not necessarily in an overt or ‘geeky’ way” (p. 110).
Motivations for Wearing Conspicuous Fan Dress

Motivations for wearing conspicuous fan dress in general was uncovered by examining literature that only briefly mentioned fan dress while focusing their research on other topics such as costumes worn at such conventions as ComiCon and Cosplay (Chen, 2007; Taylor, 2009), consumption of comic books (Brown, 1997), and online fan cultures (Stenger, 2006). While research has shown that individuals wear fan clothing at conventions to express their fandom, which are referred to as “safe haven[s]” for fans (Shipley, 2010, p. 30), they have not provided information regarding motivations behind wearing fan clothing in various social settings and contexts. Motivations for wearing fan dress within fan cultural settings such as ComiCon may include the exploration of personal identity, communication of fan identity, interaction with other fans, and displaying level of devotion.

Exploration of Personal Identity

A fan may wear conspicuous fan dress as a means of experimenting with personal identity. This motivation was evident in literature that discussed fan merchandise in which one of the authors stated, “Fans buy merchandise to build a relationship between themselves and a film or television brand” (Quail, 2011, p. 465). Some individuals bought “nerd paraphernalia” like that relating to Napoleon Dynamite to identify oneself as a nerd, based on the portrayal of the nerd in the film (Quail, 2011, p. 465). Likewise, Jane Austen-related products aided in identity play and identity building for women to playfully and creatively explore their identities and figure out who they were in relation to Jane Austen’s heroines (Barker, 2010).

The motivation of personal identity exploration was also drawn from literature that has focused on character costumes. Chen (2007) explained that cosplayers dress up as their favorite
anime or manga characters “to act out their infatuation” with them (p. 17). Likewise, fans bought costumes and props from the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* to engage in “fantasy production, role-playing and (commodity) fetishism” (Stenger, 2006, p. 31).

**Communication of Fan Identity**

Fans may wear conspicuous fan dress to outwardly express either their personal or social fan identities (Cherry, 2013; DeRosa, 2013; Shipley, 2010). A fan’s personal identity may be communicating their interest in or identification of a source of media, a specific character, or their consumption of the original media source. It was suggested that comic book fans wore fan clothing solely as an outward expression of their consumption of comic books, the original source of their fandom (Brown, 1997). Handcrafted *Doctor Who* and *Buffy* dress items that allowed female fans to identify with characters and reflected their interests in the science fiction and fantasy television series (Cherry, 2013; Fuller, 2013).

A fan’s social identity may also be referred to his/her fandom, which was defined as a “’participatory culture,’ one in which people are bound together by a wide range of desires and expressed through an equally wide range of practices” (Jenkins (1992), as cited in Stenger, 2006, p. 26) and as “a means of expressing one’s sense of self and one’s communal relation with others within our complex society” (Brown, 1997, p. 13). In other words, to express one’s fandom is to communicate one’s affiliation with a fan culture. In his narrative on fan dress, DeRosa (2013) explained that choosing to wear a Captain America hat over a Red Sox hat enabled him to “join the right team” (p. 26) and acknowledged that wearing fan dress was a way of not only identifying with the superhero, but a way of identifying with other fans of the superhero.
Other Motivations

Other motivations include interaction with other fans and displaying level of devotion to a source of media. Some motivations for wearing conspicuous fan dress may mirror those for wearing costumes for Cosplay. “Cosplay takes place within social spaces at fan conventions and involves various degrees of role playing” (Cherry, 2013, pp. 109-110). Anime/manga convention-goers participated in Cosplay at anime/manga conventions for “social reasons” and created “team projects” where a group of friends coordinated their costumes to dress in characters from the same anime or manga (Chen, 2007, p. 18). These individuals were unwilling to attend events by themselves because doing so would not be fun otherwise (Chen, 2007). Likewise, Taylor (2009) and Shipley (2010) found that Twilight fans coordinated their fan clothing with friends to attend The Official Twilight Convention, and doing so contributed to the “group experience” (p. 30) and provided an opportunity for interaction with other fans.

Fans may express their level of devotion or intensity of their fandom through dress. An intense fan is distinguished from a "'typical' fan" by his/her participatory behaviors within a fan culture (Forde, 2013, p. 64), which include consuming and producing fan dress (Cherry, 2013; Kirby-Diaz, 2013). Female Twilight fans wore multiple layers of Twilight gear to visually express their level of devotion to the franchise, one of its characters, or a group of characters. This would be done by wearing clothing and accessories specific to one “camp,” such as “Team Edward” or “Team Jacob” (p. 32). Wearing multiple layers of Twilight gear distinguished an individual as a “true fan” among Twilight fans (Shipley, 2010, p. 29).
Motivations for Wearing IFD

While it is clear that there is a wide range of IFD items offered in the contemporary marketplace, there are only a few examples found in the literature demonstrating that women wear IFD and the reasons for wearing it. These include Dr. Who fans wearing costume elements as part of their daily wardrobe (Cherry, 2013), the “shirt with only text and not any photos” worn by a Twilight fan (Shipley, 2010, p. 36), as well as the choice to wear Twilight gear, rather than full Twilight costume. Both examples showed the female fans were motivated to wear IFD because it would allow them to express their fandom without appearing too “geeky” (Cherry, 2013, p. 110) or embodying the fangirl stereotype. This evidence may be extended to other fan cultures, particularly to those of science fiction and fantasy, which tend to bear the most negative stereotypes (Booth, 2013). However, the observation of the Twilight fans was limited to the context of a fan convention or “safe haven” for fans; therefore, there is a need for IFD to be studied in a variety of social settings and contexts (Shipley, 2010, p. 30).

Based on a review of previous studies of fan dress, it was anticipated/postulated that impression management (Goffman, 1959) would be the main motivation for female fans to wear IFD. The motivation of impression management through dress has been influenced by age and other demographic factors. In the same manner, middle-aged or older women might have been aware of the part of the “geek” or ‘nerd’” outlined by Lori Kendall, “as ‘incompletely adult’” (Kendall, 1999, p. 263, as cited in Robertson, 2014, p. 22), which may have influenced their choices to wear IFD rather than conspicuous fan dress.
Theoretical Framework

Goffman’s (1959) Dramaturgical theory concept of brand community and Social Identity Theory formed the framework for this research. Some concepts may be repetitive within the following section of this review of literature; however, this repetition is necessary as it aids in forming a cohesive theoretical framework for this research.

Dramaturgy

The theory presented by sociologist Erving Goffman (1959) in his book, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life has been referred to by numerous scholars as “dramaturgy” (Kaiser, 1985). Goffman (1959) drew the parallel between actors on a stage and the way individuals present themselves in everyday life. Goffman (1959) claimed individuals create identities according to their roles within different social environments like actors who create their characters in theater by dressing and acting a part based on the expectations of their role.

Fronts. Goffman’s (1959) Dramaturgical theory recognized that that manner and appearance (referred to as a front or personal front) and setting contribute to the construction and management of an individual’s identity. Goffman defined a “front” as:

That part of the individual’s performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situations for those who observe the performance...the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance (p. 22)

One example of a front is a reenactor’s Civil War persona or “impression,” which was “created from stage props such as dress and hairstyle, whereas manner consisted of elements including behavior, gestures, content of discourse, and style of speech” (Strauss, 2003, p. 150). The impression also depended on the reenactment setting, which was a campground decorated with
props such as Confederate flags, period furniture, cookware, weapons, and other accessories. Another example of a front may be found among Mun, et al.’s (2012, p. 144) participants. One participant explained that when she worked in a “pretty conservative place,” she attempted to “wear sleeves a little bit longer” in order to cover her tattoos on her wrists (Mun, et al., 2012, p. 144). The same participant indicated that she felt embarrassment when the head of the department where she was teaching might have seen her tattoos. In this case, the setting consisted of a conservative workplace and her “expressive sign equipment,” her appearance, consisted of long sleeves that she “intentionally . . . employed” to put on a performance that communicated that she was as professional and conservative of a person as others within her work environment (Goffman, 1959, p. 22).

The front may also be a “personal front,” which “may include: insignia of office or rank; clothing; sex, age, and racial characteristics; size and looks; posture; speech patterns; facial expressions; bodily gestures; and the like” (Goffman, 1959, p. 23). As evidenced here, the personal front is comprised of many aspects of appearance, which are referred to as “props” that include dress (Chaney & Gaulding, 2015, p. 2). Drawing from Goffman’s (1969) framework, Buse and Twigg (2014) stated that dress “is part of the ‘front’ we put on and the public self we present” (p. 72).

**Settings.** Setting refers “to the scenic parts of expressive equipment” and Goffman (1959) differentiated the types of settings in which social interaction occurs by describing them either as the “front region” or “back region” (pp. 107, 112). The front region is defined as ”the place where the performance is given” (Goffman, 1959, p. 107). The back region is hidden away and referred to as the place where all the items used to create an impression are kept and “where
the performance of a routine is prepared” (Goffman, 1959, p. 238). When describing the back region, Goffman (1959) stated, “Here the performer can relax; he can drop his front, forgo speaking his lines, and step out of character” (p. 112). These settings may be distinct physical locations. For instance, in Buse and Twigg’s (2014) study of care homes for patients with dementia, open and formal “lounge and dining areas” served as the “public ‘front’” region (p. 76), while “smaller and lower” (p. 78) spaces located “at the back of and below the main house, in the old kitchen offices” served as the “‘backstage’ areas” or back region.

In addition to physical characteristics, the type of setting may be defined by the audiences with whom the performer would be interacting. For example, Millner-Spillman (2015) explained:

For re-enactors, front-stage interactions would include speaking to the public at re-enactments or during invited lectures to civic groups. Back-stage interactions would include evenings at re-enactments when the public has left and re-enactors are gathered around a campfire for casual conversation (pp. 165-166).

In Mun, et al.’s (2012) study of women’s tattoos, the front region was defined by the presence of a department head in the workplace and family members who would likely disapprove of tattoos and “conservative places” (p. 144), while the back region was defined by audiences comprised of like-minded people who would likely appreciate and enjoy seeing one’s tattoos.

**Impression management.** Individuals exercise control over who gains access to these regions by controlling what is communicated within the front region. This control is implemented “to prevent the audience from seeing backstage and to prevent outsiders from coming into a performance that is not addressed to them” (Goffman, 1959, p. 238). This control is referred to as “impression management” (Goffman, 1959, p. 238). Goffman (1959) described an impression as “a source of information about unapparent facts and as a means by which the recipients can guide their response to the informant without having to wait for the full
consequences of the informant’s actions to be felt” (p. 248). Impression management is a way for an individual to control how others respond to and treat that individual (Lancaster, 2014). The symbolic cues used to manage an individual’s impression also serve as a way for others to gather information about individuals when they meet and provide a guide for interaction and behavior toward that individual (Cutts, Hooley, & Yates, 2015).

Previous research has demonstrated that impression management is carried out in part by controlling dress, which includes an array of visual symbols, by reserving them for certain audiences and/or social settings. Individuals engage in impression management by altering their dress practices for the front and back regions. For example, Buse and Twigg (2014) used dress to study the meanings of and subversion of boundaries of front and back regions. The authors reported that in the front region of care homes residents were expected to be “fully dressed and groomed” (p. 76). This standard of dress in the front region represented to visitors that patients were properly cared for (Buse & Twigg, 2014), whereas “inappropriate undressing” (p. 79), walking around in underwear or pajamas, tolerated in the back region would be “visible indicator of poor quality care” (p. 77). The above example shows a clear difference in dress practices for the front and back regions (dressed versus undressed).

**Motivations.** Many factors may influence individuals’ dress practices, including the dress practices of female fans who choose to wear fan dress. Mun et al. (2012) stated, “Goffman noted the importance of self-presentation and how everyday details about people’s behavior allowed others to make inferences about the motivations that underlie those behaviors” (p. 135). Included in these behaviors are an individual’s dress practices that are driven by choices to control the visibility of symbols communicated through specific dress items or whole ensembles.
Others may draw conclusions about an individual’s motivations for dressing in a certain way (Mun et al., 2012).

While onlookers in every day contexts may draw their own conclusions about why an individual engages in impression management, researchers use dramaturgy to uncover the motivations underlying specific dress practices and the ways an individual uses dress to engage in impression management (Mun, et al., 2012). An individual “will have many motives for trying to control the impression they received of the situation” (Goffman, 1959, p. 15), individuals are often motivated by a desire for others to view them positively. Goffman (1959) explained “the individual may deeply involve his ego in his identification with a particular part, establishment, and group, and in his self-conception as someone who does not disrupt social interaction or let down the social units which depend on that interaction” (p. 243). Chaney and Gaulding (2015) pointed out that according to Goffman, “the performative strategies [were] employed to foster and develop positive self-concepts,” (p. 2) which implied that giving off a positive impression was important in building self-esteem. Mun, et al. (2012) found their participants were motivated to manage impressions in the front region by hiding their tattoos with clothing (Mun, et al., 2012). Aware that tattoos have been labeled “social stigmas” and are thought to be indicative of “engagement in deviant behaviors,” the participants were able to control who could view the dress cue and who could draw conclusions about the individual using that dress cue. A related motivation for engaging in impression management evident in previous literature is the desire to subvert stereotypes and avoid negative consequences.

Women’s motivations and impression management. It must be noted that the motivation for women to engage in impression management through dress may be more complex
than simply subverting stereotypes. Guy and Banim (2000) explained that women were concerned with exercising power and control over their appearance by “reconciling three dimensions,” which included, “appearing in control of oneself; appearing appropriately dressed for the situation; the clothes performing as expected” (p. 324). The authors explained that women felt “less powerful” or a lack of control when one of the three dimensions were not in place. Guy and Banim (2000) cited a wide range of external sources, which include “daily engagement with partners, children, bosses, clients etc.” that “limit women’s opportunities for self-expression” within her everyday social settings (p. 325). This might suggest that women feel that they are constantly performing in the front region as it is made up of multiple social settings, with very few settings being classified as the back region, which was noted by Guy and Banim (2000) to be where women “didn’t think about clothes” and illustrated by one of their participants as spending a day wearing a bathrobe (p. 321).

Similarly Buse and Twigg (2014), who drew from Goffman’s (1969) framework and wrote that women may be more susceptible to the “public gaze,” (p. 73) and that “marking the transitions between public/private” was “of particular significance to women” (p. 85). Additionally, when making dress choices, women may also be conscious of the “male gaze,” where “men are socialized to stare at women as ‘objects’ in order to control them and prevent them from ‘looking’ back – that is, from having any power of their own” (Neville, 2015, p. 2000). The concept posits that women are passive recipients of this gaze, while men receive power from it. This gaze can be controlled by the woman in some situations (Foucault, 1963). In the Harley Davidson subculture of consumption, front-seat female riders “claim[ed] a sense of
control over their sexual image in relation to the male gaze” (Martin et al., 2006, p. 187), and drew on it as a source of empowerment.

**Dramaturgy and Brand Community**

Impression management practices are evident among fan cultures that have been classified as brand communities (Schau et al., 2009). For this reason, dramaturgy and the brand community concept were blended to provide insight into the potential motivations for fans’ choices to wear IFD.

**Brand community.** A brand community is defined as “a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand,” and, “is specialized because at its center is a branded good or service” (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001, p. 412). In these brand communities, a specific form of media is considered the brand that is situated as its core. Impression management practices were used among brand communities (Schau et al., 2009). Two impression management practices were “evangelizing” and “justifying,” which served to “focus on creating favorable impressions of the brand, brand enthusiasts, and brand community in the social universe beyond the brand community” and “manage stigmas” associated with it (Schau et al., 2009, pp. 34-35).

**Science fiction and fantasy brand communities.** The *Star Trek* community, a fan culture within the science fiction genre, was reported by Schau et al. (2009) to engage in these impression management practices “to manage stigmas associated with overt sci-fi fandom” (Schau et al., 2009, p. 34). These stigmas originate from the common fan stereotype previously mentioned in this review of literature. Booth (2013) explained that despite the fact that fans are
“more visible and active” (p. 74) due to the internet, the fan stereotype persists among both science fiction and fantasy fans.

There is evidence that both science fiction and fantasy fan cultures engage in impression management practices. The practice of “justifying,” which was defined by Schau et al. (2009) as “Deploying rationales generally for devoting time and effort to the brand and collectively to outsiders and marginal members in the boundary. May include debate and jokes about obsessive-compulsive brand-directed behavior” (p. 44). Schau et al. (2009) pointed out that in Kozinets’ (2001) Star Trek fans engaged in this practice as they “rationalize[d] their devotion and attire based on having fun, supporting social mission of the series or value of collecting” (Schau et al., 2009, p. 44).

**Brand communities and dress.** As evidenced in Kozinets’ (2001) study, impression management practices extend to restricting the Star Trek uniform to certain settings. Kozinets (2001) noted some Star Trek fans’ apprehension toward wearing uniforms for fan club board meetings, favored other forms of fan dress instead, such as a t-shirt or sweatshirt, as some fans felt uniforms invited “ridicule” (p. 75) and would reinforce “stigmatic mainstream perceptions of Star Trek fans” (p. 76). The use of dress practices to manage impressions is evidenced in literature reporting the practices and characteristics of science fiction and fantasy fan cultures, such as the Xena Warrior Princess, Star Trek, Star Wars, and X-Files fan cultures, which have been classified as brand communities (Brown, Kozinets, & Sherry, 2003; Kozinets, 1997; Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001; Schau et al., 2009).

Likewise, Shapely (2010) found that female Twilight fans carefully managed their impressions at a ComiCon convention by wearing Twilight gear, rather than full costume, so they
would not be perceived as embodying the media stereotype applied to female *Twilight* fans. Due to this evidence, it is believed that fans will choose to wear inconspicuous fan dress rather than that which overtly expresses their fandom.

**Self and the meanings of dress.** By using Goffman’s framework to uncover the motivations for wearing fan dress in the front region and therefore, to uncover motivations for engaging in impression management, the meanings fans attach to their dress may be identified and studied, which would allow for a further understanding of the relationship between dress and the self. Goffman (1959) originally defined the self as: “a product of . . . arrangements” that include:

- a back region with its tools for shaping the body, and a front region with its fixed props . . . a team of persons whose activity on stage in conjunction with available props will constitute the scene from which the performed character’s self will emerge, and another team, the audience, whose interpretive activity will be necessary for this emergence (p. 252).

The self has more recently been defined as “A composite of an individual’s identities communicated by dress, bodily aspects of appearance, and discourse, as well as the material and social objects (other people) that contribute meaning to situations for interaction” (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992, p. 5).

Goffman’s framework has been successful in furthering understanding of the meanings of dress and the relationship between dress and self within the field of social psychology of dress (Johnson, Lennon, & Rudd, 2014). Johnson, et al (2014) noted that Mun, et al.’s (2012) findings supported Goffman’s ideas and that “Participants shared that their tattoo(s) had meaning and were expressive of their selves, their personal values and interests, important life events (e.g., marriage), and religious/sacred beliefs” (p. 19-20). By drawing from Goffman’s framework,
Strauss (2003) and Miller-Spillman (2015) found in their studies of Confederate American Civil War re-enactors that dress is a way to express aspects of self, such as feelings, in the front region that would otherwise only be revealed in the back region through discourse (conversation). Both Miller-Spillman (2015) and Strauss (2003) used qualitative research and found that wearing the Civil War uniform was tied to the wearer’s political beliefs. By analyzing open-ended survey responses asking why some reenactors chose to wear one type of uniform (Confederate or Union), Miller-Spillman (2015) concluded, “When dressed in the historic costume of an American Civil War re-enactor at a re-enactment in a public setting . . . , one can no longer consider their political beliefs private” (p. 179) and Miller-Spillman (2015) later investigated the motivations for wearing one type of uniform, either Confederate or Union, and found that by wearing the uniform “a re-enactor is literally wearing his politics on his back” (p. 179). Although Strauss (2003) did not focus his study on dress, by analyzing reenactors’ conversations in the back region, he concluded that through Confederate reenacting an individual could express the part of self that was “unhappy with the erosion of white hegemony in the United States” (p. 159).

A similar application of Goffman’s framework will be used in the present study to uncover women’s motivations for wearing fan dress, and in particular, IFD, and the meanings women assign to it. According to Johnson, et al (2014), “investigations of people’s experiences with . . . [body] modifications is fertile area for future researchers interested in the meaning(s) of dress and how dress impacts the self through interaction with others” (p. 20). Although the present study did not focus its investigation on body modifications, the study of IFD may be of equal value in contributing to the understanding of dress and the self.
Application of Dramaturgy to Present Study

Dramaturgy and the brand community were used to uncover female fans’ motivations for wearing IFD and to further understand the relationship between dress and the self. In this section, the application Goffman’s (1959) ideas concerning the front, personal front, setting, and impression management as they related to fan brand communities and women will be discussed.

**Fronts and personal fronts.** Since a front is defined partly as “the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance” (Goffman, 1959, p. 22) than in the present study, IFD might have been the “expressive equipment,” employed to make a good impression and avoid fan stereotypes. A fan’s personal front consists of this expressive equipment, IFD, along with all the other aspects of appearance, which include the physical appearance of the body, which may communicate age, gender, etc., along with manner and speech (Goffman, 1959, p. 23). In this study, the aspects of the personal front that are of primary concern are dress, particularly, IFD, and appearance-related characteristics that communicate one’s age, gender, along with other demographic characteristics. These demographic characteristics may influence the fan’s motivations and dress choices regarding fan dress (Montemurro & Gillen, 2013, p. 178).

**Setting.** In this research, the front region may be defined as a setting wherein members of the mainstream public are located. These settings may also include “conservative places” such as workplaces where the overt expression of fandom may not be appreciated in the same respect when worn in more private, leisure settings (Eicher & Evenson, 2015).

The back region may be defined by the presence of like-minded fans who appreciate the more overt expression of fandom. The may include fan conventions or small gatherings of fans,
such as watch parties, where fans gather to watch an airing of the film series or television series. The back region may also include settings where fans prepare for their performance in the front region (Goffman, 1959). Back region settings may include physical spaces, such as shopping venues, store dressing rooms, and bedroom closets where they evaluate the characteristics of IFD to see if it is suitable to be worn in the front region. It may also include online websites like Ravelry (Ravelry LLC, n.d.) where female fans typically engage in participatory behaviors, such as costuming, knitting, where they may produce IFD (Cherry, 2013).

**Impression management.** In the present study, it is anticipated that fans reserve overt or conspicuous symbols of their fandom for the back region. Previous research has also demonstrated that impression management is performed by manipulating or altering the visibility of dress cues. In the same manner, there is evidence that fans believe their dress reinforces that negative fan stereotype (Kozinets, 2001). Perhaps, fans may decrease the visibility of symbols relating to fandom in the front region, choosing less conspicuous symbols perhaps that are partially concealed or smaller in size. Therefore, impression management techniques might have included choosing to wear small dress items, such as hair bows, jewelry, carrying wallets that can easily concealed in handbags, or choosing to wear dress items, such as tops or dresses with inconspicuous imagery. Fans may also buy items featured in television episodes (Cherry, 2013) or wear pieces of fashion lines inspired by film or television series. Some fans may construct their own dress items by sewing or knitting items that will suit their need to express their fandom in a socially-acceptable way.

**Motivations.** Dramaturgy will be used in this research to uncover the motivations underlying practices tied to dressing in IFD. As previously mentioned, one of the fans’
motivations were to manage other’s impressions of them and “foster and develop positive self-concepts,” (Chaney & Gaulding, 2015, p. 2). This entails the desire to avoid negative consequences. Because Twilight fans experienced “unfair and judgmental treatment” by the media and male fans at ComiCon, they masked “their true passion for the series” by dressing in fan dress rather than full costume, which they felt was a more overt expression of their fandom (Shipley, 2010, p. 37). Maltreatment of female fans was noted to occur due to the misperception that some forms of media are “just for boys,” when a young girl was “bullied for taking her Star Wars water bottle to school” (Travis, 2013, p. 53). Fans in this research may choose to wear IFD to control other’s perceptions toward them in a way that she could not when wearing conspicuous fan dress, which would guard against negative treatment that might occur due to the overt expression of fandom in male-dominated fan cultures (Shipley, 2010, p. 37).

There may be other attributes of fan dress other than those that define it as “fan dress” that motivate women to wear or not wear it in the front region. For example, Guy and Banim (2000) explained that one of their participants felt a lack of control when her “jacket creased badly on the way to an important meeting” (p. 324). Based on their findings, it may be that an attribute of a piece of fan clothing, such as ill-performance, could serve as a motivation for a woman to restrict its use to nonpublic settings or not use it at all.

**Dramaturgy and brand community.** As previously mentioned, the Xena Warrior Princess, Star Trek, Star Wars, and X-Files fan cultures have been classified as brand communities (Brown, Kozinets, & Sherry, 2003; Kozinets, 1997; Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001; Schau et al., 2009). The Twilight fan culture has also been classified as a brand community (Thompson, 2009). Also, previously noted, these fan cultures’ engage in impression management
practices. It is expected that the fans in the present research may also engage in these practices, as they may also belong to fan cultures that may be classified as brand communities.

**Dress, the self, and meanings of dress.** Although each individual fan may attribute different meanings to a media source (Kozinets, 2001), unveiling these meanings may further contribute to the understanding of the relationship between dress and the self. Like women’s tattoos, IFD may be a physical manifestation of their personal values, interests, past experiences and relationships that may be connected to their fandom (Mun, et al., 2012 pp. 19-20). For one fan, “*Star Trek* in its entirety provides a moral compass around which fans can center their lives, one as all-encompassing as a religion” (Kozinets, 2001, p. 77). Additionally, *Star Trek* fans have adopted the television series’ utopian ideals as their personal values regarding acceptance of diversity. IFD may also serve as symbolic of a meaningful relationship to the media source. For example, fans of the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* indicated that they had Buffy “to rely on during hard times over the years” and referred to the show’s characters as friends they “could always turn to” (Fuller, 2013, p. 114).

**Brand Community**

The brand community concept, previously defined, is drawn from Consumer Culture Theory, which posits that individuals within a group consume "commercially produced images, texts, and objects" to give meaning to their lives and that the meaning of such symbols are "embodied and negotiated by consumers in particular social situations [sic] roles, and relationships" (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p. 869). There are several types of “consumer collectives” that fall under the umbrella of Consumer Culture Theory (Collins & Murphy, 2014, p. 281):
Product centered social networks such as Apple’s user groups are known broadly as consumer collectives (Schouten et al., 2007. Depending on their context and focus these collectives may be brand communities (Cova, Pace, & Park, 2007; Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001), brand cults (Belk & Tumbat, 2005), subcultures of consumption (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995) or consumer tribes (Shanker, Cova, & Kozinets, 2007).

The concept “subcultures of consumption” was introduced by Schouten and McAlexander (1995) and defined as “a distinctive subgroup of society that self-selects on the basis of a shared commitment to a particular product class, brand, or consumption activity” (p. 43). Kozinets (2001) argued that this concept was criticized by researchers studying subcultures stating that such groups should not be granted “subcultural status” for three reasons: (1) Some groups, such as the Star Trek fan culture, evolve around a leisure activity and not “a way of life”; (2) “the pre-fix ‘sub’” connotes a subordinate status and is associated with deviant behavior; and (3) the “shared consumption of the same object (and, presumably, text)” does not always express a “a commonly shared identity” (p.68). Instead Kozinets (2001) opted for the term “cultures of consumption,” which is defined as “a particular interconnected system of commercially produced images, texts, and objects that particular groups use—through the construction of overlapping and even conflicting practices, identities, and meanings—to make collective sense of their environments and to orient their members’ experiences and lives” (p. 68). Additionally, consumer collectives have been referred to as consumer tribes or “tribes,” which have been described as “neotribes,” which are “inherently unstable, small-scale, affectual and not fixed by any of the established parameters of modern society; instead they can be held together, through shared emotions, styles of life, new moral beliefs, and consumption practices” (Cova & Cova, 2001, p. 67). Cova and Cova (2002) explained the difference between tribes and brand communities:
The tribe is not necessarily a “brand community”. . . . Brand communities are explicitly commercial, whereas tribes are not. However, when a tribe is organized around a same passion for a cult-object such as the Harley-Davidson, it exhibits many similarities with brand community (p. 603).

The brand community concept was chosen for this research because many fan cultures have been classified as brand communities due to the fact that they revolve around a commercial media source (Cova & Cova, 2001). Additionally, the fan cultures exhibit the three traditional markers of community (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). The three traditional markers of community present in brand communities are (a) a shared consciousness or “the intrinsic connection that members feel toward one another, a collective sense of difference from others not in the community,” (b) “rituals and traditions” that “perpetuate the community’s shared history, culture, and consciousness,” and (c) “a sense of moral responsibility” defined as a “felt sense of duty or obligation to the community as a whole, and to its individual members” (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001, p. 413). Common practices in brand communities included “welcoming,” “empathizing” and “governing” and served as a means for bonding among members; “impression management practices” that included “evangelizing” and “justifying” and served to create “favorable impressions of the brand” and “manage stigmas” associated with it; “community engagement practices” that included “staking,” “milestoning,” “badging,” and “documenting” that serve to build cultural capital; and practices that serve to improve or enhance the brand (brand use), which include “grooming,” “customizing,” and “commoditizing” (Schau et al., 2009, pp. 34-35). These practices not only serve to build relationships with others within a social group, which may be a brand community, but serves to strengthen connections between the brands and its users (Chan, Berger, & Boven, 2012).
Science Fiction and Fantasy Brand Communities

Fan cultures have been labeled subcultures of consumption (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995), cultures of consumption (Kozinets, 2001) and brand communities (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001; Schau et al., 2009). Although fans may consume a number of differing “brands” containing images or references to science fiction and fantasy films and television shows, the term brand communities is appropriate in describing their fan culture, because the source of media is essentially the brand that they are consuming. *Xena: Warrior Princess*, a fantasy “episodic action television program,” (Schau et al., 2009, p. 32) that “appeals to other fantasy fan communities” which included the *Star Trek, Star Wars,* and *X-Files* fan cultures (p. 34) was among the nine brand communities studied by Schau et al. (2009). Kozinets’ (2001) study on the *Star Trek* culture of consumption was among the 37 articles in which the authors coded for practices among brand communities.

The *Xena* and *Star Trek* fan cultures, which represent both fantasy and science fiction, engaged in several of the 12 common practices of brand communities identified by Schau et al. (2009). Among these practices, the social networking practice of governing, the community engagement practices of staking and badging, the brand use practices of customizing, modifying, and commoditizing, and impression management practice of justifying (Schau et al., 2009). The practices of social networking and impression management and community engagement are the most notable among fan cultures. Through an examination of fan culture literature, it is apparent that fan cultures engage in these practices both at conventions and within their online communities (Brown, 1997; Chen, 2007, Shipley, 2010; Stenger, 2006, Taylor, 2009). Schau et al. (2009) explained the social networking practice of governing is defined as “articulating the
behavioral expectations within the brand community” and reported that this practice was evident in the *Xena* fan community when one member insinuated that the community tries to downplay any disagreements they might have by not letting them escalate into emotional arguments (p. 43). The impression management practice of justifying and community engagement practice of badging among fan cultures have been previously discussed. The classification of fan cultures as brand communities in previous research, coupled with evidence that their members engage in brand community practices, justifies the use of the brand community concept as part of the theoretical framework in the present study.

**Social Identity Theory**

Social Identity Theory (SIT) was selected to assist in understanding social motivations for wearing inconspicuous fan clothing and how it contributes to their social identities within their fan cultures or brand communities (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner et al., 1979). Workman and Kidd (2009) stated that “social identity refers to attributes assigned to others in order to categorize them as members of a social group” (p. 95). Thus, “Social Identity Theory links an individual to a social category, consequently providing a definition of the self” (McNeill & Graham, 2014, p. 404).

**SIT process.** This theory is a process in which individuals first categorize themselves as members of a group (social categorization), then identify with a group by taking on behaviors/conforming to group norms of members in that group (social identification), and finally, compare themselves to members of an outside group (social comparison) (McCleod, 2008). A possible fourth step in the process that is closely related to the previous step in which
individuals “differentiate their group from other groups based upon their unique group characteristics and norms” (Matthews, 2012, p. 11), was referred to as social distinctiveness.

Tajfel and Turner (1979) described the first step in the process, “social categorization,” as “the mere perception of belonging to two distinct groups” and explained that these two groups are an “in-group” and an “out-group” (p. 56). It is important that these two groups are distinctly different (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Communication with others within the group is not necessary for social categorization, and that members must simply define themselves in similar ways (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

According to Social Identity Theory, “social identification,” is the next step in the process after categorizing oneself into a distinct group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p. 59). This step involves taking on behaviors exhibited by other members within a group (McCleod, 2008). Mael and Ashworth (1992) wrote, “Individuals tend to choose activities congruent with salient aspects of their identities and support the institutions embodying those identities” (p. 109). Social identification also involves sharing in experiencing the group’s fate, successes, and failures, which contributes to their self-esteem (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). This identification drives individuals within the group to work toward advancing the groups’ status and become more distinct (Turner et al., 1979).

The aim for positive distinct identity drives group members to engage in the third step, “social comparison,” in which they compare their group’s attributes and/or performance to a relevant out-group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p. 59). This relates to the “them” versus “us” mentality, in which the in-group views the out-group as inferior. Tajfel and Turner (1986) argued
that in order for social comparison to occur, members of an inside group must compare themselves to members of an outside group that is distinctly different.

However, explicit out-groups have not always been identified in studies drawing from Social Identity Theory. Matthews (2012) was unable to identify a distinct group in which members of a clothing swap group compared themselves. Instead, she found that the label her participants used to define themselves, “Rehashionistas,” was a way of indirectly comparing themselves to others who were not included in that particular in-group. Along a similar vein, McNeill and Graham (2014) failed to explicitly identify a distinctive out-group. It was implied that the out-group was made up of “bad mothers,” or those perceived by “good mothers” as mothers who did not adhere the good mothering ideology when it came to clothing their children. The findings from both these studies suggest that in the real world, definitive and distinct oppositional groups may be simply a matter of perception, and difficult to define. This may be especially be true in brand communities where dress or other visual cues play a large role in achieving in-group distinctiveness.

**SIT and Brand Communities**

The inability to identify distinct groups have moved scholars to define social groups “within society at large” and are defined against anyone within wider mainstream culture that are not members of that social group (Matthews, 2012, p. 10). Additionally, Schau et al. (2009) explained that brand community members must justify their devotion to the brand “to outsiders and marginal members in the boundary” (p. 44). Positioning nonmembers in the out-group would seem to be a viable solution when applying Social Identity Theory to brand communities.
However, as Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) stated, individuals within brand communities do not view themselves as the “‘other;’” “they know they share a social bond around a branded mass-produced commodity, and believe it is reasonable to do so. They do not wish to be confused with indiscriminate zealots who are ‘weird nuts’ occupying marginal positions” (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001, p. 418). The practice of justifying suggests that brand communities do not expect to gain status by comparing themselves to members of the mainstream culture. Thus, the idea of increasing group distinctiveness, specifically “positive distinctiveness,” where groups “establish favourable intergroup differences” (Turner, et al., 1979, p. 200) is then called into question. Furthermore, Schau et al., (2009, p. 38) found that brand community “Members compete [with each other] on brand devotion, knowledge, and history to display their various competencies” (p. 38). This evidence supports the omission of the study of social distinctiveness among science fiction and fantasy brand communities. Instead, this study will focus on the attainment of cultural capital, which contributes to personal identity and distinctiveness within brand communities.

In the brand community literature, social identity is defined by three attributes: (1) the individual has an awareness that he/she is a member of a community; (2) the individual has an emotional commitment to the community; and (3) the individual values belonging to the community (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006; Stokburger-Sauer, 2010). It is contested as to when brand identification occurs. Stokburger-Sauer (2010) and Schau et al. (2009) claimed that identification with the brand followed interaction with other brand community members and was a consequence of higher levels of engagement in the community. However, Carlson, Suter, & Brown’s (2008) findings suggest the opposite. The authors explained, some individuals who
consume a brand have a “perceived sense of brand community (PSBC)” (Carlson, Suter, & Brown, 2008, p. 284). PBSC is defined as “an unbound group of brand admirers, who perceive a sense of community with other brand admirers, in the absence of social interaction (Carlson, Suter, & Brown, 2008, p. 285).” This suggest that individuals may be consider themselves as a member of a brand community by labeling themselves as a member and taking on behaviors of others, but do not formally interact or communally consume the brand with other brand community members.

**SIT and Fans**

In the context of science fiction and fantasy brand communities, it was important to consider when social categorization begins. In this case, social categorization may also be a form of brand identification, which is defined as “the extent to which the consumer sees his or her own self-image as overlapping with the brand's image” (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006, p. 49). An individual may align his/her self-image with a character within a science fiction or fantasy brand. For example, Robertson (2014) wrote that Bronies, male fans of the television show *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*, identify with the show’s characters because they “see something of their [sic] selves in these characters” (p. 30).

A similar concept to brand identification is “consumer–brand identification,” which was described by Stokburger-Sauer (2010) as "the individual consumer’s perception of similarity between the brand and the consumer” (p. 352). These definitions imply that when one identifies himself as a fan in a similar way that another individual identifies himself as a fan, they categorize themselves of members of a fan culture or brand community. Lam, Ahearne, Hu, and
Schillewaert’s (2010) idea of brand identification supports this notion as individuals identified themselves with brands rather than other consumers within a group.

Social identification involves engaging in behavior similar to others within a group. Within the context of this study, this may include dressing like other fans within the brand community. Additionally, an individual’s interests in a brand may lead him or her to participate in activities and events related to the brand, such as brandfests (events where consumers and potential consumers celebrate and consume the brand) (McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002). Within the context of fan culture, a brandfest could be substituted with fan conventions (Chen, 2007).

**Application of SIT to Present Research**

In the present study, the first three steps of the process outlined by Social Identity Theory (social categorization, social identification, and social comparison) was applied to the study of science fiction and fantasy brand communities. The fourth step, social distinctiveness will be omitted for two reasons. First, identifying distinct competing groups is difficult. This is due to both the choice to study multiple science fiction and fantasy brand communities rather than a single brand community, and the fact that identifying distinct competing groups may not be possible as there is considerable crossover among science fiction and fantasy fan bases. Second, there is evidence that within all brand communities, including science fiction and fantasy fan cultures, that members compete with one another to increase their personal status within their communities, rather than competing with outside groups to increase the status of the entire group (Schau et al., 2009).
**Brand Community and Cultural Capital**

The concept of brand community, drawn from Consumer Culture Theory, was also used to examine how fan dress contributes to a fans’ social identity, but also understand how fan dress relates to personal identity and distinctiveness. Brand community practices “endow participants with cultural capital,” which is a means for which individuals can gain status and personal distinctiveness (Schau et al., 2009, p. 38). Pierre Bourdieu’s (1984) theory of cultural capital states that there are “three primary forms” of cultural capital which may be important in a brand community: (a) “embodied as implicit practical knowledges, skills, and dispositions;” (b) “objectified in cultural objects;” and (c) “institutionalized in official degrees and diplomas that certify the existence of the embodied form” (Holt, 1998, p. 3)

Members of brand communities compete to gain individual distinctiveness with one another based on these three forms (Schau et al. (2009). For instance, The *embodied* form included “brand devotion, knowledge, and history” such as “knowledge and number of concerts attended” by TPATH (Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers) fans (Schau et al., 2009, p. 38). For members of the Mini Cooper brand community, cultural capital was also *objectified* in having the “shiniest finish” on their cars (Schau et al., 2009, p. 38). The third, *institutionalized* form that certifies the existence of knowledge and skills was evidenced in the form of awards given to Xena fans for their accomplishments writing online fan fiction and creating accurate costumes related to the series.

Cultural capital can be gained in brand communities via “Practices, especially community engagement practices, present opportunities for individual differentiation” (Schau et al., 2009, p. 38). The practice of badging is one practice that contributes to cultural capital that
can relate to dress. Badging is “the practice of translating milestones into symbols” (Schau et al., 2009, p. 45). An example of a badge related to dress is a TPATH concert t-shirt purchased by a fan to celebrate the milestone of attending his/her first concert (Schau et al., 2009). The greater the “length and intensity” of an individual’s membership within a brand community, the more numerous and complex the badges became (Schau et al., 2009, p. 37).

Furthermore, “badging behaviors codify the expression of brand identity, suggesting the proper behaviors to be a true member” (Schau et al., 2009, p. 37). This suggests that the accumulation of badges increases the brand community member’s status within it and contributes to personal distinction.

While Pierre Bourdieu’s (1984) theory of cultural capital is commonly used in the brand community literature, the concept of “subcultural capital” has also been utilized in other Consumer Culture Theory literature (Varner, 2007, p. 170). This concept was based on Bourdieu’s (1984) theory and introduced by Sarah Thornton (1996) in her study of club cultures. “Thornton sees contemporary cultures as a ‘multi-dimensional social space’ structured by intricate patterns of inclusion and exclusion” and notes that there are social hierarchies that exist on a micro-level, i.e., within subcultures (Brill, 2007, p. 112). “Thornton highlights subcultures’ tendency to be hierarchical, cliquey and controlled internally by disciplinary codes” (Thornton, 1995, as cited in Varner, 2007, p. 170). Therefore, individuals aspire less to reach the top of the hierarchies of social class within the wider society and more toward achieving high positions atop the hierarchies put forth within their smaller social groups. Thornton stated that subcultural capital “confers status on its owner in the eyes of the relevant beholder” rather everyone within the wider society (Thornton, 1995, p. 11, as cited in Varner, 2007, p. 170). The concepts of
“subcultural capital” and “cultural capital” are closely related and they have been used interchangeably throughout the Consumer Culture Theory research. For the purposes of this research, the term “cultural capital” will be used as this would be consistent with other usages within the brand community literature.

**Dress and Cultural Capital**

Dress has played a role in attaining cultural capital and achieving status within subcultures in which dress is an important indicator of subcultural affiliation. Members of the goth subculture gain cultural capital through utilizing hyperfeminine “goth style codes” (Brill 2007, p. 124). Within these subcultures, dress is an *objectified* form of cultural capital that distinguishes individuals as “true or “credible” members. For example, while applying the concept of cultural capital to a German sixties scene, a subculture where members adopt a “‘Sixties-like’” lifestyle” (p. 388), Jenß (2004) found that:

To become a “credible” member and to perform the style convincingly, young people have to gain the appropriate (sub)cultural capital, which they show off in dress practices, music knowledge, the “right” dance style, and so on (pp. 395-396).

In a similar manner, Cherry and Mellins (2012) reported that in the Steampunk subculture, a subculture based on a literature genre that combines a Victorian aesthetics and steam-powered machinery, “competencies” that “involve arts, crafts and design skills” and included “fashioning steampunk styles of dress” contributed to cultural capital (p. 9). The authors also wrote:

Steampunk as a style subculture conforms to the model described by Schouten and McAlexander (1995) in that it comprises hardcore members who are high in subcultural capital and adopt a full-time and/or particularly active performative identity; softcore members who, whilst still active and dedicated members of the community, do not necessarily have the time, commitment or skills to participate full-time; and non-members who style surf (Polhemus, 1996) and dabble in the style on an ad hoc basis (Cherry & Mellins, 2012, p. 9).
This suggests that dress not only objectifies cultural capital, but indicates the individual’s level of involvement within the community. This mirrors Schau et al.’s (2009) discussion of badging where the authors mentioned that in Kozinets’ (2001) study of the Star Trek brand community, “Bajoran earrings” served as a badge for one fan, which marked the first time that she wore them and “did not care about looks from others” (p. 45). Thus, dress items may be a means of expressing an individual’s status within the community.

**Women, Dress, and Cultural Capital**

It appears that dress plays a particularly important role for women in attaining cultural capital. Guy and Banim (2000) found that some women feel they achieve cultural capital through the “‘correct’ use of clothes” (p. 317) or through the “pursuit of quality labels” (p. 318). For women in some subcultures, dress plays a primary role. For instance, Brill (2007) wrote, “It follows that for goth women, the main option to gain acceptance and status through subcultural style is capitalizing on feminine beauty and attractiveness [through dress] in a fairly traditional sense . . .” (pp. 124-125). However, goth women are thought to only achieve a level of cultural capital that is secondary to men (Brill, 2007). Brill (2007) explained that goth men are able to “draw on the transgressive charge of gender-bending as a major source of subcultural capital” (p. 125) as they adopt “long hair,” “make-up” and “feminine dress” that expresses the goth ideology of “free self-expression” (p. 114). Brill’s (2007) conclusions reinforce previous theoretical views that women in subcultures adopt subservient status positions within them (Martin, Schouten, & McAlexander, 2006).

Under the umbrella of Consumer Culture Theory, Martin et al. (2006) used multiple feminist perspectives while investigating gendered consumption from a female rider standpoint.
within the Harley Davidson subculture of consumption, a male-dominated subculture. Martin et al. (2006) did not point out any relationship between dress and cultural capital. However, they did mention that female riders “claim a sense of control over their sexual image in relation to the male gaze” (p. 187) and some did so by wearing sexualized dress, such as miniskirts and high heels “symbolic markers of femininity that clarify their sexual orientation” (p. 187).

Women in the Harley Davidson subculture gained status by switching from riding a boyfriend’s or husband’s bike to riding their own (Martin et al., 2006). This demonstrates “competency and authenticity,” which are the same standards in which men in the subculture are judged to obtain status (Martin et al., 2006, p. 181). However, the attainment of status is more “complicated” for female riders than male riders (p. 182) as they must balance conflicting expectations from both genders. While achieving status within the subculture as a rider, women still occupy a lower status than their male counterparts (Martin et al., 2006). Thus parallels for women within both the goth and Harley Davidson subcultures, the means to obtaining cultural capital is the same (demonstrating competency, whether it be through wearing hyperfeminine dress or riding their own bike), but the resulting level of status cultural capital for women is lower in relation to men.

**Fandom, women, dress, and cultural capital.** By examining Schau et al.’s (2009) discussion of *Xena* fans and cultural capital, as well as, Shipley’s (2010) discussion of layers of *Twilight* gear as a means of distinguishing a fan as a “true fan” (p. 29), it is assumed that female fans gain status and distinctiveness in the same manner as men—through accumulating *embodied* forms, such as “knowledge of creators, characters, and storylines” (Brown, 1997, p. 26) and objective forms, such as authentic costumes and conspicuous fan dress, and *institutionalized*
forms such as awards. This assumption is also based on Martin et al.’s (2006) and Brill’s (2007) findings regarding the attainment of subcultural capital among women in the Harley Davidson subculture of consumption and goth subculture. Schau et al. (2009) and Shipley (2010) did not examine women’s status in relation to men’s within a single brand community. However, Shipley (2010) noted that female fans are often viewed by their male counterparts as being “orgiastic” or as a “groupie” (p. 7). Likewise, Cherry (2013) explained that ”feminine fandom is often referred to pejoratively as fangirling or squee” (p. 108). This male view of female fans suggests that female fans occupy a subservient status within their fan cultures and brand communities (Shipley, 2010).

**Women’s domains.** In such male-dominated subcultures or cultures of consumption, women may carve out their own domain or space in which they can commune apart from the male members of the community. For female riders in the Harley Davidson subculture of consumption, female domains or spaces took the form of “all-female riding groups” (Martin et al., 2006, p. 188). Women chose to ride together and apart from men to escape “the male domination and decision-making within biker culture” (Martin et al., 2006, p. 188) that prevented women from engaging in their preferred ways of riding. In most cases, men chose to ride at high speeds and disregarded traffic laws that jeopardized the women’s safety. Women preferred to be in control of their own safety, ride at slower speeds, and enjoy the slower pace that resulted in more pleasurable, visual experiences (Martin et al., 2006).

There is evidence of female domains in spaces within the brand community literature. Wakefield (2001) reported that women in the X-files brand community formed the female online community, the *Order of the Blessed Saint Scully the Enigmatic (OSSE)*, which centered on the
character Dana Scully, the science fiction television series’ heroine and places her as an “object of worship in an Abbey—a traditionally female space, where women come together . . . because of common belief” (p. 131). The author stated, “like an Abbey, a locus of female community away from the rest of society, an island is also an isolated physical space and safe haven for playing with constructions of self” (Wakefield, 2001, p. 134). Wakefield (2001) mentioned that although a small portion of the community members are male, the space was marked by “overwhelmingly women-centered rhetoric and concerns” (p. 135). This includes discussions regarding the character’s clothing, thus, women seek out spaces separate spaces from their male counterparts where they can take part in discussions and activities that they would not otherwise be allowed in male-dominated spaces. It may be necessary to observe separate women’s domains within fan brand communities, because it could provide further insight into their social and personal identities. Women may even gain personal distinctiveness within these domains that may go unrecognized or unappreciated among the men in the community.

A conversation between renowned fandom scholar Henry Jenkins and postdoctoral fellow in digital studies Suzanne Scott (2013) communicated that despite the fact that women are central to fan culture, the media portrays these cultures as male-dominant. This perception may persist due to the fact that “media texts, such as science fiction TV shows . . . are largely written by and intended for males” (Walliss, 2012, p. 130). This perception results in male fans failing to accept women within their fan base (Shipley, 2010). For example, Travis (2013) stated that within the Star Wars fan culture, “there are male fans who adhere to the ‘boy’s club’ idea,” but continued to explain that “there is a much larger community, made of male and female fans, that has put that myth behind them” (p. 54).
Jenkins and Scott (2013) wrote that within the comic book industry “women constitute a significant core of their readership” but retailers selling comic books are “hostile to the presence of female consumers” (p. xix). The authors noted there is a “steady decline in the sales of ‘mainstream’ superhero titles” and explained that although the industry has been rebranding these titles, they still “alienate female consumers” by not integrating “women’s tastes and interests” (Jenkins & Scott, 2013, p. xix). The authors also argued that if the comic book industry appealed more to women, it would “face a major fan boy pushback” (Jenkins & Scott, 2013, p. xix). Likewise, Shipley (2010) explained, “Because society believes that fan activities are meant primarily for boys, regular male attendees at ComiCon conventions stated that the predominantly female Twilight fans ruined their experience by showing up in droves at ComiCon in 2009 in San Diego” (p. 7). This argument not only reinforces the perception that fan cultures are male-dominated, but suggests that some male fans prefer it to be. The author further stated, “This attitude . . . places fangirls in a subordinated position to that of their male equivalent today” (p. 8).

Shipley (2010) found that it was because of this boys-only attitude that female Twilight fans “downplay[ed] their devotion to the series” and that the “convention, in this instance, is not seen as a totally safe haven” for them (p. 30). This evidence suggests that like women in the Harley Davidson subculture of consumption, women in male-dominated science fiction and fantasy fan cultures create or seek out their own domains or spaces. Wakefield’s (2001) findings regarding the female electronic X-files fan community along with Cherry’s (2013) observation that forums on the website Ravelry (Ravelry LLC, n.d.)," a social networking community dedicated to feminine handicrafting," provide a space for intensely feminine fandom that some
male-dominated, masculine fandom groups look down on” (p. 108) also supports this idea. Cherry (2013) explained that in such spaces “gendered fan behaviors emerge” as they take part in traditionally female activities such as knitting (p. 108). Therefore, the present study may reveal that women in these fan cultures partake in brand community practices apart from men that contribute to a uniquely feminine fan social identity.

**Application of Brand Community and Cultural Capital to the Present Study**

The brand community concept as a framework is also useful for examining how individual fans work toward achieving personal distinctiveness. Like other brand communities, fan cultures in particular are denied status by the mainstream or “official culture,” (Brown, 1997, p. 29). Fan cultures share many similarities and “operates by the same rules as official culture” (Brown, 1997, p. 28), but mainstream culture often views these fan cultures as the “other” (Brown, 1997; Chen, 2007; Shipley, 2010; Taylor 2009).

As previously mentioned, the theory of cultural capital states that there are three primary forms of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1994 as cited in Holt, 1998, p. 3): (a) embodied, (b) objectified, and (c) institutionalized. Cultural capital attained by members of fan cultures may take any of the three primary forms. Brown (1997) explained that comic book fans build cultural capital by “building a knowledge of creators, characters, and storylines” (p. 26). The author further suggested that this knowledge is the *embodied* form of comic book cultural capital, and that the *embodied* form is *objectified* through objects related to the fandom that included dress items when he wrote:

> For *Star Trek*, *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, or *Grateful Dead* fans, it is the experience of viewing the show, hearing the band, or participating in ritual consumption that is of prime importance . . . . it is the possession of the actual comic that acts as the focal point for the entire community. Other fan cultures can own *a New Kids On the Block* album or
videotape all the episodes of Dr. Who, they can even purchase all the T-shirts, dolls, and posters they want, but none of it carries the same ability to substantiate fan authenticity in the way that owning a copy of Wolverine #1 does” (Brown, 1997, p. 22).

This suggests that for comic book fans, fan dress may be worn as an outward expression that symbolizes their consumption of and knowledge of the original source of their fandom, comic books.

In a similar manner, Xena costumes may objectify the fan’s embodied knowledge of accurate and authentic costumes of the television series (Schau et al., 2009). As Schau et al. (2009) demonstrated, this knowledge was also found in an institutionalized form as awards given to Xena fans for their accomplishments in creating accurate costumes related to the series. The embodiment and objectification of knowledge of an individual’s source of fandom has been evidenced in other fan cultures that create and wear accurate costumes (Chen 2007; Mishou, 2015; Taylor, 2009). This includes cosplay worn for fan conventions (Chen, 2007).

There is some evidence that simply collecting and wearing costumes and dress is the objectified form of cultural capital and contributes to a fan’s status within the community. For instance, the collection of original Buffy costumes and props was also thought to increase a fan’s status as it objectified the fan’s knowledge of the television series (Stenger, 2006). Like Schau et al.’s (2009) observation of badging among the Mini Cooper brand community and Jenß’s (2004, p. 395) supposition that dress aided in distinguishing a “credible member” of the German sixties scene, Shipley (2010) found that wearing multiple layers of Twilight gear distinguished an individual as a “true fan” and symbolized the “level of one’s devotion” to the franchise (p. 29). These studies show that conspicuous dress, with visible graphics that overtly reference a science fiction or fantasy media source, contributes to a fan’s status and distinctiveness. However,
whether or not inconspicuous dress also serves this purpose has not been explored. In the present research, the concept of brand community was useful in achieving a greater understanding of inconspicuous fan dress’s role in contributing to personal distinctiveness within female fans’ brand communities.

The literature reviewed in this chapter provided guidance for exploring women’s motivations for wearing inconspicuous science fiction and fantasy fan dress within various settings and social contexts, and to examine how inconspicuous fan dress (IFD) contributes to a fan’s social and personal identities and personal distinctiveness. Some researchers who studied fan dress, cosplay, and handicrafts and handmade dress items provided insight into the fans’ possible fan dress practices and motivations (Barker, 2010; Cherry 2013; Chen, 2007; Shipley, 2010; Taylor, 2009; Quail 2011). A review of previous research conducted on brand communities and subcultures and the employment of Goffman’s (1959) Dramaturgical framework provided a theoretical basis for this study (Brill 2007; Brown 1997; Cherry & Mellins, 2012; Fuller 2013; Guy & Banim, 2000; Holt, 1998; Jenß, 2004; Johnson, et al., 2014; Miller-Spillman, 2015; Mun et al., 2012; Schau et al., 2009; Strauss, 2003; Taylor, 2009; Thornton, 1995 as cited in Varner, 2007; Martin et, al, 2006; Mishou, 2015).
Chapter 3.
Methods and Procedures

Specific Objectives

This research explored science fiction and fantasy female fans’ motivations for wearing IFD within various settings and social contexts. The research also explored how IFD contributed to a fans’ social and personal identities and personal distinctiveness by achieving three primary objectives:

1. To explore science fiction and fantasy female fans’ motivations for wearing IFD within various settings and social contexts.
2. To examine how science fiction and fantasy female fans’ IFD contributed to their social identity.
3. To investigate how science fiction and fantasy female fans’ IFD contributed to the construction of their personal identity and distinctiveness.

Research Questions

To explore the first two objectives, the following research questions and sub-questions were developed using Erving Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgy and the concept of brand community:

1. What are female fans’ motivations for wearing inconspicuous fan dress?
   a. How do their dress practices differ within various settings and social contexts?
   b. How do motivations differ according to their dress practices and setting/social contexts?
To investigate the third objective, the following research questions were developed using Social Identity Theory and the concept of brand community:

2. How does female fans’ inconspicuous dress contribute to the construction of social identity?

3. How does female fans’ inconspicuous dress contribute to the construction of personal identity and distinctiveness?

**Approach**

A qualitative research design was chosen due to the exploratory nature of this topic. As previously mentioned, while some brand community literature focused on brand community practices that involve creating dress (Chen 2007; Cherry, 2013; Fuller, 2013; Mishou, 2015; Schau et al., 2009; Taylor, 2009; Thompson, 2009), only one author in particular focused on fan dress within a limited social setting and context (Shipley, 2010). Furthermore, qualitative methods were beneficial in exploring topics related to Consumer Culture Theory (Arnauld & Thompson, 2005).

Qualitative methods were beneficial in studies concerning women and their dress. For example, two researchers utilized Skype and wardrobe interviews with the constant comparative data analysis method aided in “understanding queer women’s fashion-acquisition experiences and the minority stressors faced during these activities” and “led to the identification of areas in which the fashion industry can create a more inclusive and equitable environment for queer individuals” (Reddy-Best & Pedersen, 2015, p. 276). Using wardrobe interviews and thematic analysis, Guy and Banim (2000) identified “three co-existing views of self; ‘The woman I want to be’, ‘The woman I fear I could be,’ and ‘The woman I am most of the time’” (p. 314). These
findings “affirmed and added to the theoretical frameworks of ambivalence” that the researchers used (Guy & Banim, 2000, p. 325). One study combined the study of women’s dress and brand community by examining female *Twilight* fan dress and also found that qualitative research methods were beneficial (Shipley, 2010). By utilizing a qualitative research design, the present study yielded valuable insights specific to female fans within male-dominated fan brand communities.

**Sample**

A purposive sampling method was thought to be beneficial in providing insight into these motivations, the selection of respondents was based on the three sampling strategies of criterion, snowball or chain, and theoretical sampling (Creswell, 2007). First, participants were selected based on the criterion that they wore IFD in various settings and social contexts. Second, participants had to be 18 years old or older, female, and residents of the United States or Canada. While it is acknowledged that individuals may have identified themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered (LGBT), these individuals were not a specific focus of this research. Participants could have been LGBT in the present study but no questions were designed to elicit this data. LGBT fans’ specific dress behaviors should be investigated in a future study. Third, participants had to indicate some interests in science fiction, fantasy, or related genre. The participant did not need to self-identity as a fan. As Pearson (2007) argued, some individuals choose other “labels” that better describe their behavior and fan identity and avoid identifying as a *fan* due to the negative connotation of the term (Pearson, 2007, p. 98).

The sample included participants who were fans of science fiction or fantasy media or were fans of films or television series that blended both science fiction and fantasy genres.
Science fiction fandoms includes the fandom surrounding the film series Star Wars (although, it is argued that this is more fantasy than science fiction) (Hill, 2015)) and television series Star Trek. Fantasy fan cultures include those surrounding the film series Lord of the Rings, Harry Potter, and the television series Game of Thrones. Fan cultures that are considered a mix of the two genres include the three television series: (a) Doctor Who, (b) Sherlock Holmes, and (c) Supernatural, and the movie series (d) The Hunger Games (Morris, 2013). Star Wars and Doctor Who have both been described as "not 'hard' science fiction" because the stories include many fantastic elements (Morris, 2013, p. 57). The inclusion of the Star Wars fandom, in particular, was timely for the current study as it coincided with the release of the newest film within the franchise, Star Wars: Episode VII: The Force Awakens (Abrams, McGatlin, Harper, Burk, & Kennedy, 2015). Fans of Sherlock (the fandom surrounding the current BBC series Sherlock (Moffatt et al. & McGuigan et al., 2010)), Harry Potter, The Lord of the Rings, and Doctor Who were included in this study. Additionally, fans of the television series Supernatural were included. Perez (2013) described the super fandom SuperWhoLock, a combination of the Doctor Who, Sherlock Holmes and Supernatural fandoms.

To ensure diversity of fan types within the sample, other television series were included in this research. These included the science fiction television series Firefly, Heroes Reborn, Humans, and Killjoys and the fantasy television series, Once Upon a Time, Game of Thrones, Penny Dreadful, and Outlander. The researcher is a female fan of several of the television and film series mentioned above, and wears inconspicuous fan dress related to The Hunger Games, The Lord of the Rings, and Harry Potter. Therefore, she may be considered an aca-fan.
Recruitment

Potential participants were first recruited through word of mouth from friends, acquaintances, co-workers, managers or owners of retailers that sell fan merchandise, or social networking sites such as Facebook.com (2016), etc. Criterion sampling and recruiting participants via word of mouth was used in previous qualitative studies concerning women’s dress (Montemurro & Gillen, 2013; Reddy-Best & Pedersen, 2015). Second, the snowball or chain method of sampling was used. This is a method in which “cases of interest [are identified] from people who know people who know what cases are information-rich” (Creswell, 2007, p. 127). This type of sampling was used to obtain “a distinctively diverse sample from a range of backgrounds and ages” (Guy & Banim, 2000). Snowball sampling methods were used in several qualitative studies concerning women’s dress (Montemurro & Gillen, 2013; Reddy-Best & Pedersen, 2015; Tawfiq & Ogle, 2013).

In the current research, snowball sampling was carried out by asking participants to identify others who might be interested in participating in this research. Several participants were authors of blogs related to some aspect of fan culture, and one author posted an electronic recruitment flier on her blog, which aided in recruiting. Several other participants posted the electronic flier on Facebook.com (2016) after their interview. Six participants provided information for contacting potential respondents via blogs, Facebook (Facebook.com, 2016) pages, and email.

A third type of sampling, theoretical sampling, was also used. Creswell (2007) defined this type of sampling as one in which:

The investigator selects a sample of individuals to study based on their contribution to the development of the theory. Often, this process begins with a homogenous sample of
individuals who are similar, and, as the data collection proceeds and the categories emerge, the researcher turns to a heterogeneous sample to see under what conditions the categories hold true” (p. 240-241).

To obtain a more heterogeneous sample, four participants were recruited in-person at a comic book and gaming convention at CoastCon in Biloxi, Mississippi.

Theoretical saturation occurs when similar themes or categories were evident in many of the interviews (Creswell, 2007). While Reddy-Best and Pedersen (2015) were able to reach saturation of the data with 13 participants, and Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) were able to reach theoretical saturation with a small sample of 12 individuals, to ensure saturation was met in the current study, 20 to 30 respondents were sought. The researcher began to analyze data immediately following the interviews. The analysis of one interview guided the focus of the following interview (Thompson, 20009), and the researcher continued to interview participants until theoretical saturation occurred. This form of sampling provided sufficient evidence to either support or not to support the theoretical concepts used in this research.

Instrumentation

An interview protocol with semi-structured, open-ended interview questions (see Appendix B) was designed to investigate the research questions. According to Creswell (2007), “The [interview] questions are a narrowing of the central question and subquestions in the research study” (p. 133). For example, questions directly related to the first research question included, “What kinds of fan clothing and accessories do you wear and why?” and “When and where would you wear these items? Why?” The question “How would you wear or style these items differently depending on the situation?” was related to the second research question, and “How does your clothing/accessories show what kind of fan you are? Why?” related to the third
research question. These questions were also included on a separate wardrobe interview protocol, which directed the questions toward specific dress items. These wardrobe interview questions were designed to encourage discussion about the specific contexts in which the participants wore specific pieces and outfits and how they styled them within those contexts. Such questions included: (a) “When and where would you wear these items? Why?” (b) “In what situations would you wear some of these items, but not others, and why?” and (c) “How would you wear or style these items differently depending on the situation?” Additionally, there were two questions concerning social and psychological comfort. These included “Do you feel comfortable wearing some/all/any of these items in some situations more than others? Why or why not?” and “Do you feel comfortable wearing some/all/any items all the time/in all situations? Why or why not?” Questions were also included to explore how the dress items related to the participant’s fandom, such as “How do you use these dress items to identify with others that like the same film, TV series, or character? Why?” This last set of questions provided insight into female fans’ collection of fan dress items to determine if their collections included both conspicuous and inconspicuous forms of fan dress (Guy & Banim, 2000; Tawfiq & Ogle, 2013).

The open-ended nature of most of the interview questions allowed the respondents to go into greater detail with their answers, as well as allowed the researcher to probe for more information regarding a particular response, resulting in a bank of rich, thick descriptions, which are indicative of qualitative research (Creswell, 2007). The theoretical sampling technique revealed the need for the addition, deletion, or editing of questions to gather the information needed; therefore, the protocols were altered when necessary with IRB approval. Additionally, both the interview and wardrobe interview protocols consisted of statements that extracted
demographic information, such as age, race, marital, and socio-economic status that influenced some participant's choices to wear IFD rather than CFD.

Data Collection

Qualitative research exploring women and their dress has typically been carried out using a small number of interviews. Tawfiq and Ogle (2013) conducted in-depth interviews to explore the self-presentation of Saudi women within their private homes and gender-segregated spaces. The authors included 15 women in their sample, and interviewed them in their homes (Tawfiq & Ogle, 2013). The “interviews also included a photo elicitation and/or wardrobe analysis component in which participants were asked to bring photos of themselves wearing private sphere dress and/or garments worn within the private sphere,” which was “used to guide discussion during the interview” (Tawfiq & Ogle, 2013, p. 280). To explore women’s relationships with their clothes, Guy and Banim (2000) conducted 15 wardrobe interviews in the participants’ homes that aided in “allow[ing] the participants to generate a comprehensive view of how they used their clothing” and “employed a semi-structured format to explore participants’ current collections of clothes” (p. 315) This use of wardrobe samples or “wardrobe analysis components” allowed the researcher to achieve data saturation with a small number of interviews.

Additionally, it was believed that augmenting Skype or online interviews with face-to-face interviews might have reduced the number of interviews necessary. Thirteen total interviews were conducted by Reddy-Best and Pederson (2015) while exploring “queer women’s experiences when shopping for clothing” and “looking for style inspiration” (p. 265). Six interviews were conducted over Skype, while seven were conducted face-to-face in the
participants’ homes (Reddy-Best & Pedersen, 2015). Relatively small, but slightly larger sample sizes were used in studies of subcultures of consumption and brand communities that employed a mixture of interviewing methods. Thompson (2009) conducted 12 electronic interviews (via email) and 11 in-depth face-to-face interviews with female members of the Twilight brand community. Martin et al., (2006) conducted 18 “in-home ethnographic interviews” in order to observe the makes and models of the motorcycles of female riders affiliated with the Harley Davidson subculture of consumption.

Based on the data collection methods employed in the studies mentioned above, interviews were conducted until saturation was met, which was projected to be from 20 to 30 interviews. Although a total of 33 interviews were conducted, theoretical saturation occurred after 23 interviews. Thirty-one of these interviews were conducted online via Purchat.com (Pure Chat Inc., 2015), Facebook.com (Facebook, 2016), or Skype .com (Skype and/or Microsoft, 2016), and two participants were interviewed in person. For one participant, half of the interview was carried out using Purchat.com (Pure Chat Inc., 2015) and half in person due to technical difficulties concerning the website. The remaining half of the interview took place on-campus in the lobby of a public building. Permission was granted by the Louisiana State University Institutional Review Board on February 25, 2016 (Appendix F), to expand the data collection methods to on-site interviews at science fiction and fantasy conventions. One onsite interview was carried out onsite in the dealer’s room at CoastCon in Biloxi, Mississippi, which aided in achieving a more heterogeneous sample, as well as, to supplant wardrobe interviews.

No in-person wardrobe interviews were conducted, because participants preferred not to be interviewed in their homes. However, because the online participants provided a sufficient
amount of wardrobe photographs, theoretical saturation was reached without conducting in-person wardrobe interviews where wardrobe samples could be viewed in person. Both in-person interviews audio-recorded.

Online and in-person interviews began on January 13, 2016, following the approval of Louisiana State University Institutional Review Board on January 11, 2016 (Appendix D), and ended on March 29, 2016. Photographs of participants wearing fan dress, as well as photographic samples of fan dress items were collected from the online interview participants. Tawfiq and Ogle’s (2013) photo elicitation method was used instead of wardrobe samples to encourage discussion with online interview participants and to provide insight into participants’ collection of fan dress. The online format allowed participants to provide links to photographs stored in online social media accounts and featured on blogs. Collecting photographs from online sources was an easy and convenient method and is highly recommended for future dress studies. The total amount of data collected included 430 pages of text with single-spaced text and double spacing between questions and responses (format of Purechat.com transcript) with an average of 13 pages per participant ($N = 33$). In addition, 703 total photographs with an average of 21 photos per participant ($N = 33$) were collected.

**Data Analysis**

Data from audio-recoded in-person interviews were transcribed word-for-word immediately after the interview and data from online interviews were imported into a Microsoft Word document. Drawing from Reddy-Best and Pedersen’s (2015, p. 270) procedures, “Notes on themes were written during and directly following each interview.” These notes served as a data-reduction method and allowed for the simultaneous collection and analysis of data (Gaulding,
This practice is typical of the constant comparison method, the chosen data analysis method chosen for this study.

The constant comparative method was defined as one that involves the “researcher identifying incidents, events, and activities and constantly comparing them to an emerging category to develop and saturate the category” (Creswell, 2007, p. 238). Constant comparison as a method of analysis “seeks to gain in-depth insights into behavior rather than strive to measure or quantify the data” (Gaulding, 2001, p. 569). The use of the constant comparative method has been beneficial in studies of women and their dress, as well as studies of fan cultures/brand communities. The constant comparative method of analysis can be often used to build theory, (Creswell, 2007). Although, Montemurro and Gillen (2013) drew from Goffman’s (1959) “concept of impressions given off” (p. 170), the authors stated that “theory was built from, rather than being imposed upon, data” (p. 170). Likewise, Reddy-Best and Pedersen (2015) indicated that “the researcher conducting the analysis was open during the coding process to any unanticipated results that emerged from the data” (p. 270). Constant comparative method was used for analysis in brand community and fan studies research when examining “collective consumption and consumer-generated content” within the female-dominated Twilight brand community (Thompson, 2009). The author compared themes that emerged from the data to those discussed in previous research.

The interview data were managed using NVivo qualitative analysis software and analyzed using the constant comparison method as detailed by Creswell (2007), and utilized by Reddy-Best and Pedersen (2015). Data analysis included three stages of coding: open, axial, and selective coding. During open coding, data were examined and grouped into similar themes or
categories (Reddy-Best & Pedersen, 2015; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Axial coding involved comparing and connecting the themes and categories identified during open coding and collapsing them into larger categories. Finally, selective coding was the stage in which larger themes emerged out of the many categories that resulted from open coding (Reddy-Best & Pedersen, 2015; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Main themes that emerged from the data were compared to concepts found within a pre-existing theoretical framework.

Additionally, the practice of memoing was performed. This was the writing of analytic memos described as “the transitional phase from coding to the more formal write-up of the study” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 41). This practice aided the researcher in organizing the codes and integrating them into the final manuscript (Saldaña, 2009).

**Validity and Reliability**

Triangulation, selected member checks, and audit coding were used to add credibility to the research. Triangulation “involves corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective” (Creswell, 2007, p. 208). Data from the interviews were triangulated with wardrobe samples and photographs of fan dress, which thereby increased the study’s credibility, dependability, and transferability.

Member checking “involves taking data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so that they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account” (Creswell, 2007, p. 208). Member checking in the current research took the form of follow-up interviews via email when clarification was needed and photographs were sent to the participants “to see if
any major ideas were missing or overemphasized based on the initial analysis (Creswell, 2007)” (Reddy-Best & Pedersen, 2015).

Because *intercoder agreement* contributes to reliability in qualitative research, an audit coder was used (Creswell, 2007; Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). This “procedure involves having several individuals code a transcript and then compare their work to determine whether they arrived at the same codes and themes or different ones (Miles & Huberman, 1994)” (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011, p. 212). An audit coder who had no “knowledge of the expectations and questions of the project directors” used NVivo to code two transcripts (Creswell, 2007, p. 210). The coder met with the primary researcher three times to compare and agree on categories and themes that emerged from the data (Creswell, 2007). Upon completion of the audit coding, an average kappa score of 0.66 was calculated using a coding comparison function in NVivo. Because this score falls between 0.61–0.80, it represented “substantial agreement” (Viera & Garrett, 2005), which is just below the range of “almost perfect agreement,” which is 0.81–0.99 (Viera & Garrett, 2005). The 0.66 kappa score was likely due to the small number of transcripts that were audit coded, but may increase upon audit coding a higher number of transcripts.
Chapter 4.
Results

The purpose of this research was to explore women’s motivations for wearing inconspicuous science fiction and fantasy fan dress within various settings and social contexts, and to explore how inconspicuous fan dress (IFD) contributes to a fan’s social and personal identities and personal distinctiveness. Included in this chapter are the results of the current research, beginning with a discussion of participant and fan dress demographic data, followed by a discussion of the four major emergent themes: (a) types of fan dress, (b) personal motivations, (c) social motivations, and (d) impression management.

Sample

Females who identified as fans and wore dress with fan leanings were recruited for participation in this research. Two interview protocols with 22 items were designed with six demographic questions and 16 questions to investigate the objectives and research questions (Appendices B & C). Participants were recruited through word of mouth, in-person, and social networking sites such as Facebook (Facebook.com, 2016), and sampling methods included the snowball or chain method, criterion sampling, and theoretical sampling.

Online and in-person interviews began on January 13, 2016, following the approval of Louisiana State University Institutional Review Board on January 11, 2016 (Appendix D), and ended on March 29, 2016. A total of 33 female participants throughout the United States and Canada were interviewed (See Chapter 3, Methods and Procedures). All participants were assigned a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality.
Demographic Data

Five out of the six interview protocol items were designed to collect demographic data related to the participants, which included age, race, marital status, socio-economic status, and occupation or source of income. It was anticipated that the majority of participants would be located in the southern region of the United States due to proximity to the researcher. Just under half of the participants (45.45%, N = 15) resided within the south. The remaining portion of the sample spanned the United States and Canada. As shown on Figure 2, an equal number of participants resided in the Midwest and West (21.21%, N = 7), while three participants (9.09%) resided in the Northeast and one in Canada.

Figure 2. Number of participants per region.¹

¹The regions were defined by the US Census Bureau (http://www2.census.gov/geo/docs/maps-data/maps/reg_div.txt). Northeast: CT, ME, MA, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VT. Midwest: IA, IL, IN, KS, MI, MN, MO, ND, NE, OH, SD, WI. South: AL, AR, DE, District of Columbia, FL, GA, KY, LA, MD, MS, NC, OK, SC, TN, TX, VA, WV. West: AK, AZ, CA, CO, HI, IO, MT NM, NV, OR, UT, WA, WY. Other: Canada.
An equal number of participants (33.00%, $N = 11$) reported that their age fell between 25 and 34. This accounted for the majority of the sample (66.66%, $N = 22$). Five participants (15.00%) reported that their age ranged between 20 and 24, three participants (9.09%) reported that their ages were between 35 to 39, two participants (6.06%) reported that they their age fell between 40 and 49, and one participant (3.03%) reported that her age fell between 60 and 69. The average age of participants equaled 31.43 years of age. The number of participants per age range is shown on Figure 3.

![Figure 3](image.jpg)

**Figure 3.** Number of participants per age range reported.

Most participants reported their race as being white/Caucasian (84.85%, $N = 28$). One participant (9.09%) reported her race as Hispanic/Latina, another participant (9.09%) described her race as Black with a Caucasian spouse, and one participant (9.09%) reported her race as Asian-Pacific American. A little over half (54.54%, $N = 18$) of the participants reported they were married. Eleven reported they were single (33.33%), while two others indicated their marital status as either “in a long-term committed relationship, but not married yet” ($N = 1$) or
“live with my significant other” ($N=1$). One participant reported marital status as Divorced ($N=1$), while another participant chose not to disclose her marital status.

The majority of participants reported their socioeconomic status as middle class (45.45%, $N=15$). Others described their socioeconomic status as upper middle class ($N=2$), lower middle class ($N=6$), lower class ($N=1$), poor ($N=1$), or Other ($N=1$). One participant stated that she was “not sure how to describe socioeconomic status,” while six participants chose not to disclose this information.

Participants’ occupations or sources of income fell within a range of industries. As shown on Figure 4, the majority of participants (30.30%, $N=10$) worked in occupations within education, which included teaching in secondary education or higher education, working as a graduate assistant or undergraduate student worker, and working as a librarian supervisor or in a library. Occupations within the service industry (21.21%, $N=7$) included customer service representative, office manager, human resource manager, receptionist, and automobile mechanic. Creative occupations (15.15%, $N=5$) included artist/illustrator, model, film and television costumer, actress, fashion blogger, freelance seamstress/designer or costumer, video editor and photographer and writer. Retail occupations (12.12%, $N=4$) included assistant manager, sales associate, inventory porter/store administrator and bridal consultant. Outside of these industries, occupations included professional engineer (science and technology, 3.03%, $N=1$), Air Force officer (military, 3.03%, $N=1$), and dual occupations (9.09%, $N=3$), which included retail customer service representative and author and photographer and fabric store retail associate and crop exporter. Occupations in the “other” category (6.06%, $N=2$) included retired and stay-at-home parent/library volunteer.
Fan Dress Demographic Data

Science fiction and fantasy fandom has been defined in this research as one’s affiliation with a fan culture (Henry Jenkins as cited in Stenger, 2006, p. 26; Brown, 1997, p. 13), that is comprised of individuals who have a “fanatical enthusiasm for science fiction and fantasy” media that is related to either science fiction or fantasy or a blend of the two genres (Morris, 2013, p. 51). The term fandom will be also used to describe the source of media (film, film or television series, i.e., Star Wars, Star Trek) that the participant reported that they enjoyed or represented though their dress. One item on the interview protocol was designed to collect data concerning the television and film series that each participant enjoys. As the focus of this research was to explore the fan dress of participants, the shows which inspired dress-related fandom are of most importance. Because the amount of series mentioned is extensive, entire transcripts were examined to determine which science fiction, fantasy, and mix of science fiction and fantasy fandoms were most commonly worn.

Unanticipated fandoms. While it was the aim of this research to focus on individuals who wear dress related to a science fiction and fantasy television and film series, participants
cited a wider range of television and film series than were was anticipated. The genres of film
and television series and sometime stand-alone films (films not part of a series) were verified
using IMDb.com (IMDb.com, Inc., 1990-2016a) before including them in analysis. This website
was chosen because “IMDb is now the world’s most popular and authoritative source for movie,
TV and celebrity content.” (IMDb.com, Inc., 1990-2016a).” Additionally, IMDb contained a
“searchable database of more than 185 million data items including more than 3.5 million
movies, TV and entertainment programs” (IMDb.com, Inc., 1990-2016b). While many of the
film and television series and sometime stand-alone films that the participants cited fell within
science fiction and fantasy genres, some films and series often also fell within a mix with other
genres, such as action, action/adventure, thriller, romance, and drama as indicated on IMDb.com
(IMDb.com, Inc., 1990-2016a). For example, Marvel superhero films based on a comic book
series, such as The Avengers (Alonso, et al. & Whedon, 2012) were classified by IMDb.com
(1990-2016a) as action, adventure, and science fiction. Focusing this research on television and
film series that are generally thought to be purely science fiction, fantasy, or a mix of science
fiction and fantasy was problematic, as one participant, Hillary, remarked that she considered
The Avengers (Alonso, et al. & Whedon, 2012), as “an offshoot of sci-fi.” Therefore, if science
fiction or fantasy was among several genres listed under a television series, film series, or even
one stand-alone film’s title on IMDb.com (1990-2016a), participants’ dress connected to these
were included in this research. These included Marvel and DC Comics superhero television and
film series, anime films, and Disney films.

Several participants mentioned wearing fan dress connected to superheroes originating
from Marvel and DC Comic books. Science fiction and fantasy fandom is closely related to
comic book fandom (Jenkins, 2013). Many individuals who are fans of these genres are also “enthusiasts” of comic books (Robertson, 2014, p. 22). Therefore, action/adventure superhero film series, such as the Marvel’s *Avengers* films and DC Comics *Batman* film series were also included if they were classified as being a mix of the science fiction or fantasy genres, as indicated on IMDb.com (IMDb.com, Inc., 1990-2016a).

While some participants cited films and series based on a specific character or group of characters, such as Marvel’s *Avengers* and *Agent Carter* and DC Comic’s *The Justice League* or *Batman Beyond*, five participants indicated a general admiration for the Marvel or DC Universes. For example, four participants stated that they enjoyed “anything Marvel” (Anna, Farah, Marie, and Valerie), while Courtney indicated that she enjoyed watching “all of the Marvel Cinematic Universe.” Therefore, all series related to Marvel or DC Comics were counted as one fandom, as opposed to those linked to separate film series (i.e. Marvel’s *Avengers* or *Spiderman* films). These were counted as a participant’s fandom if she mentioned enjoying any Marvel or DC Comics series or films at any point during the interview and wore any related dress items, whether or not they were connected to a specific series. For example, Karen indicated that she was a fan of the character Batman and wore several fan items featuring the character, but did not directly mention any specific series involving the character when asked “What shows/film series do you watch, enjoy?” However, later in the interview she explained how her fan dress brought about a conversation centered on the question, “Is Ben Affleck a good choice for the next Batman?” Through this question, Karen indirectly referred to the recently released film *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*, (Coller et al., & Snyder, 2016), communicating that she enjoyed a film that was part of a DC Comics film series. For this reason, analysis of her Batman dress is
included in this research and is counted toward the general DC Comics fandom worn. Two participants mentioned wearing dress of characters originating from these universes that have not yet been featured in a film or television series. For example, Courtney, who enjoyed series concerning “all of the Marvel Cinematic Universe” described a tank top with Captain Marvel’s emblem, and Marie described an inspired ensemble based on the Kate Bishop’s Hawkeye. Because these dress items were linked to their general fandom for all things Marvel, these dress items were included in the analysis as an outgrowth of the Marvel fandom.

Additionally, the data revealed that anime, which was not included in the original sampling plan, was important to science fiction and fantasy fandom. Western women’s interest in anime fandom is closely related to their interest in the fantasy genre that stemmed from watching shows set in “fantasy worlds” (Erik-Soussi, 2016, p. 24). Female fans of fantasy series are often drawn to anime, as well (Erik-Soussi, 2016) as evident in a study where anime cosplay was investigated (Taylor, 2009). In that study, in addition to cosplaying as anime characters, one anime fan also commonly cosplayed as fantasy or science fiction characters from Disney, Star Wars, or Batman films (Taylor, 2009). Four participants (Alice, Dawn, Jen, & Natalie) were primarily anime fans. A total of eight participants wore fan dress connected to various anime fandoms (Gale, Hannah, Paige, & Piper). Because 36.36% of the sample wore dress connected to anime, and the dress worn was connected to anime series that are classified as fantasy, science fiction, or a mix of science fiction and fantasy according to IMDb.com (1990-2016a), anime fan dress was also included in analysis.

In some cases, book series falling within the science fiction and fantasy genres were mentioned. This was not surprising given several book series that have been developed into very
successful film series, such as the *Twilight* Saga, *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, *The Hunger Games*, and *Harry Potter*. Two participants (Courtney & Gale) described fan dress items related to fantasy books series such as *The Wheel of Time* and *Discworld*, in addition to their fan dress related to audio-visual media. However, these discussions were excluded from the study to keep the focus of the study on fandom related to visual media.

Analysis of the data also revealed that participants could not separate their science fiction and fantasy series fandoms from that of stand-alone science fiction and fantasy films. In other words, participants cited that they enjoyed stand-alone films and wore fan dress that referenced stand-alone films. For some participants, the relationship they had to a stand-alone film was just as important as their relationship to a film series. This was evident in the analysis of participants’ statements regarding their dress that referenced stand-alone films, which yielded the same themes as analysis of statements regarding their dress that referenced a series. For example, Irene’s discussion of her fan clothing connected to the science fiction film *Pacific Rim* (Del Toro, et al., & Neill, 2013) provided similar insight to her discussion of her *Star Wars* fan dress, which she primarily wore. Similarly, Nicole’s discussion of replica accessories and hairstyles inspired by the lead character in Fox Animation Studios’ fantasy film *Anastasia* (Bluth & Goldman, 1997) provided insight that it was just as valuable as her fan dress connected to *The Lord of the Rings*, a fantasy film series. For this reason, descriptions of dress referencing stand-alone films were included in analysis.

The inclusion of stand-alone films necessitated the addition of many films produced by Disney. Six participants indicated they wore fan dress connected to Disney princesses or villains, and three participants wore dress items related to *The Nightmare before Christmas* (Burton &
Selick, 1993). Although Disney fandom is not the focus of this study, dress connected to Disney films were included because the films were classified as fantasy by IMDb.com (1990-2016a), and including Disney films contributed valuable insight into the development of the *Taxonomy of Fan Dress* (Figure 39).

Dress connected to stand-alone films that did not fall within the science fiction and fantasy genres were excluded from analysis. For example, Hillary stated that in addition to science fiction, she was “also a huge fan of the horror genre where I delve into terribly produced 1950's and 1960's B Horror” and described a “pair of Jason mask earrings,” a tattoo of “Frankenstein's Monster and Jason's mask” and a “Universal Monsters t-shirt” connected to her horror fandom. Excluding horror fandom was done only to manage the size of the study and does not imply that the examination of fan dress of other genres is not valuable. The study of horror and other genres of fan dress would be valuable to future researchers.

**Fandoms worn.** The participants wore a wide range of science fiction, fantasy, and science fiction/fantasy fandoms. The most commonly worn fandom was *Star Wars* (*N* = 20), which were worn by 60.60% of the sample. The second most commonly worn fandom was Marvel (27.27%, *N* = 9), which includes fandoms for *Avengers* films and films about individual *Avengers* characters, such as Iron Man, Deadpool, Agent Carter, and Captain America. Marvel fandom also included the television series *Marvel Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* Marvel fandom is followed by *Star Trek, Firefly*, and DC Comics, which was worn by 5 participants each (15.15%, *N* = 5). The number of participants for each commonly worn fandom is shown on Figure 5. The numeric value and percentage of participants who wore these fandoms are listed on Tables 1-3.
Other science fiction fandoms included: (a) the Back to the Future (3.03%, \(N = 1\)) and Tomb Raider (3.03%, \(N = 1\)) film series; (b) the animated television series, the Venture Brothers (3.03%, \(N = 1\)); and (c) the web series Dr. Horrible’s Sing-Along Blog (3.03%, \(N = 1\)); (d) the stand alone science fiction film Pacific Rim (Del Toro et al., & Neill, 2013) (3.03%, \(N = 1\)); (e) the anime series Neon Genesis Evangelion (3.03%, \(N = 1\)); and (f) Attack on Titan (3.03%, \(N = 1\)). The numeric value and percentage of participants who wore these fandoms are listed on Table 1.
Table 1. Science Fiction Fandoms worn.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Science Fiction Fandoms Worn</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Star Wars</em></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>60.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marvel</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>27.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Star Trek</em></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Firefly</em></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC Comics</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Attack on Titan</em></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Back to the Future</em></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Dr. Horrible’s Sing-Along Blog</em></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Neon Genesis Evangelion</em></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Pacific Rim</em></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Tomb Raider</em></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Venture Brothers</em></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* *indicates the title listed is a stand-alone film. ** indicates the title listed is an anime series.

Five participants (15.15%) wore fan dress related to DC Comics science fiction series such as the animated *Batman series* (6.06%, *N* = 2), which included *Batman Beyond*. Other DC fandoms worn were connected to the character Superman (3.03%, *N* = 1), the animated series *Justice League* (3.03%, *N* = 1) and *Young Justice* (3.03%, *N* = 1), and Starman (3.03%, *N* = 1). Dress worn was also related to a mix of science fiction or fantasy television or film series surrounding DC universe characters, such as the recently released film *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* (Coller et al., & Snyder, 2016) (3.03%, *N* = 1) and *Wonder Woman* (6.06%, *N* = 2). The total numeric value and percentage of participants who wore DC Comics fandoms are listed on Table 1. The total number of DC science fiction and mix of science fiction and fantasy
fandoms worn are combined on Figure 5 and Table 1, since the majority of them were classified by IMDb.com (1990-2016a) as science fiction.

Most commonly worn fantasy series included the anime series *Harry Potter* (30.30%, \( N = 10 \)), *Sailor Moon* (15.15%, \( N = 5 \)), and the film series *The Lord of the Rings* (12.12%, \( N = 4 \)). Another commonly worn fantasy fandom included Disney films, which were primarily Disney princess films (19.18%, \( N = 6 \)), and *The Nightmare before Christmas* (Burton et al., & Selick, 1993) (9.09%, \( N = 3 \)). The number of participants wearing these fandoms are shown in Figure 5. The numeric value and percentage of participants who wore these fandoms, as well as other fantasy fandoms, are listed on Table 2.

Table 2. Fantasy Fandoms worn.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fantasy Series Fandoms Worn</th>
<th>( N )</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Fantasy Series Fandoms Worn</th>
<th>( N )</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Harry Potter</em></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td><em>The Chronicles of Narnia</em></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Sailor Moon</em></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15.15</td>
<td><em>Dracula</em></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disney films</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19.18</td>
<td><em>D.N.Angel</em></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Lord of the Rings</em></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12.12</td>
<td><em>Final Fantasy</em></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Game of Thrones</em></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9.09</td>
<td><em>Idolmaster</em></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Twilight</em></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.06</td>
<td><em>Inuyasha</em></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>My Neighbor Tortoro</em>**</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.06</td>
<td><em>Modika Magika</em></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Adventure Time</em></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td><em>My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic</em></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Amnesia</em>**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td><em>Spirited Away</em>**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Anastasia</em></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td><em>The Vampire Diaries</em></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Buffy the Vampire Slayer</em></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* * indicates the title listed is a stand-alone film ** indicates the title listed is an anime series. ***indicates the title is a stand-alone anime film.
The most commonly worn fandoms are followed by the fantasy series *Twilight* and the television series *Game of Thrones*, as well as dress connected to the stand-alone fantasy anime film *My Neighbor Totoro* (Dempsey, Hara, Lott, Tanaka, Tokuma, & Miyazaki, 1998). Other fandoms worn by only one participant included the anime series: (a) *Amnesia, Inuyasha, Modika Magika, D. N. Angel*, and *Idolmaster*; (b) the stand-alone anime film *Spirited Away* (Aihara, H., Ernst, et al., & Miyazaki, 2001); (c) the stand-alone fantasy films *Dracula* (Apted, et al., & Coppola, 1992) and *Anastasia* (Bluth & Goldman, 1997); (d) the film series *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *Final Fantasy films*; and (e) the television series: *The Vampire Diaries, My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic, Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and *Adventure Time*.

The most commonly worn mix of science fiction and fantasy fandoms were *Doctor Who* (36.36%, $N = 12$) and *Sherlock* (15.15%, $N = 5$). The number of participants who wore these fandoms are shown on Figure 5. The numeric value and percentage of these, as well as other mix of science fiction and fantasy fandoms are listed on Table 3. Other mix of science fiction and fantasy fandoms included the anime series *Dragon Ball Z* (6.06%, $N = 2$), the television and film series *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (TMNT) (6.06%, $N = 2$), the film series *The Hunger Games* (6.06%, $N = 2$), *Underworld* (3.03%, $N = 1$), and the television series *Supernatural* (3.03%, $N = 1$).

With the exception of one participant, Taylor, who only wore *Star Wars* fan dress, most participants wore items of dress that were representative of more than one fandom. Five participants (Anna, Georgia, Irene, Paige, Regan) primarily wore one science fiction or fantasy fandom, which was *Star Wars* in all cases, likely due in part to the timely release of the film *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (Abrams, McGatlin, Harper, Burk, & Kennedy, 2015) just prior to the
Table 3. Mix of Science Fiction and Fantasy Fandoms Worn.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mix Fandoms Worn</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doctor Who</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>36.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sherlock</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dragon Ball Z</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Hunger Games</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supernatural</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underworld</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* * indicates the title listed is a stand-alone film ** indicates the title listed is an anime series. ***indicates the title is a stand-alone anime film.

collection of data for this research. Georgia stated that in addition to Star Wars fan dress, she wore many other fan dress items connected to literary fandoms, such as Edgar Allen Poe.

Likewise, several participants mentioned wearing fan dress related to other genres such as comedy. For example, Piper described a t-shirt she had of the comedy television series Parks and Recreation. Excluding fandoms worn from unrelated genres, the total number of science fiction and fantasy fandoms worn equaled 132, contributing to an average of 4 fandoms worn per participant. Seventeen participants (21.21%) reported wearing as few as one to three science fiction and fantasy fandoms, while 15 participants (45.45%) wore from four to seven fandoms. One participant reported wearing dress connected to as many as 10 science fiction and fantasy fandoms.

**Fan dress categories.** The question “How does your clothing/accessories show what kind of fan you are? Why?” was initially designed to explore how the participants’ fan dress reflects the intensity of their fandom (hardcore vs. casual fan), but responses often included a general description of fan items worn by the participant. This data was used to present the types of fan dress categories participants wore. In addition to using the responses to this specific question, the
transcripts were examined for any other references to dress items in order to provide a more accurate picture of the fan dress categories worn and the number of participants that wore dress items within each category.

A plethora of fan items were mentioned during the interviews. As shown on Table 4, the dress items fell within four broad categories of clothing, outfits and ensembles, accessories, and body modifications. As indicated on Table 4, all but one participant (96.96%, N = 32) wore fan dress items that were considered to be a clothing item. Thirteen participants (39.39%) reported wearing complete series or character-themed outfits or ensembles. The majority of participants (93.93%, N = 31) reported wearing fan-related accessories. Twelve participants (36.36%) reported they had body modifications.

Table 4. Fan Dress by Category.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clothing</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>96.96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outfits/Ensembles</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>39.39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessories</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>93.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body Modifications</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>36.36%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Clothing items included: (a) t-shirts and other tops such as tank tops blouses, and sweaters; (b) outerwear such as fashion and active jackets and hooded sweatshirts; (c) leggings, yoga and sweatpants; (d) pajamas, corsets, aprons; and (e) outfits and ensembles. The number of participants who reported wearing each type of clothing item is shown on Figure 6. The most frequently mentioned clothing item included the t-shirt (69.69%, N = 23), followed by dresses (48.48%, N = 16), tops other than t-shirts (24.24%, N = 8), outerwear (24.24%, N = 8), sweaters (21.21%, N =7), leggings (18. 18%, N = 6), skirts (12. 12%, N = 4), yoga/sweatpants (6.06%, N =2), swimsuits (6.06%, N =2), pajamas (6.06%, N =2), aprons (6.06%, N =2), and corsets
Nearly half of participants mentioned (45.45%, \(N = 15\)) they wore themed outfits and ensembles based on a series or characters. Two out of 15 participants (13.33%) mentioned wearing an ensemble that featured items that directly referred to a character or series. Most other participants that mentioned putting together complete ensembles explained that their outfits referred to the series or characters through design using a particular dress category such as an accessory, or particular clothing items in colors that were representative of a series or character.

![Figure 6](image.png)

**Figure 6.** Number of participants per type of clothing.

As shown on Figure 7, dress items in the “Accessories” category included jewelry such as necklaces, bracelets, watches, rings, and earrings, scarves, hats, shoes, socks, handbags and handbags with graphic pins attached, hair accessories, and keychains. Over half of the participants (66.66%, \(N = 22\)) reported wearing various forms of jewelry, while 18.18% (\(N = 6\)) wore hats, 15.15% (\(N = 5\)) of participants wore hair accessories and scarves, 12.12% (\(N = 4\))
wore socks and carried handbags, 9.09% \((N = 3)\) wore fan-related shoes, and 6.06% \((N = 2)\) carried handbags with graphic pins attached and keychains.

![Figure 7. Number of participants per forms of accessories.]

Body modifications included makeup and nail products that were either marketed as a fan product or applied in a way that referenced a character or series. These types of body modifications were worn by three participants (9.90%). Seven participants (21.21%) either styled or colored their hair in a way that referenced a character or series. Although six participants (18.18%) mentioned having tattoos, only four of them (12.12%) reporting having tattoos relating to science fiction, fantasy, or mix of science fiction or fantasy television or film series or stand-alone films.

**Classification of fan dress worn.** While the *Taxonomy of Fan Dress* (Figure 39) will be discussed in detail later in this dissertation as part of one of the emerging themes of this research, identifying the forms of fan dress worn by participants is essential for providing context to this
research. By examining thick descriptions of fan dress items provided by the participants, fan dress items were classified according to this taxonomy. Analysis of the data revealed that participants wore both IFD and CFD. All 33 participants wore IFD, but few wore only IFD. The majority of participants (66.66%, $N = 22$) wore both CFD and IFD, while 11 (33.33%) wore mostly IFD.

Analysis of the data also revealed that there were multiple types of IFD. Like CFD, direct IFD contained direct references to a form of media through text or imagery, but the reference was less visible or recognizable to non-fans. Indirect IFD did not contain direct references to a source of media through text or imagery, but through design. These classifications will be explained in depth later in this chapter. As shown on Figure 8, the majority of the participants (72.72%, $N = 24$) wore both direct and indirect forms of IFD. Some participants (21.21%, $N = 7$) wore only direct forms of IFD (direct IFD), while the smallest portion of participants (6.06%, $N = 2$) wore only indirect forms of IFD (indirect IFD). Descriptive statistics regarding specific CFD and direct and indirect IFD items will be provided in the following section. Data appearing in Figure 8 were classified as either CFD or IFD only when specifically categorized as such by the participants. Participants classified 271 fan dress items and did not classify 52 dress items.

![Figure 8. Number of participants per fan dress classifications. Columns concerning only forms of IFD are colored in blue.](image)
Emergent Themes

The 430 pages of single spaced text with double spaces in between the interview questions and respondents’ answers were analyzed using constant comparison as detailed by Creswell (2007), and utilized by Reddy-Best and Pedersen (2015), which included three stages of coding: open, axial, and selective coding. Open coding was executed by examining data and grouping it into similar themes or categories (Reddy-Best & Pedersen, 2015; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). For axial coding, themes and categories identified during open coding were compared, connected, and collapsed into larger categories. During selective coding, larger themes emerged out of the many categories that resulted from open coding (Reddy-Best & Pedersen, 2015; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). These themes were compared to concepts found within a pre-existing theoretical framework.

Additionally, the practice of memoing was performed. This is the writing of analytic memos and described as “the transitional phase from coding to the more formal write-up of the study” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 41). This practices aided the researcher in organizing the codes and integrating them into the final manuscript (Saldaña, 2009).

The interview text was triangulated with photographs provided by the participants “to shed light on a theme or perspective” (Creswell, 2007, p. 208), as well as to add credibility to the research. The 658 total photographs were analyzed by applying the same initial codes to the visual material that was applied to the interview text. For instance, the code “obscure references” was applied to Briar’s statement:

For me, it's a kind of Shibboleth, or a nonverbal way of seeing if anyone else is also in that fandom. Especially more subtle displays, like . . . a shirt with the Tree of Gondor, which only other fans would know off the bat, and would probably confuse non-fans.
The same code was also applied to the photograph (see Figure 9) of the Tree of Gondor shirt that she provided. Four themes emerged from the data set and include: types of fan dress, personal motivations, social motivations, and impression management.

Figure 9. Tree of Gondor t-shirt (folded) was coded under “obscure references.” Photograph courtesy of participant, Briar.

**Types of Fan Dress**

As previously mentioned, the data revealed that participants wore a range of conspicuous and inconspicuous fan dress. Additionally, both direct and indirect forms of inconspicuous fan dress were worn. After the analysis, it became clear that the definition of both inconspicuous fan dress (IFD) and conspicuous fan dress (CFD) must be further developed to address not only the visibility of the reference to a source of media (conspicuousness), but the nature of the reference itself (i.e., direct or indirect). A visual representation of the relationship between the nature of the reference itself (i.e., direct or indirect) and the visibility of the reference to a source of media (conspicuousness or inconspicuous) is shown on Figure 10. The figure also contains examples of CFD, direct IFD, and indirect IFD discussed in detail later in this section.

**CFD.** Prior to this study, the relationship between the direct reference to a source of media and conspicuousness was not clear. It was revealed that participants perceived their fan dress items to be conspicuous when it contained imagery or text that directly referred to a film,
television series, or film series and was easily seen or noticed. Therefore, CFD would not include dress that has a “direct tie through imagery . . . or text” (Shipley, 2010, p. 21), but it would exclusively contain dress that includes this direct reference. Two characteristics play an important role in distinguishing the item as CFD or IFD. The first is the size of the graphic, and the second is the ability of nonfans to recognize the image. The ability of nonfans to recognize the image depends on the content of the graphic, such as a logo, symbol, figure, and character that is widely known, and the visibility or recognize-ability of the fandom. For example, Emma, who favored overt displays of fandom outside of work, explained that “adding a particular recognizable symbol” to a fan dress ensemble enabled “others that aren't huge fans” to understand the reference. Alice explained that her anime tank tops are “usually pretty obvious”
because “they display the main character or an important character largely on the front.” These main and important characters were likely more generally recognizable figures than other characters. Main logos tended to be more conspicuous than secondary logos from the same source. Irene explained that she did not like “many standard shirts or logo merch,” but instead preferred “something only other fans would ‘get.’” Among the dress items that she described were Pacific Rim (Del Toro, et al., & Neill, 2013) tank tops that have the “logos of two of the big fighting robot teams on them, not the logo of the movie.”

The visibility of the fandom within popular culture was a very important factor in contributing to a dress item’s conspicuousness. Briar explained that her “schematic Star Wars shirts, and ‘Trust me, I'm a superhero’” graphic t-shirts were instantly recognizable. Star Wars and Marvel film series are enjoyed by those who may not consider themselves science fiction and fantasy fans. Beth explained that she has recently enjoyed “participating in the pop-culture/shared culture of fantasy movies and shows,” such as the Marvel films, because they are series that she can enjoy watching with her husband, whom she referred to as “a more ‘mainstream’ geek.”

Highly visible and recognizable fandoms often include those that revolve around popular superheroes. When describing her fan items, Courtney stated:

I don't have much subtle or easily hidden things. For generally recognizable items, I have a hand knitted Wonder Woman sweater and a Batgirl logo t-shirt. I have a magnetic necklace I can change the pendant on (for any pendant that is magnetized) which I have Wonder Woman, Batman, Batgirl, Starman (see Figure 11).

Fandoms considered to be obscure or unrecognizable by non-fans were connected to series that were not widely popular among mainstream television viewers. This was particularly true of anime series. Paige stated that her “anime stuff” was not as noticeable or obvious as her
accessories from more popular series. Alice explained, “Some of the series [anime] I'm a fan of has not come over to America yet, so a lot of the accessories I wear for those are overlooked.”

Figure 11. Knitted Wonder Woman sweater that she described as “generally recognizable.” Photograph courtesy of participant, Courtney.

**IFD.** Initially inconspicuous fan dress was defined as fan dress that contains imagery that is less visible, more covert, or not instantly recognizable by individuals who are not part of the fan culture to which the image or text belongs. IFD was thought to include dress items themselves that are “not very easy to see or notice” due to their small size such as a ring, or the fact that they are mostly hidden from view, such as a wallet and combinations of garments or costume elements that may appear to be contemporary fashion. This initial definition merely implied a fan dress item could reference a source of media either directly or indirectly. However, it was discovered that IFD may either directly reference a source of media through imagery or text or indirectly reference the source through design, which include the shape, color, or simply the name of the item. Indirect references will be further explained in the following section.

**Direct IFD.** Direct IFD dress items are those that directly refer to a source of media through imagery or text, but are “not very easy to see or notice” to nonfans. As predicted, these
include small items such as small jewelry, garments or accessories containing small prints, and merchandise that contains slogans or “memes” (Poore, 2014) that are familiar only to fellow fans. However, the participants indicated that direct IFD includes references that are obscured by size or “inside jokes” (Hannah) in the form of a slogan or meme. References were also obscure if they were made up of artistic images or secondary logos, or contained references to multiple sources within one design (mashups), or contained references to obscure fandoms. Direct IFD also includes conspicuous dress items that can be “masked,” in addition to hidden, items that can pass as fashionable dress items, which, in addition to small print, can include items with large, but busy prints. Direct IFD also includes body modifications that contain direct imagery such as tattoos and fingernail art. Examples of direct IFD fan items are provided in Figure 12. These include Hillary’s Ravenclaw House earrings [Harry Potter] that are small in size, Piper’s Firefly t-shirt with a meme, and Valerie’s t-shirt and dress with obscure Star Wars imagery.

Figure 12. Examples of direct IFD. Photographs courtesy of participants Hillary (far left), Piper (second to the left), and Valerie (second to the right and far right).

i. Jewelry. As previously illustrated, over half of the participants (69.69%, N =23) reported wearing forms of fan jewelry. The participants made a total of 80 statements concerning jewelry. Sixteen participants supplied a total of 47 photographs of jewelry. Of the 80 statements, 32 were general statements where the participant mentioned jewelry, but did not describe it.
The data revealed that in general, jewelry and accessories were perceived by participants as being less conspicuous than fan dress items in other categories. However, four participants’ thick descriptions of specific pieces of jewelry revealed that accessories, in particular jewelry is inconspicuous if it is small in size. For example, Emma explained, “I don't really go all out during the week at work. Maybe a small item or two . . . Small items being a necklace or a pair of earrings or a scarf.” Some styles of jewelry are inherently smaller in size, and these were described as being less noticeable than other styles of jewelry. For instance, Kaylee stated, “I first go for jewelry, usually subtle and small to portray my geekdom (stud earrings, necklaces, etc.). Nothing too big or gaudy. Again, going for the more subtle nod to geekdom rather than full-on loud prints, big colourful pendants, etc.” (See Figure 13). Hillary also illustrated the relationship between style, size, and subtlety when she explained that she had a “tiny pair of arc reactor stud earrings” representative of the character Iron Man, which she liked to wear to work because of their small size and compared them to a “pair of Jason mask earrings that are more noticeable.”

Figure 13. Star Wars Imperial stud earrings. Photograph courtesy of participant, Kaylee.

As indicated by two participants, even when the jewelry directly referenced a television or film series or stand-alone film through the use of a recognizable motif or symbol such as a main logo, as long as it was small in size, it was viewed as a subtle reference to fandom. Nicole
stated that she wears “lightsabers or little logos or just small things that draw people’s attention, but not so much as it like smacks people in the face, like, “Hey, I’m a fan!.” Kaylee explained that her small logo jewelry (i.e., “Star Trek gold dangle Starfleet earrings”) was “small, more demure in nature, but very obvious to anyone who knows Star Trek.”

Three other participants described main logo jewelry as subtle without mentioning the size of the pieces, but analyses of the photographs provided support for the claim that jewelry with main logos, symbols, or slogans is also subtle if it is constructed using fashionable materials (see Figure 14). Taylor explained that she loved wearing her Alex and Ani’s Star Wars gold and silver bangle bracelets with pendants bearing the recognizable farewell “May The Force Be With You” because they “are subtle and pass off as regular jewelry.” Briar described her antiqued silver or bronze “Tardis earrings” as “more subtle displays,” even though the phone booth symbol seems to be accepted as a very direct reference to the television series Doctor Who. Valerie explained that the material of her bracelet obscured the reference to her fandoms, making it recognizable only to other fans, “Pandora-style charm bracelet, with a bunch of charms ranging from Star Wars, Star Trek, Marvel, Twilight . . . it's silver, so no one really knows it's ‘fangirl’
stuff, unless they're ‘in the know.’” Likewise, Irene stated that she liked her “necklace shaped like the stargate” because “it's subtle and fun.” Jewelry bearing secondary logos or motifs were also viewed as subtle because it often only attracted the attention of other fans. This was indicated by Georgia who explained that she tended “to choose [to wear] things that aren't immediately recognizable to everyone,” which included the Star Wars rebel alliance logo, and reported that she often wears a pair of dangle earring bearing this logo to work because of their subtlety.

ii. Obscure references. Perhaps the most surprising set of results from this research concerns garments with direct, but obscure references to media. Garments with obscure visual images include those featuring (a) text only, (b) secondary logos, (c) very specific references to a film or film or television series, (d) relatively unusual styles of artistic execution, and (e) references to multiple sources, which are referred to as mashups. Sixteen participants made a total of 45 statements concerning clothing items with obscure references and seven participants supplied a total of 101 photographs of garments containing obscure references.

Obscure references were often found on graphic items, particularly graphic t-shirts that either contained text only or contained visual imagery that did not contain obvious, overt, or conspicuous references to fandom. Excluding mashups, fifteen participants made a total of 35 statements concerning clothing items with obscure graphics or text only, and six participants supplied a total of 45 photographs of garments containing obscure graphics or text only. Six participants described t-shirts with text only such as slogans or “memes” (Poore, 2014) and perceived them to be inconspicuous. Gale explained that the references of her t-shirts were rarely recognized in-person, and would receive some recognition when posting photographs online.
When describing her text-only shirt with the words, “I AM SHER LOCKED,” she stated, “Sometimes I get comments on my *Sherlock* shirt” (see Figure 15). Three participants indicated that textual references are usually only understood by other fans. Alice illustrated this when she explained that her shirts that have imagery are more recognizable than those that feature only a quote from the show. She explained her experiences encountering references to fandoms in which she is not a part:

> I see a lot of *Supernatural* or *Dr. Who* clothes that leave me wondering "What does that mean?" or "What’s the significance of that?" but I am not a part of the fandom so that’s probably why I don’t understand. So the obviousness of some of them may just be more tailor made to certain people who have an "in" in the fandoms themselves.

Two participants preferred to wear garments with text only or obscure imagery because they were subtle and allowed them to reserve sharing their fandom with fellow fans. Irene stated that her text only "Property of Hogwarts Phys Ed" and Naruto ninja school shirts were among the dress items that “only other fans would ‘get.’” Lacey explained that her “graphic tanks with nerdy sayings . . . are obvious to super fans, but not to the normal person.” These include her

![Figure 15. Fan dress garments featuring only textual references. Fan items featuring text-only references, such as Gale’s *Sherlock* t-shirt (left) and Lacey’s *Doctor Who* graphic tank top (right), are considered inconspicuous because they are usually recognized and understood by only fans. Photographs courtesy of participants, Gale (left) and Lacey (right).](image-url)
“Don't Blink” graphic tank (see Figure 15), which references a meme from Doctor Who and a sweatshirt with the Harry Potter meme “mischief managed.” In addition to these memes, the fashionable cursive font and fashionable colors of the garments themselves obscure these references by making the items appear to be fashionable dress items.

Graphic garments such as t-shirts, tank tops, and leggings were perceived by participants as inconspicuous when they featured imagery that contained secondary logos, or very specific references within a film or television or film series. Seven participants categorized garments with these types of obscure references as subtle. Examples of graphic tees with secondary logos include Cagen’s Gryffindor tee from Harry Potter that contains the house crest with a shield and a rampant lion, and Courtney’s Firefly shirt, which contains “just the Blue Sun logo,” as well as her Venture Brothers shirt that contains the “Venture Logo which is just a large 'V’” (see Figure 16). Courtney stated that she likes “shirts with a bit more obscure references on them” and explained “When I wear a Venture Brothers shirt, that is me displaying my fandom, and it's up to the people around me to recognize it and let me know they're fans as well and make a connection.”

Figure 16. Graphic garments with secondary logos. Courtney’s Firefly and Venture Brothers shirts contain obscure references that only other fans may recognize. Photographs courtesy of participant, Courtney.
In addition to shirts with secondary logos, Courtney mentioned other shirts with obscure references that referred to something very specific to the television series. For example, she explained, “I have a Doctor Who shirt that's an advertisement for Sonic Screwdrivers.” Five other participants described their graphic garments as having imagery that was specific to a film or film or television series. Hillary described her Harry Potter t-shirt that “showed each of the horcruxes created by Voldemort in a pattern with the title Horcrux Hunter [Harry Potter] across the top” as not an “overly blatant design, possibly because individuals unfamiliar with may not understand the t-shirt’s specific reference to an element of the story. During her interview, Lynn provided a link to a photograph and stated, “This shirt isn't obviously geeky.” The photograph contained an image of her wearing a fitted scoop neck t-shirt that contained no text, but only three small ships from Star Wars on the right shoulder, which she hand-painted with fabric markers (see Figure 17).

Figure 17. Fan dress items with specific references. These items contain references specific to a television or film series. Lynn’s fitted scoop neck t-shirt that contains only a small hand-painted graphic that is specific to the Star Wars film series (left), while Natalie’s leggings refer to a scene specific to the anime television series Dragon Ball Z. Photographs courtesy of participants, Lynn (left) and Natalie (right).
Natalie described a pair of *Dragon Ball Z* leggings that refer to a specific scene, which she designed herself and was produced by Redbubble.com (Redbubble, n.d.) (see Figure 17):

I love these because I designed them. It’s from the scene in *Dragon Ball Z* where Piccolo is watching over Gohan, making sure he's safe without him knowing. Most people wouldn't know that, as Gohan is down in the corner eating an apple that piccolo gave to him without his knowledge. It was a funny and touching scene. Even though few people recognize that's what it's from, I love them anyway.

Five participants indicated that t-shirts and graphic garments were subtle if they contained imagery in which characters, symbols, or motifs drawn differently than highly visible presentations. Two participants explained that they preferred wearing shirts that were “more artsy than movie-postery” (Denise) and “something inspired by the book, movie or TV show . . . instead of a shirt that has a picture of the movie cast on it” (Irene). These obscure references were more valuable than more overt references. Other participants’ descriptions revealed that “artsy” or “inspired” imagery tended to be more obscure. For instance, Courtney described her *Star Wars* shirt with “Roy Lichtenstein inspired pop art” as one of her shirts with an obscure reference. Briar explained that when she wears her “Doctor Hoo” shirt, which is a fan art image that shows eleven of the twelve doctors drawn as owls, “most people just see cute owls” (see Figure 18). Piper described her Sherlock denim jacket as “subtle” partly because of the “Starry Night inspired fan art” image embroidered to the back of it. She explained, “Unless you know the series it's not recognizable as a Sherlock piece” (see Figure 18).

Briar also described her *Veronica Mars* t-shirt as subtle because *Veronica Mars* is “not a hugely vocal fandom anymore.” As illustrated earlier in this discussion, dress items containing text and imagery relating to fandoms that are highly visible in popular culture are perceived as more conspicuous than dress items that refer to more obscure or less well-known fandoms.
However, analysis of the photograph revealed that its subtlety also stemmed from the design of its reference, which contained text that reads “I'm a marshmallow” amongst traditional holiday sweater geometric designs mixed with images of small cameras and pyramids (see Figure 18).

Figure 18. Obscure visual references featured on fan dress items. Briar’s t-shirt featuring this “Doctor Hoo” graphic (top) and Piper’s denim jacket featuring “Starry Night inspired fan art” (bottom) are recognizable as fan pieces only by those who “know the series.” Briar’s Veronica Mars t-shirt refers to a less visible, more obscure fandom. Photographs courtesy of participants, Briar (top and bottom right) and Natalie (bottom). Top image retrieved from DeviantArt.com (2016).

Two participants described t-shirts featuring a silhouette of a character’s body or face. Cagen described the image of her Elsa shirt from Frozen (Del Vecho, Lasseter, Scribner & Buck & Lee, 2013) as an “ombre silhouette of Elsa's profile” and stated, “Some people don't recognize the image. Kids especially don't. I like how it's not obvious.” Likewise, Piper described her “most recent Sailor Moon” shirt as “subtle because it's just her silhouette and so you won't know its SM [Sailor Moon] unless you recognize what she looks like.”

**iii. Mashups.** The term “mash-up” refers to fan dress items that contain imagery or text that combines two fandoms, such as that of Star Wars and Leone’s 1966 film The Good, The
Bad, and the Ugly (DeRosa, 2013). Seven participants made a total of 13 statements concerning clothing items, particularly t-shirts and tank tops, that can be classified as mashups, and four participants supplied a total of 56 photographs of these mashups. Seven participants described shirts that can be classified as mash-ups in detail. For example, Hillary explained that mashups allowed her to express her fandom less overtly, “I also love cross-over fandom references [mashups]. When you get the gold nugget of having your two favorite characters from different fandoms meet each other in design, it's rather satisfying. It's basically like saying, ‘Hey, I'm Team Rey,’ without actively gushing to anyone who will listen about how much you like the character.” Examples of items classified as mashups include Regan’s “BB-8 t-shirt where BB-8 is being chewed on by Stich from Lelo [sic] and Stitch” and Briar’s Doctor Who Tardis and Disney princess mash-ups by artist Karen Hallion that feature Disney Princesses such as Belle and Jasmine entering the Tardis [Doctor Who] (see Figure 19).

As the research indicated, mash-ups could also refer to one fandom and any other well-known object, activity, or product. For example, Briar explained that she had a t-shirt with an image of a “Middle-Earth subway map” that combined the map from The Lord of the Rings with that of a subway system. The double reference obscures the image. Karen explained that her “The Dark Knit” t-shirt allows her to express her “love for Batman and Knitting at the same time” and that “People are initially confused when they see the shirt, but eventually get it.” Hillary shared several photographs of shirts where her “fandom is turned into a beer label” rendering the reference as not instantly recognizable (see Figure 19). Another example is Gale’s raglan t-shirt that combines the image of Rosie the Riveter with the character of Leia from Star Wars (see Figure 19).
iv. Geek fashion. Fan dress items that have a direct reference to a television or film series or film that can pass as fashionable dress items, such as jackets, sweaters, dresses, and skirts from retailers such as Her Universe or Hot Topic, were perceived as subtle and inconspicuous and acceptable to wear to work by several participants. As Taylor explained, “Subtle attire is the best attire, especially for the workplace. Sometimes I have to be careful with what I’m wearing, but my workplace is lenient, so I wear as many Star Wars items as possible.
that can pass as ordinary items.” Likewise, Emma would determine what fan items were acceptable to wear to work based on the size of the print. IFD that looked like fashionable dress items also included altered garments or handmade garments with small inconspicuous print, or prints that were so busy that the references were not recognizable until it was viewed close-up. This type of fan dress was most often referred to as geek fashion by participants (Kaylee, Miriah, Lynn, Denise, Taylor, & Anna), but was also referred to as geek clothing and fandom fashion (Irene). Thirteen participants made 41 statements about geek fashion and 8 participants supplied 73 photographs of what could be classified as geek fashion.

Jackets, sweaters, and dresses from Her Universe featuring small or simple logos, symbols, and motifs were perceived as inconspicuous. Three participants noted that their pieces’ subtle references were recognizable to fans only. For example, Kaylee described her “Her Universe Darth Vader jacket” in this way:

This is one of my favorite pieces out there in the world of geek fashion with its subtle tones, understated, but well-crafted design to mimic Vader’s suit. Not to mention it is the epitome of stealth geek. For those who know what it is, the Vader design can be clearly seen. But for those not in the know of the culture icon, it simply looks like a stylish leather jacket (see Figure 20).

Figure 20. Geek fashion. Fan dress items featuring a simple symbol logo that could “pass” as every day fashion. Kaylee’s “Her Universe Darth Vader jacket” that is only obvious to those who recognize the symbol as the Star Wars Imperial logo (left) and her “Her Universe Imperial Cardigan.” Photograph courtesy of participant, Kaylee.
She described her “Her Universe Imperial Cardigan” in a similar way, “It’s subtle in its geekery where it looks like a fairly normal cardigan. But to those who know Star Wars, they will recognize it as a piece based off Grand Moff Tarkin’s imperial uniform, complete with matching coloured rankings” (see Figure 20). Likewise, Regan described her “Her Universe X-wing cardigan” as something that “someone who is fan of the movie would recognize” and explained that “if you'd never seen it [Star Wars] before you'd assume I was randomly wearing a tiny spaceship on my shoulder.”

Geek fashion pieces featuring small logos or motifs not produced by Her Universe were also worn. One participant added an existing logo by adding a Star Wars X-wing patch to a pre-existing “military-esque jacket” to transform it into a "rebellion jacket" and noted that it was “still tailored enough that I can wear it with heels and jeans for a cute night out.”

Both commercial and handmade garments with small, subtle prints were described by five participants. These included primarily dresses, which were described by four participants (Anna, Beth, Taylor, Valerie), sweaters (Taylor) and long sleeve tops (Haley). Taylor mentioned having a “Darth Vader floral print dress” and a “Star Wars symbols sweater” by Her Universe that have “small and subtle prints.” Among the subtle dress items, Haley described was her long sleeve top with a print that incorporated Jack Skellington’s face from The Nightmare Before Christmas (Burton, et al., & Selick, 1993). Taylor and Valerie described and provided photographs of the Darth Vader dress from ThinkGeek.com (ThinkGeek, Inc., 1999-2016). When describing the photograph of the dress, Valerie stated, “If you zoom in you can see the crossed lightsabers in the design - one of those more subtle things” (See Figure 21). Karen explained that she wears her Doctor Who inconspicuous print dress on a regular basis, which “is
based on Van Gogh's interpretation of the Tardis from a Doctor Who episode” (see Figure 21). Beth described a handmade Spiderman dress that she constructed herself. She explained that the colors were “a little muted and people often don't notice exactly what it is until they're up close” (see Figure 21). The fact that the print is not instantly recognizable, makes it inconspicuous.

Figure 21. Dresses with inconspicuous prints. Valerie’s Darth Vader dress from ThinkGeek.com (ThinkGeek, Inc., 1999-2016), Karen’s Doctor Who Van Gogh print dress, and Beth’s Spiderman dress in muted colors feature patterns that are subtle enough to wear in settings outside conventions, such as the workplace. Photographs courtesy of participants, Valerie (left), Karen (middle), and Beth (right).

Four participants described dresses with busy or large prints that also required a second look. These could be classified as inconspicuous because it may not be instantly recognizable by non-fans. For example, Lynn stated, “I don't have too much subtle fan clothing. Most of mine is pretty loud,” but when describing her Batman print dress, which features a repeat of rather large figures of the superhero, she explained, “I once wore it to a dinner and it was only the 5 year old boy who noticed that there was Batman on it and pointed it out to his mom who thought I was just wearing a fun blue and black print.” Likewise, Piper and Briar described dresses from Hot Topic. Briar’s Tangled dress features a large print scene from the film involving the two main
characters. She explained, “I like because it looks cute far away, but can only be recognized as Disney close-up.”

Accessories containing small prints or relatively obscure graphics, such as scarves and hair bows were also perceived as inconspicuous. For example, Cagen mentioned that she loved wearing “hair bows with fan symbols on them.” She explained, “I wear the deathly hallows hair bow [Harry Potter] a lot. It's black and the gray hallows symbol is subtle, so it doesn't jump out to ppl [people].” She also felt that the print featured on her Doctor Who hair bow was not very obvious (see Figure 22). Jasmine explained that the sizable print of a skull and snake, the Death Eater tattoo, a secondary logo, on what she called her “Deathly Hallows scarf,” [the Harry Potter Death Eater scarf] was not very noticeable and that “to the naked eye it looks like a black scarf” (see Figure 22).

![Image](https://example.com/image.png)

Figure 22. Fan accessories with inconspicuous prints. Jasmine explained that the pattern on this Harry Potter scarf is not very noticeable. Although not indicated by the participant, the scarf may also be inconspicuous because it contains a secondary, rather than main logo of the series. Cagen felt that her hair bows with small print were inconspicuous. Photographs courtesy of participant, Jasmine (left) and Cagen (right).

Direct dress items, whether CFD or IFD, that could be easily hidden had been previously defined as IFD. For example, Nicole explained, “I wear earrings that they’re kinda hidden under your hair sometimes but every now and then they’ll pop up and surprise people.” However, the
analysis revealed that in addition to wearing items that could be easily hidden, participants wore items that were “masked” to make them appear less conspicuous in some situations. Three participants noted masking items by layering over them with outerwear. For example, Georgia stated, “I will occasionally wear a wonder woman t-shirt under a blazer to work.” Lynn explained that she layers her busy print Batman or Star Wars dresses with cardigans or lab coats to make them less distracting (see Figure 23).

Figure 23. CFD/IFD masked. Fan dress item styled to appear less conspicuous. Lynn’s busy print Batman dress worn layered with a cardigan to tone down the distinctive print. Photograph courtesy of participant, Lynn.

v. Body modifications. Body modifications with direct imagery, which included tattoos and Star Wars nail decals featuring silhouettes of characters and the Star Wars main logo, were mentioned by five participants. While four participants reported having fan-related tattoos, only one participant classified hers as IFD. Jasmine explained that her Harry Potter “tattoo of the
phrase ‘mischief managed’” on her inner forearm was among the “more subtle ways of expressing fandom” (See Figure 24). She explained, “My association with HP is deeply personal. So I am fine with knowing that the world isn't aware of my fandom, but I am willing to swap stories with fans.”

Figure 24. Body modifications with direct references. Taylor’s Star Wars nail decals (left) were among the body modifications that contained direct references to a film series. Jasmine explained that her “‘mischief managed’” tattoo (right) was one of the ways she subtly expresses her Harry Potter fandom. Photographs courtesy of participants, Taylor (left), and Jasmine (right).

**Indirect IFD.** Combinations of garments or costume elements that may appear to be contemporary fashion are indirect forms of IFD because they refer to a form of media through design or attributes rather than imagery or text. As expected, participants wore ensembles and elements that appeared to be contemporary fashion items. These include replica garments and accessories that faithfully mimic the design of those worn in the television show or film (these may be commercial or handmade, licensed or unlicensed) and “inspired” accessories, garment pieces, and ensembles, which are based on aspects of the film, series, or character, but does not accurately reproduce any specific dress item. “Inspired” is a term also used to indicate that a fan dress item’s relationship to a television or film series or stand-alone film is a *perceived* relationship based on the design or name of an item rather than an actual relationship. Paige explained the concept behind inspired fan items perfectly when she stated:
I have a fuzzy hat that's marketed as a “werewolf” hat, but a lot of the times I'll say it's my Ewok hat XD. Some people can see it, others can't. I suppose it really just depends on the fan, and how they see things, if they'll see everyday objects as fandom related or inspired.

In addition, body modifications, such as fragrance, hair color or style, and makeup were found to be forms of indirect IFD.

i. Replica garments and accessories. Replica garments and accessories were classified by participants as inconspicuous because the items were often only recognized as fan dress by other fans. Two participants mentioned wearing replica garments. Like some garments that were described as geek fashion, replica garments may pass as everyday fashion. This included Cagen’s replica of Bella’s prom dress from *Twilight* that she purchased from Torrid and Piper’s “*Dr. Horrible's Sing Along Blog* Penny hoodie,” a hoodie that she embroidered herself to make it appear “screen accurate.” Cagen explained that her “Bella dress” was “a garment with no logo that looks like a real dress that someone would buy off the rack.” Piper explained that her hoodie was among “a couple of cosplay pieces I have made for costumes” that she mixes into her “regular wardrobe,” and stated that “it doesn't look like a costume at all, but I know it's a fan piece” (see Figure 25).

![Figure 25. Replica garment. Piper’s “screen accurate” “*Dr. Horrible's Sing Along Blog* Penny hoodie” (left) that faithfully mimics the design of that worn by the character in the film (right) is an indirect and inconspicuous reference to the film. Photograph (left) courtesy of participant, Piper, and Photograph (right) retrieved from images.google.com (Google Images, n.d.).]
Replica jewelry and accessories were more commonly mentioned among the sample than replica garments. Twelve participants mentioned owning replica pieces, which included both commercial and handmade pieces. Three participants classified this type of accessory as IFD by indicating that replica jewelry is rarely recognized by non-fans or only recognized by other fans. Natalie often wears her “Daenerys Targaryen’s dragon egg necklace” and explained that “almost no one has been able to say ‘Oh, look, a dragon egg!’ Usually I get ‘Is that a pineapple?’ Ha-ha. I still wear it anyway” (See Figure 26). When describing her “necklace from Underworld,” Sarah explained:

I enjoyed the series, but it [the necklace] lends itself to a medieval look, but people who recognize it, ‘I recognize that! Did you like that show? Its great fun!’ You know? And to everybody else, it’s just a necklace that looks good with the outfit you are wearing.

Figure 26. Replica accessory. Natalie’s “Daenerys Targaryen’s dragon egg necklace” reference to the television series Game of Thrones is rarely recognized. Photograph courtesy of participant, Natalie.

**ii. Inspired garments, accessories, and ensembles.** While it was thought that the definition of IFD might extend to fashionable combinations of garments inspired by media characters, the results suggested that in addition to these full ensembles, the definition of IFD should be extended to “inspired” accessories and garment pieces as well. These types of dress
items were commonly classified by participants as indirect inconspicuous. Twenty-two participants made a total of 70 statements about inspired garments, accessories, and ensembles. Eighteen participants supplied a total of 155 photographs of inspired garments, accessories, and ensembles.

iii. Inspired accessories. Inspired accessories that could be classified as IFD were worn by 9 participants. These include Paige’s “angel wing necklace,” which she explained is a “nod to one of my favorite animes, D. N. Angel” and jewelry that reminded participants of their fandoms. For example, Gale explained, “Sometimes I’ll stack my earrings with moons and stars and a big dipper just for kicks and wear it with my moon and star necklace for a Sailor Moon flair.” Two participants noted wearing shoes inspired by favorite characters. Nicole wears boots that are similar to her favorite princess, Anastasia [Anastasia (Bluth & Goldman, 1997)] and Marie stated that her “knee high boots look very similar to about a half dozen of my favorite Marvel and DC super heroines.”

Four participants indicated that inspired accessories were inconspicuous fan dress items. For example, Lacey stated, “I have a few subtle accessories I like to wear: Lots of Union Jacks because I love so many British things. I have Doctor Who inspired necklaces {bow tie for the 11th Doctor, Rose ring for one of his companions, Rose, Allons-y bracelet for 10th doctor.” For Hillary, “Lord of the Rings type of accessories” were appealing “because they’re both beautiful and don't scream what it's from.” For Lynn, “Elven jewelry” was her “fallback” for when she wanted to be “subtly geeky.” Marie, who used jewelry to pull together inspired ensembles, explained that others will not recognize the character or series that she was referencing simply by looking at her jewelry. She explained:
I have jewelry that may not mean much to someone. But it's something I can grab because I'm wearing a certain character’s colours and that jewelry matches them or what they do. Like I have a set of arrow earrings I now wear whenever I wear a purple shirt, because it lets me embrace my love for Kate Bishop's Hawkeye.

**iv. Inspired garments.** Inspired garment pieces were worn by 10 participants. As Denise demonstrated, inspired pieces could be found anywhere and be contemporary fashion pieces and are those in which the wearer perceives a connection to a film or television or film series. She explained that the “regular outfit pieces” she buys remind her of her fandoms. She stated:

> It's kind of a fine line sometimes whether something is an addition to my regular clothes or my geeky clothes, and I don't always draw a distinction. One shirt I found in a cheap fashion store looks a lot like an alternate universe Star Trek uniform top.

Similarly, Kaylee explained that the “H&M Balmain collection dress . . . screamed Star Trek” to her (See Figure 27). Cagen noted buying a “white and black striped dress” that reminded her of *Beetlejuice* and all things Tim Burton.

![Figure 27. Inspired garment. Kaylee perceived a connection between this fashionable H&M dress and Star Trek. Photograph courtesy of participant, Kaylee.](image)
Three participants sewed their own inspired garments. Gale made “Hans solo trousers,” that were inspired by the design of those worn by the Star Wars character (see Figure 28), Karen sewed a plaid dress inspired by the Doctor Who companion Clara Oswald, and Miriah stated that she made a top inspired by “Khaleesi from Game of Thrones,” a romper inspired by the character Loki from the Avengers film series (see Figure 29) and Captain America, and a “Captain Phasma (Star Wars) inspired cape dress.”

Figure 28. Self-made inspired garment. The design of Gale’s Hans Solo-inspired trousers [Star Wars] was based on the character’s costume, but does not reproduce the specific dress item exactly. Photograph of Gale courtesy of participant. Photograph of Hans Solo and Chewbacca provided by the participant and retrieved from Puu’s Door of Time (2014, July 8).

Three participants indicated that inspired garment pieces were inconspicuous. When describing the pieces Miriah makes in general, she explained, “The things I hand make tend to be subtle and a little more obscure, so I can more easily blend in . . . .” Miriah indicated that there
were times that fellow fans would recognize her reference to fandom (see Figure 29). For example, she explained that some people recognize her Khaleesi top:

Well, my Khaleesi top that I made, it's similar to her costumes in the show, and when I wear it I always get at least one person coming up to me, telling me that I remind them of a character on one of their fav shows. It's always her.

However, she also explained that recognition depended on the way she styled the piece:

There are times when I wear my Khaleesi top with just black leggings, simple boots, and no jewelry. Other times I push the 'dragon queen' aspect and wear a necklace similar to hers on the show, a hammered cuff, and tall boots. It just depends on if I really want to be recognized for that fandom or not.

Kaylee explained that styling and designing outfits using inspired pieces were “a sort of "stealth geek" mode. Something that I could wear to the office that wouldn't raise the eyebrow of bosses, but if someone knew the show, they'd know what it was!” In addition to wearing pieces like the “H&M Balmain collection dress” that reminded her of Star Trek, Kaylee mentioned wearing a “tweed jacket a la the 11th Doctor” (Doctor Who). Some pieces’ references were so subtle that

Figure 29. Self-designed inspired garments. Miriah explained that her designs, such as her Khaleesi top and Loki-inspired romper “tend to be subtle and a little more obscure. Photographs courtesy of participant, Miriah.
only the fan was aware of it. Gale explained, “I did [sic] made a dress inspired by a character from *Sailor Moon*, but again, it's everyday wear, and I am the only person who knows that is the reference.”

**v. Inspired ensembles.** The evidence revealed that building ensembles based on characters was a common practice among science fiction and fantasy fans. Fourteen participants reported wearing combinations of garments and accessories inspired by a film, series, character or group of characters. Kaylee explained that when she loves “the design of a particular costume” she tries to translate it into “a real world outfit.” Her designs include her “Vogue Loki” (see Figure 30), which is an “evening gown based on Loki from *The Avengers*” (Alonso, et al. & Whedon, 2012) that she “styled it into a Vogue-esque editorial,” and her “everyday Rey” (See Figure 30). These types of ensembles were referred to by participants using a number of different terms, which include: every day cosplay, casual cosplay, closet cosplay, Disneybound, bounding/bound, and geekbound. Two participants used the term “every day cosplay.” Anna

![Figure 30. Inspired ensembles. Ensembles was based on the character’s costume, but does not reproduce the ensemble exactly. Photograph and illustration courtesy of participant, Kaylee.](image-url)
stated, “I also enjoy every day cosplay like this,” and provided an image of a Stormtrooper, “The Force Awakens-Inspired Everyday Cosplay,” which contained one model wearing a black and white top with black jeans, another model wearing white pants with black ballet flats, a two-toned black and white boot, and a tote bag bearing an image of a storm trooper helmet and text that read “First Order” (see Figure 31). Emma defined the term by stating:

Everyday cosplay or casual cosplay is wearing an outfit meant to be reminiscent of a character; but it’s made of everyday clothing that you already have and worn on a normal day rather than to a party or convention. It’s meant to represent the attire of a character.

Figure 31. Example of everyday cosplay. Anna stated that she puts together ensembles similar to this Stormtrooper “The Force Awakens-Inspired Everyday Cosplay.” Image courtesy of participant, Anna and retrieved from Fangirl Blog (2015, December 7).

Other terms that held the same meaning included “closet cosplay,” “Disneybounding,” “geekbound,” or “bound.” Briar reserved the use of the term “Disneybounding” to describe outfits or ensembles inspired by Disney characters. These included her “Belle Disneybound” (see Figure 32), which consisted of a yellow shirt with Beauty and the Beast (Ashman et al., 1991) glass dome rose necklace.
It should be noted that Briar’s Disneybounds consisted of jewelry that can be classified as direct inconspicuous. In a similar manner, one of Kaylee’s ensembles that she referred to as “stealth geek fashion” was inspired by the character Darth Vader, which consisted of a direct Star Wars logo t-shirt, her direct inconspicuous Vader jacket from Her Universe, black leggings, and knee-high black boots. In most other cases, participants described inspired outfits that were made up of pieces that lacked direct imagery.

Two participants also used the term Disneybound to describe their outfits inspired by non-Disney characters. Paige explained, “It’s similar to what people do with the ‘Disney Bound’ outfits, when its color coordinated and stylized to the character they're wanting to portray. I'll do similar at times with various fandoms.” Marie used the term to refer to an outfit inspired by science fiction Marvel comic book superhero, “This is my Disney-Bound cosplay of Kate Bishop’s dinner dress outfit.” When referring to outfits or ensembles inspired by non-Disney characters, Jeanie referred to them as a “bound look,” or “bounding look.” Jeanie defined bound
or bounding as “using basics or specific pieces purchased that evoke the same look, rather than
direct merchandising.” One participant used the term “geekbound” and defined it as “wearing
clothes similar to the costumes in the shows, without being a cosplay.”

Several participants did not use specific terms to describe their ensembles. Jen explained
that she “imagine[s] what a character might wear in today's time” and puts together outfits
accordingly. For example, she explained, “I had silver hair for a while and . . . . I'd wear reds to
channel my inner dog demon.” This referenced the anime character Inuyasha. Jen also explained,
“I also dyed my hair bright red and would wear clothing in representation of Ariel [Disney’s The
Little Mermaid (Ashman, Donley, Musker, & Clements. & Musker, 1989)].” Natalie explained
that she would wear “cargo pants and a black tank top” as an attempt to “channel” her “inner
Riddick” [The Chronicles of Riddick]. Farah explained that she designs her own ensembles based
on a character’s dress:

When a character resonates with me, I will look at their styles, and I design an outfit, or a
piece of jewelry that encompasses that character in some measure if the original is
something that doesn't mesh well with my body type.

Because participants’ terminology to describe combinations of garments and accessories based
on a character, film, or series was inconsistent, the term “inspired outfits and ensembles” will
continue to be used throughout the remainder of this paper.

Because participants were often the only person or among few people aware of the
character or series they were referencing, nine participants indicated that inspired ensembles
were inconspicuous. Irene stated that she wears “outfits that are inspired by characters . . . like a
green plaid skirt and a silver top when I'm feeling like a Slytherin librarian [Harry Potter].” Irene
explained that she wears inspired outfits more often than garments with direct references because
it allows her to “get all the same rewards” as wearing fan clothes with direct clothing. Four other participants noted that they were the only person or among few people aware of the character or series they were referencing. Paige explained that when she wears ensembles inspired by a character, “Even though others may not catch on, I know for myself who I am and it can just add an extra bit of fun to my day.” Likewise, Jeanie stated, “I can at times find ways to reflect these shows or looks evoked in them in my wardrobe, quite purposely, but to the outside world it’s just a different way to put together an outfit.” She explained that bound looks allow her to “have a direct connection to the character or look that I love and in turn reflect my personality and subtle support for those things.”

Only two participants indicated that their inspired ensembles are sometimes recognized by fellow fans. Miriah’s “dragon queen” styling of her Khaleesi top serves as one example. In addition, Dawn explained that her ensemble based on the character Mika Jougasaki from the anime series *Idolmaster: Cinderella Girls* “catches fellow fans attention” because “it can be such a striking outfit” (see Figure 33). However, she explained that because the outfit is based on an

![Figure 33. Mika Jougasaki-inspired ensemble. Dawn’s inspired outfit is is based on an obscure character and only receives recognition from other fans of the anime series *Idolmaster: Cinderella Girls*. Photograph courtesy of participant, Dawn. Image of Mika Jougasaki provided by participant and retrieved from Animecharactersdatabase.com (Goral Software, 2007-2016).](image-url)
obscure character of an obscure series and is “not an EXACT replica of the one the character wears,” it is not extremely successful at connecting her with fellow fans through recognition.

**vi. Hairstyles.** Body modifications indirectly related to a film or television or film series were reported by nine participants. Seven of these either styled or colored their hair in a way that referenced a specific character. Six participants referenced characters by styling their hair. For example, Alice explained that she finds it fun to wear “Sailor Moon's ridiculous hair” and is one of her “favorite hairstyles to play with.” Paige stated, “I'll put my hair up in Princess Leia buns.” Nicole explained that she bases her hairstyles upon that of Princess Anastasia ([Anastasia](Bluth & Goldman, 1997)], and Anna said that she wears her hair like Rey from [Star Wars: The Force Awakens](Abrams, McGatlin, Harper, Burk, & Kennedy, 2015). Jen mentioned that she dyed her hair to match that of characters. For the anime character Inuyasha, she had silver hair, and for the Disney Princess, Ariel ([The Little Mermaid](Ashman & Clements, 1989)], she dyed her hair bright red. Likewise, Hannah said, “I went as far as to cut, bleach, and train my hair for 7 months to look like Link from [Legend of Zelda](a video game character that is also the main character of an animated series with the same title].”

Only one participant directly indicated that hairstyle was an inconspicuous expression of fandom. When discussing subtle references to fandom through dress, Denise explained that the subtlety of her references vary based on the setting and stated:

Last year, I wore civilian clothes to work for a week because I was portraying a member of the media for an exercise. One day, I wore a Game of Thrones Targaryen necklace and wore my long black hair in a Dothraki-ish braid.

Denise explained that the wearing only the hairstyle and accessory allowed her to express her fandom in a subtle way that was acceptable for her military occupation.
vii. Make up and fragrance. Wearing makeup and fragrances was another way participants subtly expressed their fandom. For example Hannah stated, “I wear blush directly under my eyes to mimic the blushy look anime girls have” and later explained, “My makeup is very subtle and would only be noticed if I mentioned it.” Likewise, Jen stated:

I think some of us get stuck in situations where we have 9-5 and aren't able to express our fandoms on a daily basis so we find times, like movies or parties to pull out the clothing. I find alternatives [sic] outlets, like makeup or styling of everyday clothing to break that mentality.

She explained that because she worked at a bank, she could not dress in full costume during “spirit week around Halloween,” so she “dressed like Michelangelo [a character from Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles]” by wearing orange lipstick. In these two cases, participants applied cosmetics create a connection to a television or film series, or film.

Similarly, two participants mentioned wearing cosmetics that had an established connection to the source of media. This includes what can be described as replica cosmetics and cosmetics and fragrances that were marketed as fan items. Briar mentioned wearing the same exact lipstick brand and shade as the character Agent Carter [replica cosmetic], and Valerie explained that she currently wears the new Star Wars Cover Girl cosmetics line, and wore the Twilight body gel glitter when the series was popular. Valerie indicated that besides its established connection to fandom, these body modifications were still a subtle way of expressing fandom. When she mentioned the Star Wars Covergirl line, Valerie exclaimed, “Talk about being subtle and can wear it anywhere!!!” Valerie was the only participant who mentioned wearing a fragrance, “I also bought a perfume at Bath and Body Works called "Forever Red," because it’s the same title as the new Black Widow novel.” In this case, the product was not
marketed as a Marvel product. The participant chose to wear the item because she perceived there was a connection between its name and her fandom for the Marvel character.

These body modifications may have a direct relationship to a form of media through marketing, but lack a direct visible references to fandom when worn. Therefore, makeup and fragrance may be the most inconspicuous way to show fandom. As Valerie explained, “Makeup or fragrance I would wear anywhere, anytime, because no one would notice its connection to fandom anyway.”

**Motivations**

Motivations for CFD and IFD were difficult to separate. It was clear that participants’ admiration for the film or television series led them to wear a range of fan dress classifications. IFD was often perceived as more appropriate than CFD for occupational and formal settings. The motivation to express or communicate fandom was evident no matter what type of fan dress was worn. This overlap will be discussed further under the theme *impression management*. Therefore, motivations for wearing fan dress in general will be included in the discussion of the two following themes, *personal motivations* and *social motivations*.

**Personal motivations.** Participants cited a number of personal motivations for wearing fan dress. These included (a) communication of fandom, (b) self-expression (c) creative self-expression, (d) interest in fashion, (e) feelings of pleasure/fun/escape, (f) emotions derived from meanings that participants personally assigned to their dress, and (g) other personal motivations related to functional and aesthetic needs. The number and percentage of participants who cited each motivation are shown on Table 5.
i. Communication of fandom. One primary motivation for wearing fan dress was to communicate fandom. Sixteen participants made a total of 22 statements concerning the motivation to communicate fandom. While Georgia, stated outright, “Typically I wear accessories that show my, what's the word, fanhood,” most participants indicated this motivation through other statements describing fan dress as a nonverbal form of communication of a source of media that they liked, loved, enjoyed, or supported. For example, Dawn stated that wearing fan dress is “an outward expression of myself and the things that I like,” and Taylor stated:

It’s representative of what you love and enjoy. For example, sports fans wear jerseys on casual occasions to represent that they support that team or player. So for fans in love with sci-fi and fantasy, it's their opportunity to show what they love.

When explaining why wearing fan dress was important to her, Valerie stated, “I feel great wearing something that expresses the things I love.”

Participants wore fan dress to express admiration for a specific series or character. Dawn described her fan dress as a way of “projecting your love and passion for the shows. Like wearing a badge of honor or becoming a walking bill board. ‘I love this show and I'm not afraid to show it . . . loudly.”’ Briar explained, “I think that my clothes and accessories help me show how much I love Doctor Who, or Lord of the Rings, or whichever fandom by displaying that I have a particular passion and knowledge of the fandom I'm wearing.” Likewise, Karen stated,

Table 5. Personal Motivations.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal Motivation</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication of Fandom</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>48.48</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-Expression</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative Self-Expression</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24.24</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interest in Fashion</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings of Pleasure/Fun/Escape</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotions Derived from Personal Meanings of Dress</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>51.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Personal Motivations</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>90.91</td>
</tr>
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“When I wear the other dresses, like the Doctor Who or Batman dress, it's definitely broadcasting my love for those shows.” Briar also explained that her clothing was a way of expressing her love for a particular character, and “Clothing and accessories are just another outlet for how much I really love my fandom. I do like closet cosplaying as Rose Tyler occasionally, because I really identify with her, and she's my favorite companion.”

Participants stated that not only did their dress communicate their admiration for a film or television or film series, but it also was a means of sharing their fandom with others. When asked about the importance of wearing fan dress, Lacey responded:

The importance to me is that I can share my favorite fandoms and incorporate fashion as well. I love being creative! So putting together these outfits allow me to express myself creatively all the while sharing two things I love most, my favorite fandoms and fashion.

Beth explained that when she wore her dresses with subtle or busy fan prints that she was “saying ‘This is a thing I like,’” while also inviting the viewer to share in her fandom by stating, “‘Do you like it, too?’”

ii. Self-expression. Eight participants indicated that wearing fan dress was a part of their identity and a vital expression of the self. It was clear that these participants used fan dress as a mode of self-expression and creative self-expression. Six participants indicated the importance of fan dress to identity, for instance, “it's really just part of my self-expression. . . . Wearing these things compliments my quirkiness” (Hillary). These participants noted that wearing fan dress allows them to feel more like themselves. Denise stated, “I wear fandom clothes/accessories so often because they make me feel confident/authentic.” Likewise, Courtney said that when wearing her fan items “I just feel comfortable and more myself.” Valerie explained that she
wears fan dress “because it makes me feel good. It's an inherent part of my personality and overall self-concept,” and explained:

Anyone who knows me, knows I'm a fangirl . . . HUGE fangirl. At one time, I was a little shy and reserved about it, but I guess I've taken more of an “I don't care” attitude in my “old age” Lol!! THIS is who I am. . . . My husband has said that to me on several occasions. I'd ask him "Is it silly to wear this (Star Wars . . .Twilight . . . insert here fandom. . .) to this restaurant? And he would reply: “It's who you ARE, honey...wear it!”

This participant later reiterated this point by stating, “I think it's VERY important to not be afraid to express who you are and what you love.”

Two participants noted that IFD in particular allows them to express themselves. Jeanie explained that her subtle “bound looks” reflect her personality in addition to showing her support for a “character or look” that she loves. Piper explained that she was able to express herself through IFD in settings where she was unable to wear CFD:

For my casual t-shirts [which tend to be more overt] they're important to me because I can feel more like myself when I am wearing them. While I am at work I have to maintain an air of professionalism and authority. I work with college students that are close to my own age and it's important that I am seen as an authority figure. Many of my students know about my fandoms and can relate to me in that way, but my colleagues aren't like me in that way. On the weekends I try and wear my Sailor Moon, Sherlock, or other fun fan shirts I can't get away with wearing at work. The pieces that are more professional like the Darth Vader dress and the Sherlock jacket are very special because they are dressy and subtle. I can still show a bit of my personality.

Other motivations related to self-expression included creative self-expression, interests in fashion, and feelings of pleasure, fun, and escape.

iii. Creative self-expression. Wearing fan dress allowed eight participants to exhibit their artistic skills and express themselves creatively. For Denise, putting together outfits inspired by a character, which includes “wearing a fandom necklace or shirt with a coordinating outfit” allows her to exercise creativity while receiving “a (slightly watered down) powerful
feeling of cosplaying an awesome character.” Likewise, Lacey stated, “I love being creative! So putting together these outfits allow me to express myself creatively.”

Participants exercised their creative skills in fashion design and sewing while producing fan dress items that allowed them to creatively express themselves according to their own personal tastes. For example, Kaylee designed her “own outfits based on all the TV shows and movies” that she loved because she wanted to “fly” her “geek flag,” but did not want to wear “printed leggings and short dresses” that she did not find personally appealing. Gale explained, “I like my t-shirts to fit a certain way that is hard to find. So I just buy what I want, take it apart, and put it back together or embellish it.” Beth admitted that most of her interest in fan dress “has a lot to do with sewing” because it was a part of “creating” her “own fantasy worlds,” which allowed her to create and wear anything she wanted. Engagement in an online sewing community also led to creative self-expression through fan dress. Lynn and Beth are authors of their own sewing blogs, and Beth explained that the two participants sewed their Spiderman-print dresses at the same time.

For Piper, Jeanie, and Beth, wearing fan dress items they designed or created allowed them to show off their creative talent. Piper explained that “the pieces that I made for costumes have that extra benefit of showing my own creative talent in addition to my fandom,” and when asked about a unique piece that she made, she said it was “a way for me to show off a little bit.” Jeanie also mentioned that when wearing fan dress there was “a little piece of showing off.” Beth explained that wearing the fan print dresses she made was “about showing off” and “plain ol’ attention seeking.” The participant noted that she “always enjoyed making a statement” with her clothes and that she receives “a lot of attention and compliments” when wearing those dresses.
She explained that when she wears them that “there's a lot of the ‘advertising’” of the fandom represented, and that “it also says a lot about me personally—my sewing skills and my own style choices.”

For some participants, wearing fan dress included wearing dress items or a style of dress different from the norm, which helped them achieve a sense of personal uniqueness. For three participants, creative interests such as sewing led to the creation of unique fan dress items. Karen noted that her skills allowed her to develop her own individualistic style:

I like having a unique item in my closet that sets me apart, but that's why I wanted to learn sewing in the first place, really, so I could design clothes more for my style and not look like everyone else.

Lynn also noted that making her own fan clothing would ensure that her items are unique and “that nobody will have the same thing.” In the same way, Beth credited her sewing for achieving a sense of uniqueness, which motivated her to wear her fan dresses with “novelty prints:”

I feel most like myself when I'm stunt dressing in SOME way—whether it's a full on novelty print or just something a little nicer or different from the norm. And I love how sewing has given me so much freedom to fulfill that.

Participants who did not wear unique items that they created also felt a sense of personal uniqueness. Jeanie explained that her character-inspired ensembles were more meaningful to her than “just wearing what is fashionable now,” while allowing her to “look unique compared to those around me.” Valerie stated that wearing fan dress was a “way of expressing myself, in ways that are perhaps not as "cookie-cutter" as the rest of society might be.” Although not the primary reason for wearing fan dress, Haley mentioned that “standing out from the crowd is just an added motivation to wearing fan dress.”
iv. **Interest in fashion.** Four participants’ motivation to wear fan dress stemmed from their interests in fashion or geek fashion, which led them to seek out, purchase or produce, and wear fan dress items. Kaylee currently designs complete ensembles that integrate direct fan dress items from a series, as well as complete ensembles inspired by a character or television or film series. She explained “this is a subject [fan dress] I'm passionate about and hope to eventually make my living working in and around.” Taylor had a strong interest in *Star Wars* fashion:

I also have a *Star Wars* geek fashion podcast, where I talk with my co-host about the latest *Star Wars* fashion trends, apparel, and accessories. In that podcast, I interview other fangirls about their fashion tastes and what they love about *Star Wars* geek fashion.

Additionally, Taylor noted that she enjoyed “searching for others wearing geeky/fan clothing” on social media in order to support wearing fan dress:

I love favorite-ing their pictures and letting them know that they are gorgeous or complimenting them in their attire. Sometimes, it's nice to hear a little support, especially if you come from some place where others don't see eye to eye on what you love. And hopefully, those kind thoughts and sentiments would motivate them to wear more fan apparel.

For Anna, wearing fashionable fan dress was a way to support fan merchandise geared toward women in typically male-dominated fandoms, such as *Star Wars*. She explained:

I have rallied hard for geek merchandise for women because I felt that was the way to combat the mindset that franchises were for men. I feel like where the dollars went the stories would follow. That's pretty much how change has come around. We can wear our fandom as women now more than ever and now it's impossible to say women aren't fans of franchises.

Anna’s interest in female fan fashion and merchandise is further evidenced in the podcast she shared regarding the tendency for marketers to cater *Star Wars* merchandise more to males rather than females.
v. Feelings of pleasure/fun/escape. For seven participants, wearing fan dress was simply pleasurable or fun. Four participants mentioned wearing fan dress for their personal pleasure or enjoyment regardless of setting, situation, or present company. Jen stated, “Sometimes I'll wear them to public cinema showings or if there are themed parties. But most of the time I wear them for my own pleasure,” and Taylor explained, “I don't let the public dictate what I should and shouldn't wear. . . . I do it to please myself and not others.” Briar stated, “It's mostly because I enjoy it! I often wear them when I know I'll be around other geeks, but sometimes it's just for my own enjoyment.” Likewise Katie said, “For me, it all goes back to personal enjoyment. I love this thing, let me share it with you! (Even if you aren't acknowledging it).”

Three participants, Emma, Gale, and Valerie, described their fan dress items as “fun,” which was an attribute that motivated them to wear it. For example, Gale remarked, “If I am coming home after a long day or hanging out on the weekend, why not reach for a t-shirt that is, for me, a little more fun than something from the Gap?” Emma noted, “I just like to have some fun things in my wardrobe. If they get a positive reaction and I get compliments on what I wear, that's just a bonus.”

Three participants mentioned that wearing fan dress provided them with a sense of excitement or escape from reality. For Kaylee, this was the former:

It falls under the same line of thinking as to why people cosplay. There's a sense of departure from the norm, to be elevated above the mundane. Adding spice to one's life, as it were. There is something that many are intrinsically drawn to in identifying with characters in shows they love or movies they watch or books they read. . . . What better way to do that than to put on the mantle of that character in the form of their clothes? Some are satisfied with this through cosplay. But some, like myself, like to take this to our everyday. It adds fun, purpose, and style to what would otherwise be just an outfit.
Jasmine described this sense of escape as being transported into a “fantasy world.” She explained, “I have been to HP [Harry Potter] World, and it is completely magical. I got the scarf there, and when I put it on it is like being back at Hogwarts.” Likewise, Alice stated:

Because I'm a very imaginative person, and real life gets boring more times than I'd like to admit, dressing this way often helps me take a break from reality. I'll be sitting in the car or at a meeting but in my head I'll be at Hogwarts [Harry Potter] or fighting some villain from another planet, or something weird like that.

vi. Emotions derived from meanings. Participants assigned special meanings to their fan dress based on the attributes of characters or series that they admired. The emotions derived from these meanings served as motivations for wearing fan dress. Seventeen participants made a total of 41 statements related to emotions stemming from the personal meanings they assigned to fan dress.

Nine participants made 10 statements indicating that their dress gave them an emotional boost. One participant indicated this directly. For example, Lynn explained, “It's like an instant mood boost when you wear something you love even if nobody notices it.” Beth noted that she wears her fan print dresses, including her Star Wars print dress whenever she is “feeling in a rut.” She also explained:

I don't wear the fan dresses on a daily basis, but I do like to pull them out from time to time---for Hallowe'en, a [sic] significant date (say, May the 4th) or just when I'm feeling like I need a pick-me-up.2

Nicole explained that when she wears “stuff like shoes that match a certain character like Anastasia’s [Anastasia (Bluth & Goldman, 1997)] boots” she feels “a little bit better.”

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2 May the 4th is Star Wars day, which brought about the slogan “May the Fourth be With You.”
Five other participants noted experiencing positive emotions or positive emotional reactions because of their fan dress. Anna explained that wearing fan dress related to the character Rey in *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (Abrams, McGatlin, Harper, Burk, & Kennedy, 2015) “makes me feel good” and Valerie stated, “It makes me happy.” Irene stated that her fan dress items “make me smile.” Likewise, Gale said:

It really just gives me pleasure to wear these things, it makes me smile. It feels more fun. . . .You know, a t-shirt with a great saying from a favorite character can just make you laugh when you catch it in the mirror.

Six participants made 18 statements indicating that their dress served as a source of strength and empowerment. For example, Jen stated, “I love wearing my *Sailor Moon* shirt, and I feel like a kid in it! I can do anything in that shirt. No one can make me feel otherwise!!” When participants wore fan dress items that featured or was reminiscent of a specific character, they were empowered to take on that character’s attributes. Natalie stated that she admired certain characters because of “how they move, or their determination, or some other attribute” and explained, “My fellow students have stopped being surprised by my clothing and accessory choices. They all know that I'm a major Vegeta/Piccolo [*Dragon Ball Z*] /Darth Maul [*Star Wars*] fan because of my clothes. It's really inspiring for me actually.” Natalie stated that she often wears clothing featuring these characters to places where she needed motivation to work hard. For example, Natalie explained that “Vegeta's determination and willpower are what I think about when I go to the gym,” and described this in detail when she stated:

My gym clothes make me feel more tough. Because the gym is full of mirrors, I enjoy looking at my clothes and they remind me to push harder. . . . My gym buddy is naturally big and strong, and I have to work twice as hard to keep up with him. So I feel like I connect to Vegeta and it reminds me to push harder. Piccolo always trained so hard too, but never bragged about it, so I want to channel him.
Natalie also stated, “When I wear my shirts to school, they remind me to channel what I like about the character.” She explained that wearing clothing featuring the character Vegeta also empowered her in this setting:

I’m an airbrush artist, but six months ago I wasn’t. I thought of him when I put in the long extra hours and spent 14 hours a day at school. He was my reminder that to be better, I had to put in the time. I had to train harder and work longer. I don’t know why wearing a shirt can help me do that, but it’s like every time I would start to feel defeated I would look down or look in the mirror and get that little extra burst of energy. "He wouldn’t quit and neither will I."

Miriah also stated that she often drew strength from wearing fan dress connected to specific characters:

So I dress, when I leave the house, in a type of armor. As I put on clothing, I’m thinking of different characters that I admire (for their personalities, strengths, morals, etc.) and how the clothes I wearing may either pay homage to them so I can feel as though I am them, or could simply remind me of them in some way. It helps me feel like I can conquer whatever quest or mission I have for the day.

The participant explained that she had “been often bullied/insulted/mocked since middle school at the least” and “dressing either as the characters or as an homage to them is . . . . a way for me to remind myself throughout the day to find the strength or drive that the character or show had” (Miriah). Miriah’s *Harry Potter* tattoo, *Game of Thrones* Khaleesi top, and “Wonder Woman inspired dress” served as specific examples. Miriah described her *Harry Potter* tattoo in-depth:

Well I have a tattoo of 'mudblood' on my left inner arm. I got it after reading a particularly emotional fanfic about Hermione post-books/war. Hermione Granger, from *Harry Potter*, is always a character I related with. She's smart, but picked on, has a small number of friends but still helps everyone. She's also the only girl we follow through the whole series. She's me to me. So after the books ended, I turned to fanfiction to keep the stories going. I didn't want to be done following Hermione’s life and see how she turned out, because she had such potential! And when she had the hated slur used in the series carved into her arm by Bellatrix, I felt that would do something psychologically to someone . . . and, in the fanfic I read, she still had the scar and was suffering from PTSD over the war. I have an annoying anxiety about everything, and I am always worrying about everything, so I related to the constant fear. I got the tattoo after reading a passage
in the story about how she doesn't want to get rid of the scar, because it shows that she has overcome every obstacle that she has faced, and she survived. Sometimes, in spite of herself, she still survived.

Miriah said that when she wears her Game of Thrones Khaleesi top “I feel like I am becoming her,” and explained “sometimes you just need to be a dragon queen . . . to battle the crazy shit you encounter every day.” She also stated. “I made a wonder woman inspired dress that I wore to a job interview, because I needed her woman power to get through it.”

Like Miriah, Marie stated, “There are days I've got to go out and do things, and I feel if I put on a shirt with a particular character, I'm kind of embodying them for an adventure or task to be accomplished.” Marie also noted:

For the days where I just need to fight the apocalypse but can't look it, I'll wear my favorite combat boots, my cargo pants and jewelry made from recycled pieces. I feel like I'm ready for the fallout to happen or hop into Mad Max's car. And then I have the day where I just dress like I'm expecting the TARDIS to appear. Because every companion has the best outfit for their journey's [sic]!

Jeanie explained that she uses her inspired ensembles “to relate in that the things that they inspire in me and get strength or confidence from that,” and explained, “I once wore a bound look based on Jayne Wetherby from Dracula (Apted, et al., & Coppola, 1992) who was a vampire hunter, to a musical theatre concert, I needed a boost of badass because I hadn't sung in a while.” Also, Alice stated:

As far as Sailor Moon goes (being my favorite anime), I love the beauty and strength of the characters in the series. . . . I usually wear a replica of her brooch or necklaces of her wands, so on and so forth, because in my mind she really does embody strength.

Three participants made three statements that indicated that their fan dress served as a source of comfort. Valerie explained wearing fan dress is “like being swaddled.” Although her fan dress, which usually features characters from male-dominated fandoms like Dragon Ball Z,
helped Natalie connect with classmates who were predominantly male, she stated, “I wear it mostly to comfort myself.” Jasmine was the only participant that referred to a specific dress item that served as a source of comfort, which was her *Harry Potter* tattoo:

The HP [*Harry Potter*] series is something everyone in my family can relate. My sister actually picked out the tattoo and got a matching one because she wanted me to know that she was supporting me. I don’t normally tell people why I got that tattoo, it’s for me. But it's nice to know when you're having a shitty day and you throw your hands up that you're not alone.

Alice described her fan dress as a source of comfort, while suggesting that it was more of a coping mechanism:

The major importance to me is my comfort and my escape of reality–I have a tendency to stress a lot and especially over this last year. It’s led almost to panic attacks. When I'm dressing in the comfort of these series, I don’t have to deal with the situations around me that almost make me want to go insane.

Two participants indicated that their fan dress was a source of inspiration. Cagen mentioned that “The Cullen lion” from *Twilight* reminded her of the character Aslan in *The Chronicle of Narnia*, who is an allegorical character of the biblical figure Jesus, whom she explained was an “inspiration” to her and her faith. Anna explained that fan clothing inspired her to be more like some characters that she does not necessarily relate to:

The clothes remind me of emotions or power I take from a story or a character/characters. Sometimes I'll wear villain-related clothing because it's not what I see myself as, but I can step into different shoes by way of fashion. Mostly I like heroic characters on my clothes because that's what I aspire to be.

**vii. Other personal motivations.** Other personal motivations include those related to an attribute or the performance of a piece of fan clothing. These motivations were cited by 30 total participants. Participants selected and wore fan dress items based on their functional and aesthetic needs. Functional needs related to the utility of a garment and include fit, mobility,
comfort, protection, [ease of] donning and doffing, and aesthetic needs, which related to the beauty and attractiveness of a garment or ensemble (Lamb & Kallal, 1992). Haley illustrated that she selected her fan dress items according to both these needs:

I tend to like a mix of both obvious and subdued designs in my fan-related dress. For me, it's more about what I find aesthetically pleasing at the time that I am shopping, followed by whether or not the clothing and accessories are functional items that I can use in my everyday life.

Likewise, Farah stated, “I choose my clothing and accessories based on what I love, characters who inspire me, things that make me feel strong, beautiful, and comfortable, and what will look good with my stature, complexion, and body type.”

a. Physical comfort. Physical comfort was the most frequently mentioned functional need. Nine participants made a total of nine statements that were coded as “physical comfort.” These statements were often made while referring to specific dress items. For example, Paige stated that her fan shirts “are a fun way to share the series, and they're pretty comfortable.” Karen described her Doctor Who inconspicuous print dress as “super comfortable,” and Irene described her “jersey dress with Star Wars on it” as “comfy.” Dress items that provided physical comfort included those that were suitable for specific climates and temperatures. Irene explained that although she does not normally wear clothing representative of the Star Wars dark side or Empire, she wore her “Star Wars sweater” with “storm troopers all over it” partly because it is comfortable to wear “when it’s cold.” Likewise, Miriah stated, “I like to wear a Hawkeye hoodie when hiking in the mountains, as it’s warm and stylish,” and Regan explained that her “Jayne hat from Firefly” had “the dual purpose of being hilarious and fandom related AND warm!” Two participants indicated that physical comfort related to climate or temperature aided in deciding which fan dress items to wear or not wear. Kaylee indicated that even when wearing fan dress,
she felt it was important to be conscious of the weather. She explained, “If I'm sick and it's freezing outside, I'm not running to the store wearing a chic Star Wars-inspired business dress. I'm going to run out there in a comfy, fuzzy, Trillian-inspired jumpsuit [Star Trek]!” Jasmine indicated that she was “not afraid” to wear a Harry Potter robe, but because she resided in the South, “it's just too damn hot to wear one.”

b. Fit. Two participants mentioned the fit of their clothes using general statements as well as those specific to certain dress items. Three statements and two photographs were coded as “fit.” Taylor stated, “I love my Torrid lightsaber dress. It's the perfect fit for me. As someone who isn't a size two, I love that there's clothing out there for plus-sized girls.”

Nine statements addressed the need for proper fit, as well as the need to achieve a pleasing garment-body relationship. Five participants explained that they choose to wear specific types of garments based on what flatters their bodies. For example, Cagen stated, “I also don't wear clothes that draw attention bc [because] I'm insecure about my body as well.” Four participants (Farah, Piper, Jeanie, and Miriah) designed and constructed many of their own fan dress pieces in order to have fan clothing that flattered their bodies. Among these participants, Piper explained that she and Jeanie were:

Very fashion and body conscious with hourglass shapes so we try and play up our own body shapes when trying to decide how to dress ourselves to best fit our body type. I think we can both agree a t-shirt is not the best way to show off our figures.

Participants primarily expressed the need for an aesthetically-pleasing body-garment relationship when describing specific garments. Cagen explained that she often wore her replica of Bella’s prom dress from Twilight partly because it looked “great” on her. When describing her Firefly t-shirt that says “Browncoats Serenity Valley,” Piper stated that is was “a bit short on me
so it's not the most flattering to wear.” While describing another shirt, Piper commented on how it complemented her décolletage. Likewise, Miriah stated:

I would wear my Khaleesi top every single day if I had multiple copies or even different colored version. It's flattering, makes my boobs look awesome, and is long enough to wear leggings without fear of underwear showing, but short enough that I can justify wearing leggings with it.

c. **Craftsmanship and quality.** Craftsmanship and quality were an additional functional need cited by three participants. Four statements were coded as “craftsmanship and quality.” For example, Hillary stated:

I look for really quality work as opposed to buying anything related to my fandoms that's offered. I have a standard for the things that I purchase, and if I feel something is crafted in a slipshod manner or the design is sloppy where it doesn't need to be, then I won't purchase it.

Piper commented on the quality of clothing from two retailers that carried fan clothing:

Hot Topic charges like $40 for a thin knit skater dress like who do they think is buying this stuff? The Her Universe dresses are closer to $70, but they are fully lined with boned bodices and great fabric so they are worth it.

Kaylee expressed disappointment in the quality and price of commercial fan clothing and remarked that although she desired “more subtle, work-appropriate wear,” she feared it may be too costly to produce since the prices would likely exceed the prices currently listed on fan clothing.

d. **Aesthetic needs.** Seven participants made a total of 12 statements and provided 12 photographs that were coded as “aesthetic needs.” Aesthetic appeal served as a motivation for wearing or not wearing specific fan dress items. For example, Piper explained why she was motivated to buy and wear the Her Universe Darth Vader dress. She stated, “I've never considered myself more than a casual fan of *Star Wars* but I could not pass up such a cool and
unique design! Cagen mentioned that she loved “wearing bows with fan symbols on them” because they were “feminine” and casual enough to wear with “jeans and a tee.”

Three participants made three statements that were coded as “versatility,” which is an aesthetic need. Jasmine explained that her “Death Eater scarf” was “so versatile” because she could “wear it in any weather and it can dress up a white t-shirt or punch up a collared shirt.” Valerie explained that she likes to accessorize some of her fan dress garments “to reflect different styles and to create several looks with the same piece.” Irene said that her “jacket with X-wing patch on it” was “tailored enough that I can wear it with heels and jeans for a cute night out. I can also unattach [sic] and reattach the patch if I need to wear it without it.”

**Social motivations.** Social motivations for wearing fan dress included (a) **identification with a character, group of characters,** (b) **identification with a series,** (c) **identification as a nerd or geek,** (d) **identification with others,** (e) **facilitation of interaction,** (f) **distinction from others,** and (g) **other motivations,** which included sharing interest with spouses and/or family. The number and percentage of participants citing each motivation are shown on Table 6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Motivation</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identification with a Character or Group of Characters</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>66.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification with a Series</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification as a Geek or a Nerd</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification with Others</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>66.67</td>
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<tr>
<td>Facilitation of Interaction</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>51.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distinction from Others</td>
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<td>87.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Social Motivations</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24.24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

i. **Identification with character, or group of characters.** Although four participants mentioned they primarily use cosplay to identify with a specific character, fan dress was also used for this reason. Twenty-two participants made 41 statements indicating that they wore fan
dress to identify with, relate to, or aspire to identify with a character or group of characters. Nine participants made 13 general statements regarding this. For example, Courtney said, “I mostly use clothing to show if I identify with something specific. I really relate to Captain Marvel, Carol Danvers, so one of my favorite shirts is a tank top with her emblem on it.” Kaylee explained that she used “characters I personally identify with (and want to be identified with)—characters like Belle [Disney’s Beauty and the Beast], Tomb Raider [Lara Croft: Tomb Raider], Rey [Star Wars: The Force Awakens (Abrams, McGatlin, Harper, Burk, & Kennedy, 2015)], etc.” Natalie, who primarily wore fan dress featuring male characters from Dragon Ball Z, explained, “I feel like I identify more with a lot of male characters,” which included “villains or anti-heroes” from the series. In several cases, these general statements indicated that the characters participants identified with were their favorite characters. Briar explained, “I do like closet cosplaying as Rose Tyler [Doctor Who] occasionally, because I really identify with her, and she's my favorite companion.” Hillary stated, “I generally gravitate towards my favorite characters,” which included Rey from Star Wars: The Force Awakens (Abrams, McGatlin, Harper, Burk, & Kennedy, 2015), and explained, “Who you identify with can say a lot about you.” Nicole stated:

I have many aspects with the character Anastasia [Anastasia (Bluth & Goldman, 1997)]. I wear her jewelry box necklace, as well as own the jewelry box. I also wear my garments based on her character like her boots and hair styles. I feel as though I am like her and want to show my appreciation for the show. She is also my favorite princess.

One participant, Irene, indicated that, in general, she wears fan dress to identify with a group of characters, such as those part of the Star Wars rebellion rather than the dark side. She explained:

I really don't like wearing pieces of clothing that have villains on them, because it doesn't give me the same boost as I would get from a jacket that make me think of the rebellion, etc. I do have some pieces now that have the "other side" on them that were given to me by a friend, but they're not common pieces in my wardrobe.
Ten participants provided 19 statements in which they explained specific character attributes that they related to and how this was reflected in their dress. Two participants mentioned that they related to individual *Harry Potter* characters. For example, Jasmine stated, “I feel my personality is much like Professor McGonagall. When I was an instructor in the Air Force I had long hair tied back in a bun. I had to be firm, but fair.” Haley and Alice both mentioned that they related to a group of *Harry Potter* characters, those a part of “Ravenclaw” or “Ravenclaw House.” Haley stated that this was because “I feel like I can relate to the characters who belong to Ravenclaw since they are highly valued for their intelligence.” Alice explained that she wore as much Ravenclaw merchandise as she could find because she had a “thirst for knowledge.” She further explained:

I'm a bit of a nerd and I value school and education systems, so with how much I put up [being] knowledgeable as a valuable personality aspect, I always get automatically directed to Ravenclaw!

Participants often identified with strong female characters. Valerie stated that she identified with “strong females like Wonder Woman, Leia, Rey, Black Widow” and stated that she had “various pieces of clothing, charms, etc.,” that represented them. Valerie further explained:

I think I do it because I want to celebrate the strong traits that these women possess. When I was a little girl, I closely identifies [sic] with Leia. I was very shy and had low self-esteem. I was bullied. I would think “What would Leia do?” and it gave me confidence. I think that always stuck with me.

Like Irene, Georgia identified with the female characters that were a part of the *Star Wars* rebel alliance and stated, “with *Star Wars* memorabilia, I'm always going to wear something related to the rebel alliance, Leia in particular, because (1) badass woman (2) anti-establishment or anti-authoritarian warmongering.”
Other participants identified with characters because they felt they shared common attributes. Marie explained that she wore her Kate Bishop’s Hawkeye inspired ensemble because she related the character’s activities and interests:

Because, as a photographer, I shoot people. And well . . . so does Kate! I have arrow earrings, her trademark white scarf, a purple ribbon keeps the bun in place [something she wears about 1/4 of the time in the comics], and her love of boots are about as great as mine.

Cagen explained that she related to three characters in particular, Susan of Narnia [The Chronicles of Narnia], Merida from Brave, and Bella from Twilight, and owned several fan dress items related to each of these characters. Of these three, she stated, “Bella is a big one,” and explained:

I'm kind of like Bella. She's a little boring, but not really. She's bold in love. She wasn't afraid to put her love in the forefront no matter what. I kind of think my love story is about really fighting for love because in real life, so many people give up on love so easily. I never did.

Cagen stated that to show her identification with this character, she wore a replica of Bella’s engagement ring, as well as “rubber bracelets, one with Jacob's wolf charm and another with the Cullen lion,” which she wore a great deal when the films were popular.

Marie explained that in addition to wearing fan dress to identify with a single character, she wore it to identify with “groups of characters.” Marie explained:

When I want to feel cute or bad ass, I'll wear elements that tie them all together. Like I love Maleficent from Sleeping Beauty (Geronimi, 1959). I have a choker and bracelet that feature her, but I like to tie in Aurora by wearing a pink blouse and a blue jean skirt [I loved the faeries and their fighting over her clothing colours], and sword earrings for the Prince.

Eight participants made a total of 13 statements that indicated that they wore fan dress related to characters that had attributes that they aspired to emulate. Among these participants, three made four statements indicating that they related to or aspired to be like a character because
of the character’s dress style. Karen explained that when she wore that plaid dress inspired by the
Doctor Who companion Clara Oswald that she sewed, “that she was “definitely expressing an
interest in that character's style.” She further explained, “While I am not a fan of that particular
caracter, I love how she dresses and makes those clothes work for the adventures she is
having.”

Five participants aspired to emulate other types of character attributes. Jen stated,
“Characters like Serena (Sailor Moon) and Pocahontas [Disney] signify heroism, and in some
ways, I'd like to be like them and stated that she had shirts relating to these characters. Farah also
explained:

I love to create replicas of outfits from characters that resonate with me, generally they
are strong women who stand for their beliefs, who inspire others to be who they want,
and who can take care of themselves. Women who are intelligent and who keep growing
rather than letting life pass them by.

ii. Identification with a series. Three participants made four statements that indicated
they wore fan dress to identify with a series. For example, Cagen stated that she related to the
stories of fantasy films, such as The Lord of the Rings and The Chronicles of Narnia, which
inspired her faith. She explained, “Tolkien (LOTR) and C.S. Lewis were kind of fathers of the
high fantasy genres, and I love their stories because they drew from their personal faith and
experiences and transplanted those in a very fictional romanticized world.” Two of these
participants indicated that they tended not to identify with specific characters. For example, Gale
stated, “I am not sure I identify with a character, per se,” but instead identified with “the story as
a whole.” Likewise Alice explained:

I wouldn’t say I ever get overly attached to any one character, though, as much as I
appreciate the shows and movies as a whole. I'm more attracted to the universes the series
present, I guess, because it gives my imagination a chance to run wild: How would I act, dress; what would I do if I were a part of that universe?

iii. Identification as a nerd or geek. Four participants (Beth, Courtney, Lynn, and Regan) wore fan dress to generally identify as a geek or nerd, rather than specifically identify with a character, group of characters, or series. Beth indicated that she used her fan dress to communicate her relationship to a range of science fiction and fantasy series:

I don't know personally that there's any one character I like THAT much that I want to identify myself as like them. It's more general than that for me. This may be because I'm NOT totally about any one fandom‒I'm not that Star Wars girl (but I love Star Wars) or that Avengers girl (even though I love those movies.)‒I want to make a more general statement rather than a very particular one, I guess.

Likewise Regan indicated that she uses her fan dress to communicate geek identity rather than her relationship to specific series or characters:

iv. Identification with others. Participants described their fan dress as being a nonverbal form of communication of their personal identification with a character, group of characters, or series, or their identity as a nerd or geek to others, and this served as motivation for wearing fan dress. Twenty-two participants indicated this through a total of 30 statements. For example, Haley said, “I believe that I mostly do it [wear fan dress] as a way to nonverbally communicate my interests to others.” Participants not only wore fan dress as an expression of their relationship with a form of media, but also to show that they were a part of a community consisting of people with similar interests. Seven participants made a total of 11 statements that indicated that fan dress served as a social identity marker. Gale explained that fan dress was becoming “more of a social marker” and “almost a signifier, like, hey, here is how I am different and interesting.” Similarly, Lynn stated, “So, dress is a way to express your appreciation for what you love, while at the same time, identifying with others that appreciate the same thing” and later remarked,
“clothing is a Bat-signal that helps bring other fans out of the woodwork.” Taylor stated that when wearing fan dress, “people who love the same thing” are “able to spot you out in a crowd and think, ‘This person loves what I love!’” Beth commented that wearing fan dress was “signaling you are part of a community” and stated, “When you wear something with a fan print, you are absolutely stating ‘I like this,’ and it really invites people to connect if it's something that's important to them as well.”

v. Facilitation of interaction. As previously illustrated, participants recognized that fan dress enabled them to identify with others. Thirty-two participants made a total of 115 statements indicating that facilitating interaction was a major function of fan dress. Seventeen participants indicated through 23 statements that their motivation for wearing fan dress was to identify or find others who held a shared or common interest. For example, Haley stated:

It's kind of a way to express my interests and draw like-minded people to me. I guess it's almost a way to ensure that people who approach me and start a conversation based on my fan dress will have common interests with me.

Inconspicuous fan dress (IFD) was particularly worn to find others with similar interests, and six participants indicated they use IFD to connect with “real” or “hardcore fans.” Georgia mentioned that by wearing IFD she was, “really only inviting conversation with other fans rather than casual viewers or people who’ve just seen the movie poster, etc.” Gale stated that her fan dress pieces are “less recognizable, more obscure,” and were rarely recognized by anyone in person, but received “a lot of replies” when she posted photographs on Instagram.com (Instagram, 2016). She explained “the internet is great” because “the online sewing community is full of closet geeks who don't have to be 'closet' about it anymore,” which helped her to connect with like-minded people more successfully.
Ten participants indicated through 13 statements that their fan dress brought about reactions from others. Emma stated that when she wore fan dress, “people smile, laugh or give me a thumbs up” and explained that receiving these reactions were an added motivation. Hillary noted that individuals “loudly proclaim[ed] a movie quote at the mere site of” her “earrings or t-shirt.” Fourteen participants made a total of 23 statements indicating that they received comments or compliments from others when they wore fan dress. Reactions and comments often led to conversation. As Natalie explained:

I've come to the conclusion that wearing this stuff is like a magnet. Even shy folks will say ‘I like your shirt/purse/mug,’ and that gives me enough of a window to try and start a conversation, to start probing and seeing what other interests we have in common.

Twenty-eight participants made a total of 58 statements that indicated that their dress not only brought about conversations about a film, film or television series, and/or its characters, but served as a “conversation starter” or “ice breaker,” especially in social situations in which they were not comfortable. Natalie explained:

I'm the only female in most of my classes. More than a few times, my clothes have started conversations that have led to bonding between me and my classmates. I try and pretend like I'm not uncomfortable in class, but I find it really hard to reach out sometimes. The clothes are oftentimes an icebreaker.

Two participants mentioned that they specifically chose to wear fan dress if they felt they might be in a situation where they would need it to provide them with a topic of conversation. Briar said that she attended a “Cinco de Mayo party” where she “only knew about three people,” and explained that she wore her “Millennium Falcon shirt [Star Wars] and had multiple great conversations about the new movie, the prequels vs. [versus] the originals, and led to other conversations about other fandoms and subgenres.”
Participants also mentioned that they used their fan dress to facilitate relationships as it was often a source of bonding. Sixteen participants made a total of 22 statements that indicated this. For seven participants, wearing fan dress led to friendships. Paige explained that fan dress enabled her to “connect to other fans easier, I’ve made quite a few friends just because of the shirt I was wearing or the necklace.” She also remarked that, “I've known people who ended up dating someone because they met due to one or the other wearing fandom clothing/accessories.” Natalie stated, “The first day in my motorcycle class another girl saw my purse, and we immediately started talking about Doctor Who. We now sit side by side and always work in the lab together.” Alice explained that fan dress helped “bolster friendships” with girls that she worked with and added, “I've gotten together with several girls to teach them how to make their own [Harry Potter] wands.”

Three participants noted that fan dress is a source of bonding in existing relationships. Taylor explained that it brings about conversation with her family:

There are other Star Wars fans in my family, so I love wearing Star Wars clothing and accessories around them because it generates conversation. We also fall into chats about what’s going on in the Star Wars universe, and it's usually because of what I'm wearing.

Valerie explained that she has a small, close-knit circle of friends whom she met through a Star Wars fan site and stated, “We all have lots and lots of ‘stuff’ to wear and share. . . . We go shopping together for fangirl items, whether it be at conventions, in person, sharing online finds, etc.” Likewise, Anna noted that she and her friend bought the same BB-8 dress, and stated that they “share with each other our experiences in different places.”

vi. Distinction from others. In some cases, participants used their dress to set them apart as “real” or hardcore” fans. In most cases, personal distinctiveness did not necessarily entail
setting oneself apart by comparing the intensity of one’s fandom or devotion to one’s fandom. In other words, “distinct” did not mean “better,” but different. Most participants used fan dress to make them more distinct from others in general (non-fans), as well as from other fans. This was indicated by 29 participants through a total of 48 statements.

Sixteen participants made a total of 29 statements that indicated that they used their dress to distinguish themselves from non-fans. Non-fans were referred to in general terms, which included the “general public” (Georgia), the “rest of society” (Valerie), “others” (Kaylee; Miriah), “other people” (Jen) or “people” (Haley; Miriah; Nicole), “non-geeks” (Denise), or people whom participants referred to as “normal” or “average” (Lacey; Miriah; Piper). For example, Kaylee explained she used her dress to distinguish herself from “others” who do not identify as “geeks:”

People like to feel a sense of belonging, that they're not alone. And for geeks that can mean not feeling weird for enjoying something that others might feel is juvenile, for kids, or just plain weird. So I like to wear geek fashion to fly my geek flag for others to see, to mark me as a fun, safe person to come up to chat about various geek topics.

Some participants compared themselves to specific groups, which included “soccer moms” (Denise), “football kids” or sports fans (Lynn), colleagues (Piper), and co-workers (Karen). Lynn compared herself and her dress to that of sports fans:

Here in the Bay Area, Raiders fans wear their gear and for good or for ill, there are probably assumptions that people make about the type of person they are if they're wearing Raiders gear, and I guess I'm trying identify myself as a geek, somebody who might be more interested in discussing epic stories than epic plays.

A few participants distinguished themselves from others in these statements by labelling themselves as a “geek” (Briar, Denise, Lynn, Miriah), “fangirl,” (Miriah, Valerie), “fan” (Georgia, Nicole), “a weird kid” (Gale) or “oddballs” (Alice) and then described how their dress
reflected these labels. Gale stated, “I love that it is more socially acceptable to be weird in that way than it was when I was a kid, or maybe I was just a weird kid.”

The relationship between fan dress and intensity of fandom was examined in this research by asking participants the question, “How does your clothing/accessories show what kind of fan you are?” However, most participants’ responses included a general listing of the types and styles of fan dress that they wore and gave little indication of a relationship between fan dress and the intensity of their fandom. Four participants’ responses indicated that they were uncertain that their dress reflected the intensity of their fandom or was not successful at reflecting the intensity of fandom. For example, Gale simply stated, “I am not sure that they show what 'type' of fan I am, per se,” and Hillary responded, “I think ranking how much of a fan someone is isn't necessarily fair to anyone.” Two participants responded in-depth. Courtney explained:

I guess my clothes just show I'm generally a fan, though to know what kind or how much of a fan I am you'd probably need to talk to me about it. I have some shirts from things that I am a fan of, and some of things I am a HUGE fan of. Though everything I own is of something I really like.

Like Courtney, Cagen questioned the ability of visual cues to reflect the intensity of one’s fandom:

I think my stuff shows I'm a less intense fan but I'm a BIG fan . . . the subtlety has something to do with not wanting to stand out and be socially acceptable. . . . It's hard to compare, but I think being a fan is one thing. Expressing it is another. So I'm not sure if the fact that you wear an HP [Harry Potter] shirt means your super obsessed. HP is one of the franchises I am not as big on as others.

Seven participants made a total of 11 statements that indicated that the more subtle their fan dress was, the more intense the fan or the deeper the involvement they have with a film or film or television series. Denise explained that she liked “the not-instantly-recognizable look,” because it was “more of a secret handshake with other mega fans.” She explained that the subtle
nature of her dress was more about communicating the intensity of her fandom “than trying to hide the fact that I'm a geek.” Hannah discussed the importance of subtle fan dress regarding the interaction with fellow fans, while also hinting toward how it reflected the intensity of fandom:

There are, in a way, levels to fandom clothing. How in-depth your clothes are in the fandom culture can be important when interacting with others. For instance, wearing an Avengers logo on your shirt shows you like the franchise. But if it had a joke from the film on it, suddenly it's more valuable within that fandom.

As previously mentioned, personal distinctiveness did not necessarily entail setting oneself apart by comparing the intensity of one’s fandom or devotion to one’s fandom to that of other fans. It became apparent from this research that a fan could be distinct from other fans through dress in ways other than the intensity of their fandom. Participants were asked, “How is the way you dress different or the same as others who like the same film, TV series, or character? Why?” In response, over half of the participants (66.67%, N = 22) stated that their dress was different than other fans. Eight participants indicated that their dress was both similar and different from other fans. Only two participants indicated that their dress was the same as other fans. There were six ways in which participants’ dress differed from other fans. These included personal styling, unique items that participants sewed or altered themselves, more subtle/atypical fan dress items, different repertoires of fan dress items, and gender differences. Participants pointed out four ways in which their dress was similar to other fans. These included owning the same shirt or item, wearing similar clothing categories, wearing items originating from the same retailers, and putting together geek or character-themed outfits.

a. Personal styling. Eight participants provided a total of nine statements that indicated that their dress differed from other fans because of their unique personal style choices. Two participants provided general statements regarding how their styling was different than that of
other fans. Jen stated, “I'd like to think I'm unique in how I spice up my wardrobe.” She later explained, “I tend to style the same outfit different from someone else wearing the same exact outfit. I think that helps spark some conversation between me and other fans.” Likewise, Valerie stated:

I like to think I give my own sense of style, flair, personality, etc., to the pieces I choose. I like to really "level up" what I wear, and how I express myself. Not to be conceited, but I try to pick things that flatter me and my face, body, etc., and not be "sloppy" about what I choose to wear. I do it because I have a lot of pride in my appearance, but also to honor the integrity of the fandoms themselves.

Other participants provided more specific details regarding how their dress differed from other fans. For example, Lacey said, “I feel like I always try to bring in a fashion element to my looks. I don't want to JUST wear a tee shirt and jeans. I want to create an entire thought-out look.” Paige stated that she did not necessarily try to distinguish herself as a fan, but noted that mixing fandoms within the same outfit is something that other fans typically did not do. She explained, “I suppose in some ways the fact that I’ll mix fandoms in outfits does make how I wear things different, but honestly I never gave it a lot of thought.” Anna explained that her personal style was more conservative due to her age and noted personal style differences among her and her friends.

b. DIY fan dress. Seven participant provided eight statements indicating that their dress differed from that of other fans because they made it themselves. This type of dress will be referred to as DIY (Do-It-Yourself) fan dress in this dissertation. Miriah stated, “I make a lot of my own pieces, though, which is a huge difference between my look and others.”

DIY items were reported as being more unique, as Piper explained, “I think because I can sew I can make unique items that others can't get.”
Likewise, Karen said:

I find most often that my items I'm wearing are unique because I've made them. I don't see any one else expressing their love for the fandom through similar patterns or dresses. I see mostly t-shirts or jewelry, jewelry like mine, but my sewn for me items set me apart.

Unique DIY fan dress items also included items that were inspired by a characters or series (indirect) or direct fan dress items that were altered and/or embellished. Farah explained that she wore her “own [character-inspired] designs every day that are originals,” which gave a “nod to those beloved characters that inspire me,” and Jeanie stated that she took the logos off shirts and re-sewed them to the backs of denim jackets, creating a new, unique piece.

c. More subtle. Seven participants indicated through seven statements that their fan dress was more subtle than other fans. Denise stated this outright, “I tend to go for the subtle references a lot more.” Hillary also explained:

I think this tends to go toward my personal style and having to keep a corporate wardrobe. Most of the time, I can keep my fandoms at a subtle touch rather than the emblazoned t-shirts I wear in my off time.

Although Kaylee’s response to how her fan dress is similar or different from other fans could also fall under personal styling, she explained that her styling results in a more subtle expression of fandom. Irene implied that her dress was more subtle because she selects fan dress items that contain obscure references rather than those containing main logos or easily-recognizable imagery.

d. Atypical fan dress items. Four participants indicated through five statements that they do not wear the same types of fan dress items that other fans typically wear or that they select items that are less popular. These include fan dress items that are sold by retailers where other
fans did not typically shop. Kaylee explained that she avoids certain types of dress items that are popularly worn by other fans:

As alas, most geek fashion (even for women now) still leans towards a more juvenile appearance with t-shirts, printed leggings, and short skater dresses. . . .Some people absolutely LOVE printed leggings and the skater dresses for their body type (so I'm not 100% knocking it).

Three participants mentioned that their dress items tend to be more unique compared to other fans because they acquire it from places overlooked by other fans. Taylor explained:

I think it's because other fans may not have the access to geeky clothing. . . . So for me, I dress differently because I know where to go to buy my clothing. I search for it on a daily basis. Others may not know where to go.

Gale remarked the she was “thrilled to have access to exactly the clothes I like and the references I like instead of relying on Hot Topic to tell me what is in.” She stated that she buys t-shirts “from individual designers on sites like Redbubble [(Redbubble, n.d.)] or Lookhuman [(Print Syndicate, Inc., 2016)]” where “the designs are a little more individualized and it's much more fun to play with the kinds of references and motifs available that way than, say, shopping at Hot Topic.” Nicole noted that that she searches for “older looking tee-shirts, rather than the new ones that just came out,” and often finds them at garage sales and second-hand stores.

e. Different repertoire. Participants’ fan dress differed because they each had a unique selection of fan dress items within their repertoire. Two participants pointed this out when explaining how no two inspired ensembles are alike. For example, Briar stated, “Closet cosplay is different for everyone, since no two people have the exact same selection of clothes and jewelry.”

Two participants stated that their fan dress differed from others because of their gender. Briar stated, “In one sense I'm different because I'm a girl. A lot of my geeky shirts, especially
the *Star Wars*, *Harry Potter*, and *Avenger*-themed ones I found in the boy's section of Target.”

This implied that she does not dress like other female fans within her fandom, because she opted to wear t-shirts designed for male fans.

**f. Same shirt or item.** Five participants indicated through six statements that they owned the same shirt or item or same kind of item as other fans. For example, Nicole responded, “How am I the same? Every now and then you buy a t-shirt that everybody else has.” Jasmine noted that when she visited Harry Potter World, she realized that “every other person in the park” was wearing a Hogwarts t-shirt. Marie and Courtney explained that owning the same item as other fans is not undesirable. Marie stated, “Finding someone in the crowd wearing the same shirt/dress/bag is pretty amazing. Cheering and squeeing is usually involved from both sides.”

Three participants indicated through three statements that they own similar types of fan dress items, such as t-shirts. Paige stated, “In some ways I'm pretty similar to other fans in that I wear a lot of the T-shirts (granted I don't own near as many as some people) and accessories that other fans do.” Miriah discussed how some clothing categories that she wore was common among other fans her age:

I have a few hoodies in my wardrobe, which is fairly common for fans to have as they're easily accessible to buy and all. . . . I wear a lot of leggings. . . . Lots of girls my age wear geeky leggings (galaxy prints, mermaid prints, maps from our fav shows, etc.), so that's common enough.

Two participants mentioned that their dress was similar to other fans because they shopped at similar retailers. Cagen stated, “Well I get most my stuff from Hot Topic, so I imagine there's a huge percent of people wearing the same stuff out there.” Additionally, one participant, Denise, pointed out, “In general, I have a lot in common with people who are into
geek fashion (i.e., wearing geek themed accessories as part of a chic outfit). I also have a lot in common with people who put together character themed outfits.”

vii. Other social motivations. While no participants stated that their spouses directly motivated them to wear fan dress, eight participants indicated that their spouses and family influenced or shared their fandom. Twelve statements and five photographs were coded as “spouse or family.” When talking about the types of characters Jen admired, which included male characters from an anime series, she stated, “My husband is a huge influence on my fandom.” Both Emma and Beth stated that superhero shows and films, such as Marvel and DC Comics, were those that they enjoyed and shared with their husbands. Beth stated, “Most of my interest in, say, the Marvel movies and things like that comes as something I do with him [her spouse].”

Therefore, it is likely that shared interest with family served as another social motivation for wearing fan dress. Denise mentioned that she and her husband attended a geek meetup where they both wore fan dress. Piper mentioned that she and her husband sometimes wear their matching My Neighbor Totoro! shirts at the same time and mentioned working with him in the future to put together cosplays from Dr. Horrible's Sing Along Blog. Lynn and Valerie explained that they influenced their spouse or children’s involvement in fandom and wearing fan dress. Likewise, Valerie stated, “I've been a fangirl all my life. No assembly required lol!!” The participant explained that although her spouse was very supportive of her interests in her science fiction and fantasy fandoms, as well as her interest in wearing fan dress, he did not initiate her interests in these things. She also mentioned that she supported her children’s’ interests in science fiction and fantasy fandom, “My boys are also ‘geeks’ in their own rights. Fandom is
much celebrated in our house. Follow what you love, and love will follow you...I've always told my boys that.” Beth stated that she, her spouse, and her children dressed up to see *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (Abrams, McGatlin, Harper, Burk, & Kennedy, 2015) and that “it was so much fun and we were all geeking out and squealing all through the movie.” Lynn and Beth designed, made, or sewed some of their own fan dress items and noted that they did the same for their children. Lynn explained, “I've even made geeky shirts for my toddler,” and Beth explained that she sewed an *Avengers* dress for her daughter’s eighth grade graduation ceremony. Georgia also indicated that she dressed her children to reflect her interests in science fiction and fantasy fandom.

**Impression Management**

Participants engaged in impression management by adjusting the amount and types of fan dress worn within certain situations and settings. Participants engaged in impression management for two primary reasons, which were to subvert fan and fangirl stereotypes and to be perceived positively by dressing appropriately for the situation. The number and percentage of participants citing each reason are shown on Table 7.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impression Management</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subvert Stereotypes</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Perception</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>75.76</td>
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**Subverting stereotypes.** Eight participants expressed concern for subverting fan and fangirl stereotypes, and this was indicated through a total of 15 statements. For example, Irene explained that she did not feel comfortable wearing fan dress in all settings because she did not want the fan stereotype to be applied to her so she stated, “I'm careful not to only be the ‘fandom
girl’ because I feel like that pigeonholes me into a place I don't want to be, especially as a librarian.” The motivations of impression management were evident in statements concerning the age appropriateness of fan dress and the influence of male-dominated fandoms and the social acceptance of fandom on fan dress.

i. **Age appropriateness.** Three other participants made a total of 11 statements that indicated that they were concerned for appearing age-appropriate and consequently limited their fan dress to avoid appearing juvenile or immature. For example, Haley said:

> I don't want to go over the top wearing clothing and accessories that would make me appear to be wearing some type of costume or like a young child who dressed in clothes that are covered in her favorite characters.

She later explained that she refrained from wearing her fan dress in some settings. Like Haley, Cagen expressed concern for how others would treat her and chose only to wear inconspicuous forms of fan dress, as a result. She explained:

> I think the subtlety has something to do with not wanting to stand out and be socially acceptable. I don't want people to perceive me as immature and not take me seriously. Some people think if you’re a mature, serious adult, you would wear "normal" clothes and jewelry.

Haley, Cagen, Lynn, and Piper mentioned that their youthful appearances played a role in their concern for appearing age-appropriate. Lynn, who worked as a high school science teacher, stated that she refrained from wearing her busy print dresses to parent-teacher conferences, because “I look fairly young, so I don't want to give parents any reason to doubt my professionalism.” Although several participants praised the current retail market for offering more fan dress options to women in recent years, participants felt that female fan dress “still leans towards a more juvenile appearance.” This highlighted the need for more mature, professional, and subtle women’s fan dress garments on the retail market.
ii. Male-dominated fandom. Five participants made a total of seven statements referring to science fiction and/or fantasy male fans or male-dominated fandoms. Two participants mentioned male fans’ responses to their fan dress, which provided some evidence that participants may feel the need to manage impressions in the presence of male fans. Lynn said:

 Almost every interaction I've had with another fan who saw me wearing a geeky garment has been with a male. . . . some have been like the stereotypical "prove to me you deserve to be a fan" but most are really cool and just want to geek out together. . . . that's one of my huge beefs with fandoms that trend male.

However, while these participants experienced negative interactions with male fans, they did not indicate that it inhibited them from wearing fan dress. In fact, interactions with male fans motivated participants to wear fan dress even more. Lynn stated that she was “trying to say that it's okay to be a girl geek” by wearing her fan dress. In a similar manner, Miriah said that her fan dress was “a kind of visual evidence to either the 'fanboys' who want to test my actual love of a thing.”

Two participants felt that the accessibility of female fan clothing related to typically male-dominated fandoms, such as Star Wars, was evidence of the acceptance of female fans in these fan cultures. The accessibility of female fan clothing has gotten better in the last several years.” Anna commented, “We [women] can wear our fandom as women now more than ever and now it's impossible to say women aren't fans of franchises.” Perhaps these statements combined with the rare mention of male fans and male fandoms provide evidence that the participants were not concerned with the subversion of the fangirl stereotype. This may be due in part to the growing social acceptance of fandom in general.

iii. Social acceptance of fan dress. Eight participants made a total of nine statements regarding the contemporary social acceptance of fandom. Overall, participants did not indicate
that there was a stigma attached to their fan dress. Georgia indicated this directly when she stated, “There's no stigma for me with these items, regardless of where I am or who I'm with.” Six participants indicated that wearing fan dress is more acceptable today than it was in the past. For example, Hillary stated, “Growing up, it wasn't always cool to be in love with this stuff. . . . Now that it's more accepted, it's really just part of my self-expression.” Gale explained that when she was a teenager, “you had to be brave to be sixteen and wearing a Sailor Moon t-shirt” and later noted, “I love that it is more socially acceptable to be weird in that way than it was when I was a kid.” Briar explained that she felt “more comfortable now” wearing fan dress than when she was younger, in part because of her “age and the discovery of other like-minded people,” as well as the fact that she felt “that geeks have become so much more mainstream than ten years ago.”

As Briar’s and Gale’s responses above indicated, some participants felt more comfortable wearing fan dress as an adult than they did when they were adolescents, and therefore, may have only perceived wearing fan dress to be more acceptable in contemporary society. Like Briar, Regan suggested that it could be both. The participant explained that she had not received as many negative responses to her fan dress “in the past decade or so, but in primary school ‘geek’ clothing wasn't nearly as accepted as it is today. That was also when my fashion wasn't as on point as it is now.” Jen stated that the social setting was more of a determining factor for what kinds of fan dress she wore rather than the social stigma attached to fan dress. This was also indicated in responses pertaining to the situations and settings in which participants chose to wear conspicuous and inconspicuous forms of fan dress.
Positive perception. Participants also engaged in impression management to be perceived positively by others. This positive perception was achieved by dressing appropriately for the situation. Twenty-five participants made a total of 56 statements indicating that they wore fan dress in any situation or setting, because they had a range of fan dress items appropriate for multiple situations and settings. For many participants the appropriateness of fan dress items for certain situations depended on the subtlety of the item and the casual or formal nature of the item. Participants noted that there were some fan dress items that were appropriate for all situations and settings because of their subtlety.

i. Subtlety. Several participants indicated that IFD was suitable to wear for many situations and settings. Hillary said, “There aren’t any places or situations where I wouldn’t wear any fandom items on purpose. I can fit them into pretty much every bit of my wardrobe.” Lacey, who primary wore IFD, stated, “I would wear these items anywhere and everywhere. I don’t think anything I have is too crazy to not use in everyday life.” Most participants implied that they would style their dress to appear more subtle in situations and settings wear conspicuous fan dress was not appropriate. For example, when asked the two questions, “When and where would you wear these items? Why?” and “When and where would you not wear these items? Why,” Denise responded, “It’s more of a question of what to wear where and how subtle to make it.” When asked, “How would you wear or style these [fan dress] items differently depending on the situation?,” Valerie responded, “I would wear/style things differently depending on the function itself; how subtle I could be with it and still express myself, etc.”

ii. Fan dress items worn in all settings. Nine participants indicated through 12 statements that some fan dress items could be worn everywhere and in any situation or setting.
These included body modifications, such as makeup and fragrances. Jen indicated that she would feel comfortable wearing makeup inspired by a character in any situation, and Valerie said, “makeup or fragrance I would wear anywhere, anytime, because no one would notice its connection to fandom, anyway.” She explained that this included the “new Cover Girl cosmetics line for Star Wars.” One participant, Lacey, felt that even her tattoo could be exposed in almost any situation. She stated that she usually tried “to wear clothing that allows my nerdy tattoo to be in view,” and later explained, “I'm not sure I wouldn't NOT wear fan items to anything. My tattoo is always with me, so that is going to be shown most of the time.”

Accessories and jewelry were more frequently cited as fan dress items that could be worn anywhere. Natalie stated, “I carry my Tardis purse [Doctor Who] with me everywhere I go.” Valerie explained that because her “jewelry is a bit more subtle” she felt like she could “'get away with it,'” as well as “some of the scarves, pins, etc.” that she wore. “Alice explained, “No matter what situation I'm in though, I always feel comfortable wearing a necklace.” However, Hannah pointed out that “anything with symbols on it” is an exception.

Participants indicated that inspired jewelry (indirect IFD), in particular could be worn in any situation. Gale referred to stacking her “earrings with moons and stars and a big dipper” that were representative of Sailor Moon when she stated, “I would wear a ‘fan item’ in any situation that fit my mood, honestly. As I mentioned, even down to playing with my earrings to give me a laugh or a smile.”

iii. Casual or formal nature. Several participants noted that they owned range of casual and dressy fan dress items. Cagen remarked that she would wear fan dress “anyplace anytime be [because] I have fancy fan stuff and casual fan stuff.” Jen explained, “I personally do not think
there is a right or wrong time to wear anything. Obviously there are some situations where you cannot wear themed shirts, but that's when I like to get creative with regular clothing.” When asked, “When and where would you wear these items? Why?” Valerie noted:

I guess the main thing is the formality of the situation. I wouldn't feel comfortable wearing pieces that are fan-oriented at things like I said before - funerals, weddings, etc., only because I think those situations require a different "level" of attire, and are not appropriate for those types of situations.

Miriah also indicated this:

Just like with the normal fashion world, there are just general rules and standards, and I treat my geek fashion in the same vein. I don't wear a geeky t-shirt to a wedding that would ask for a cocktail dress that is inspired by a character.

**Settings and Situations where fan dress was limited.** Other forms of fan dress were limited to some situations and settings. Settings in which participants wore limited fan dress (no or minimal fan dress) included: (a) professional settings, which included a range of work settings; (b) settings in which participants would be in the presence of certain people; (c) church; and (d) formal settings, which included weddings and funerals.

**i. Professional settings.** Thirty participants made a total of 95 statements that indicated that they wore no or minimal fan dress in professional settings, which included professional meetings or presentations and conferences, job interviews, and a range of work settings and situations such as important meetings, visits, presentations, average or typical work days, casual Fridays, and weekend workdays. Eight participants made a total of 10 general statements that indicated that they wore no or minimal fan dress or only inconspicuous forms of fan dress in professional settings. Three participants generally indicated that they did not wear or would not wear any fan dress at all in these settings. Beth explained, “There are certain situations where I
wouldn't wear the fan clothing—mostly situations where I want to make a ‘professional’ impression.”

Four participants indicated that in professional settings they would wear only minimal amounts of fan items or would wear IFD only. Alice indicated that she would “tone it down if I have to go to the bank or anywhere to get paperwork done.” Taylor stated that if she were going somewhere professional, she “may add an accessory here and there.” Alice also indicated that she would select IFD items, and “I would be very careful and picky with what fan items I wear for more business centric places such as the bank, offices, job interviews, etc. (A necklace or earrings are fine as long as they are subtle).” Likewise, Hannah said, “In professional situations I would only wear very subtle or vague pieces.”

Three participants indicated through five statements that professional settings included school events and presentations and business presentations and that they would wear no or minimal fan dress or IFD in those situations. Natalie explained that she considered a car show that she planned to attend as a professional event because she would be representing her school:

As long as I'm in my school's shirt, I'll be without fan items because I'm representing THEM instead of myself. While out of my school's clothes I'll be rocking whatever I want because in that scenario I'm representing who I am instead.

Jasmine explained that she occasionally wore her fan dress items to class, but for a school presentation she would wear “a 3/4 sleeve white collared shirt with the Death Eater scarf [Harry Potter]. That way I'm presentable, but have some nerd next to me.” When promoting her own work connected to her small business, she noted that she would avoid wearing noticeable forms of fan dress:

If there is a formal presentation that I need to give, I resist the urge to wear HP [Harry Potter] t-shirts. I also resisted the urge during CoastCon [a fan convention where she
worked as a merchant] because I did not want to associate my work with someone else's. I know that I'm not Loren Bouchard [writer and producer of television series Bob’s Burgers, whose work Jasmine admired] or J.K. Rowling [author of Harry Potter book series] but I wanted my work to stand on its own. I'm sure an HP shirt would have been a good conversation starter but I wanted to look professional, like I was running a small business.

Two participants, Irene and Regan, indicated through two statements that they would not wear fan dress or would only wear IFD to professional conferences.

Six participants made a total of nine statements that indicated they would wear no or minimal fan dress or IFD only to job interviews. Three participants stated that they would wear no fan dress. For instance, Briar responded, “none for job interviews,” and Dawn said she would wear no fan dress items “in front of an interviewer in the job market.” The participant stated that she had worn some fan dress items “to auditions or interviews.” Likewise, Alice stated that she “wanted to tone it down” when she interviewed for her current job at a comic book shop, and explained:

We get a lot of applicants who wear full costumes or dress up top to bottom with their fandom gear—which is great, but not when searching for a job. I wore a simple (but obvious) Sailor Moon necklace and let my application speak for me.

Jeanie, who wore IFD only, which consisted of primarily inspired ensembles, stated, “I don’t recall ever wearing anything fandom related in job interviews, but I have at auditions.” Miriah explained that she “made a Wonder Woman inspired dress that I wore to a job interview because I needed her woman power to get through it.” This suggest that indirect IFD may be the type of fan dress that is most appropriately worn in professional settings. This idea is further supported by participants’ responses regarding fan dress worn at work.

**ii. Work settings.** As previously mentioned, work settings included professional meetings or presentations and conferences, job interviews, and a range of work settings and
situations such as important meetings, visits, presentations, average or typical work days, casual Fridays, and weekend workdays. Overall, 24 participants made a total of 77 statements regarding wearing fan dress in work settings. Seven participants made a total of 12 statements that indicated they would wear no or minimal fan dress to important work meetings, visits, and presentations, which included meetings with supervisors or clients, faculty meetings, and parent-teacher conferences. Three participants indicated that they would not wear fan dress to meetings with their supervisors. As Beth explained, “I probably wouldn't wear a fan item to a work meeting with my superiors (beyond my local office people). It's not the first impression I want to make.” Three participants indicated that they would wear no fan dress while working or meeting with clients or visiting with important people. Marie stated:

> When and where I don't wear these, mostly when I'm working weddings, around commercial clients and when I just have to be professional and not be my fun-loving self. Because my professional image is just as much a key to my business as the images I deliver my clients.

Regan who works as a librarian at a higher education institution explained, “If I know we are having significant people on campus, I tend to dress far more conservatively, and won't wear items like fandom wear.” One participant, Lynn, stated that she did not “wear fan clothing to parent teacher conferences,” although she did for “normal school days.”

When participants chose to wear fan dress in these settings, they were selective. Piper explained that because she worked at a Catholic University where her fellow faculty members are nuns, she will not wear her *Supernatural* necklace because it contains a pentagram.

Over half of the participants (54.54%, \( N = 18 \)) indicated through a total of 57 statements that they wore fan dress on average or typical work days. Only three participants indicated through four statements that they would wear no fan dress to work because they were required to
wear a uniform. Denise stated, “I wear a uniform to work, so I can't wear fan items with that . . . not that I haven't tried to think of ways to get around the rules.” Likewise, Dawn said, “To my sadness, I wouldn't be able to wear it to work or important company meetings . . . because I have to wear a uniform, and that's the rules of my company.” Courtney also explained that although she wore many of her fan dress items at the comic book shop where she worked, she could not wear fan dress items to her “second job” which required her to wear a “specific uniform.” The other participants indicated that they were able to wear fan dress frequently as part of their daily work garb. Taylor stated, “I love to wear my Star Wars apparel and accessories to work because I'm there 75 percent of the time.” Beth explained that her “day job, which is in an office environment,” gave her a reason “to dress up on a daily basis” and wear her fan print dresses.

Six participants indicated through 10 statements that workplace dress codes or guidelines did not prohibit them from wearing fan dress. As Alice, who worked at a specialty anime shop, stated:

I wear them [fan dress items] on an almost daily basis at work. We don’t have a dress code and we are a very casual company - but I think it helps lift up the energy of the store, employees, and customers when we do “represent.” Because we're an anime fandom specialty store, I feel it’s pretty appropriate to dress up.

Lynn said, “I'm really fortunate that my administrators at school don't seem to care when I wear superheroes or dinosaurs to work.” Several participants noted that they were able to incorporate fan dress within established limits of workplace uniforms or dress codes. As Paige explained:

I tend to wear the jewelry a lot more, just due to the fact it's easier to incorporate into other outfits, and even at my normal day job (I’m a customer service associate at [a drug store]) I have to wear a uniform, so being able to wear my fandom jewelry keeps my nerdyness there while still fitting into the uniform guidelines.
Briar explained that her workplace prohibited her from wearing graphic items when she described her workplace as, “not really strict, just not so much a graphic-tee place.”

Two participants noted that their geek fashion items (IFD) fit easily within workplace dress codes. Taylor also described her workplace as “lenient” and stated that as a result, she wore “as many Star Wars items as possible that can pass as ordinary items.” Regan described her university library dress code as “business casual during the week” during the schoolyear and “lax” during the summer, allowing her to wear her casual fan dress items. She explained that her Star Wars “x-wing cardigan “and “lightsaber skirt” from Her Universe fit within her workplace guidelines.

Other participants indicated that they did not wear casual fan dress items, but did not explain that it was prohibited by the dress code. Jeanie, who primarily wore inspired ensembles (indirect IFD), stated that she wore “a lot” of her fan dress items to work and mentioned that “there are things I don't wear to work (i.e. a Guardians of the Galaxy t-shirt).” Others chose to avoid casual fan dress items or use them as a layering piece to achieve a dressier appearance. Courtney explained “At my comic shop, I like to wear a nice cardigan with my graphic shirts to dress it up a little.” Gale stated, “I have worn regular shirts with blazers to work,” and then provided two photographs exemplifying how she styled her casual fan t-shirts to work. She explained that her motivation for styling was primarily that she loved wearing “them with blazers or miniskirts or heels or flats or boots or anything, really, as long as I like the vibe of the outfit.” Piper also explained that she “won't wear my graphic tees while teaching but I'll wear dresses, jackets, and jewelry” that she described as “more dressy and subtle” in order “to maintain an air of professionalism and authority.” Two other participants who worked as educators noted styling
or layering some fan dress items to make them appear dressier. This suggest that some fan items classified as conspicuous, may be made inconspicuous through styling.

Twenty-six participants made a total of 52 statements that indicated that they wore primarily inconspicuous forms of fan dress (IFD) at work. Among the types of IFD worn were: 
(a) geek fashion, which has previously been defined as fan dress items that have a direct reference to a television or film series or film that can pass as fashionable dress items (direct IFD); (b) clothing with obscure references (direct IFD); (c) accessories, particularly small accessories or accessories with secondary logos (direct IFD); (d) inspired accessories, garments, and ensembles (indirect IFD); and (e) body modifications (indirect IFD).

As previously mentioned, geek fashion items (IFD) fit easily within workplace dress codes. Five participants noted wearing geek fashion items by Her Universe to work. Taylor stated, “I also love wearing Star Wars attire to work, especially subtle attire.” Piper stated, “Anything subtle, I can wear to work,” and cited her “Darth Vader dress” [*Star Wars*] by Her Universe as among the professional fan dress items she wore to work. Two participants remarked that they wore Her Universe geek fashion items that were described as subtle or having subtle prints, on casual Fridays, in particular. Anna explained, “On Fridays, which are casual days, I have worn my Marvel *Agents of Shield* pattern dress that is subtle.” Taylor stated, “For my casual Fridays at work, I also love to wear dresses with small and subtle prints” and provided a photograph of her wearing the “Darth Vader dress from ThinkGeek [(ThinkGeek, Inc., 1999-2016)] and Imperial Sweater by Her Universe” (See Figure 34).
In addition to geek fashion items, Piper noted wearing her denim jacket with an obscure *Sherlock* reference (direct IFD) while teaching at work.

Ten participants made a total of 22 statements that indicated that they wore or would wear only fan accessories to work or wore fan accessories to work more frequently than clothing items. Haley stated, “I might wear smaller items in a professional setting, but I wouldn't want them to draw blatant attention or criticism towards me.” Smaller fan dress items often worn were fan accessories. Two participants explained that they would wear fan dress items that were small in size to work.

Two participants indicated that they wore subtle accessories more frequently to work than other types of fan dress. Hillary stated, “I love *Lord of the Rings* type of accessories because they're both beautiful and don't scream what it's from. That means I tend to wear that type of stuff at work more often.” One participant indicated that she would wear a minimal amount of fan accessories to work where she worked as a wedding photographer. She explained that she will wear “some fan items” if her outfit is preapproved by her clients and that this may include
“just having a button or certain accessories,” which she described as “obviously geeky related [like TARDIS earrings].”

Eight participants provided a total of 12 statements that indicated they often wore inspired garment pieces or inspired ensembles, which include inspired ensembles containing direct accessories, to work. Gale explained that she wore her “Sailor Moon inspired dress” and her “Hans Solo trousers” to work “multiple times.” Briar stated, “I do Disneybound and accessorize at work quite a bit!” and explained that she wore “more Disneybounds with a geeky necklace or earrings” (a mix of direct and indirect IFD) to work rather than her graphic t-shirts with obscure references (direct IFD). Denise also noted wearing a fully inspired (indirect IFD) ensemble, “Another day I wore a nice black wool coat and a blue scarf . . . which just happened to look just like Benedict Cumberbatch's Sherlock Holmes.”

Two participants explained that they wore inspired ensembles to work most often because it was the most subtle way of expressing fandom. Irene explained that she wears inspired ensembles “more often than most things,” because “inspired outfits are for me, and usually not visible to anyone else.” Likewise, Jen stated, “I think some of us get stuck in situations where we have 9-5 and aren't able to express our fandoms on a daily basis” and explained that “styling of everyday clothing” was an “alternative outlet” for expressing her fandom in that setting.

Jen also mentioned that makeup was another alternative outlet for expressing her fandom at work. She was among two participants that mentioned having fan-related body modifications in a work setting. Other participants cited body modifications as fan dress items that were subtle enough to be worn or exposed in any type of setting.
As previously explained, two participants stated that they wore geek fashion items to work on casual Fridays. One participant suggested that she wore more conspicuous forms of fan dress on casual Fridays when she stated, “I don't really go all out during the week at work. Maybe a small item or two,” which included accessories such as “a necklace or a pair of earrings or a scarf,” and “Casual Friday at work is an excuse for me to pull out some of the fun things and wear them.”

Two participants indicated through five statements that they wore more casual and/or more conspicuous fan dress items while at work on weekends or summers. Regan explained:

I don't wear the t-shirts or hoodies to work Monday-Thursday due to work dress guidelines. I will wear any of them to work when I'm there on a Saturday or Sunday (minus the hoodie [Star Wars logo hoodie], because hoodies generally aren't work appropriate). I do wear the cardigan, shoes [Star Wars shoes that have the empire and rebel logos on them], and skirt [Her Universe lightsaber skirt] any day of the week.

The participant also stated, “During the summer I actually wear my fandom stuff just as much as I wear my other casual clothes.” Piper said that she wore her “t-shirts and big graphic things” when she is “sewing in the studio [at work] on the weekends,” and later remarked:

I feel most comfortable now wearing them on the weekends when I am sewing in the studio at school. When I am working I feel the most centered and am generally excited to be there doing what I love. Sometimes my students come in and sew too and I don't care if they see me sporting my "Many faces of Dean Winchester" shirt [Supernatural] because this is me being myself outside of class.

iii. Around certain people. Other situations and settings that participants reported wearing no or minimal fan dress included situations and settings where the participants would be around certain people, which included opposing fandoms, conservative or religious individuals, individuals whom participants felt did not like, enjoy, or appreciate fandom.
Six participants reported being unwilling to wear fan dress connected to fandom around fans of an opposing fandom because it could “incite a conflict” (Farah). For example, Paige explained, “If you're going to a Star Trek party with hardcore Trekkies, I wouldn't suggest wearing Star Wars stuff, unless you know they're SW [Star Wars] fans too.” Emma stated that she would not “wear a Star Wars shirt to a Star Trek movie,” and Irene said, “I have a Star Trek shirt, which I’d wear if I was going to a Trek con, but not to see Star Wars.” However, participants did not indicate that they used fan dress to distinguish themselves from members of an opposing fandom. In fact, five participants in this study cited being a fan of both Star Wars and Star Trek. Instead, it was more common for participants to distinguish themselves through dress from other fans within their own fandoms. For example, Jasmine compared herself to other, more intense Star Wars and Marvel fans and explained how she would edit her dress in situations where she would be around them:

I would not wear my Millennium Falcon shirt at any comic book convention. I am a Star Wars fan, but not hardcore. I would not want to be locked into a conversation and have to tell the person that I didn't know who they were talking about. I would never wear my Avengers shirt to one either. Marvel fans are the worst for being pissed that you don't know what is going on in that universe.

Eight participants made a total of 13 statements indicating that they would not fan dress or wear certain fan dress items around certain people other than members of opposing fandoms. Three participants indicated that they would avoid wearing particular fan dress items around individuals whom they described as “conservative” or “religious.” Hannah explained that while most fan jewelry could be worn no matter the situation or setting, some jewelry was an exception and stated, “Occasionally, symbols meant to represent a fandom can be misinterpreted to mean other things. Full Metal Alchemist is an anime with a lot of symbols that
can be considered religiously offensive.” Hillary explained how this impacted her decision in her selection of which fan dress items she wore and remarked, “I would gear the fandom-wear to the situation. I'd likely not wear *Supernatural* gear to see my grandparents, who are very religious. I'd more likely wear something from *Lord of the Rings* because it's prettier and less occult looking.”

Three participants noted that they avoided wearing fan dress around individuals whom they felt disliked or would feel negatively toward their fan dress. For example, Jeanie said that she would not wear her fan dress to “places where I knew people didn't like the fandoms. Kaylee explained that she would be selective of the fandoms she represented if she:

> Was with a friend who had a bad reaction to particular show or movie (like it reminded them of an ex-boyfriend or something they loved with their mom who recently passed away), then I wouldn't wear items from that show out of respect.

Only one participant stated that she would not wear fan dress around individuals who would not recognize it. Hannah stated, “In a setting where no one would understand the fandom references, I wouldn't bother to wear much, if any, fandom attire.” She illustrated a preference for wearing fan dress items around others who would most likely recognize and understand fan references her fan dress presented. As Hannah explained, “Really, I'd wear these when I thought I'd be around people who would understand it.” This preference was shared by others. Piper stated, “I'll mix in my cosplay items if I'm attending a convention or going somewhere where I know I might run in to someone that will recognize it.” Jeanie explained that when she was around her young nieces she sometimes wore “things they recognize, (e.g., my Elsa [Disney’s *Frozen* (Del Vecho, Lasseter, Scribner & Buck & Lee, 2013)] t-shirt or Maleficent [Disney’s *Sleeping Beauty* (Geronimi, 1959)] underwear.”

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iv. Church. Five participants made a total of six statements that indicated that they did not wear or would not wear fan dress to church. Two participants noted that fan dress would be inappropriate in that setting because it could be too distracting and call too much attention to the wearer. Lynn explained that she would avoid wearing what she viewed as her more overt items, such as her dresses with large or busy fan prints, to any event “specifically focused on others,” which included church events. Kaylee explained she “potentially” would not wear fan dress items to church because she was there “to worship the God I say I serve and not bring attention to myself with what I'm wearing and potentially be a distraction to others.” Hillary indicated that wearing clothing with specific imagery could lead to negative consequences. She explained that the same rule regarding wearing jewelry containing symbols around individuals described as religious may be applied to clothing containing such symbols when worn in a church setting.

Two participants’ indicated through a total of four responses that they wore both direct and inspired jewelry (indirect IFD), as well as inspired ensembles to church. Lynn explained that because her inspired jewelry is more subtle, it is less distracting than wearing other types of fan dress, and “Elven jewelry is my fallback for when I want to be subtly geeky at, say, a house of worship, but don't want to be loud.” Briar stated, “I usually don't wear graphic tees at church, but I'll occasionally Disneybound, if the mood strikes me” and that the reason for this was “more of a dress code than fan-related thing.” As previously mentioned, inspired ensembles usually included wearing similar styles of dress or colors worn by specific characters, which is a form of IFD. Briar noted that her Disneybounds involved “wearing a geeky necklace or earrings,” which contained direct references to a Disney character. Depending on the size of these jewelry pieces and whether or not they featured a main logo, these could be classified as IFD.
vi. Formal settings. Formal events such as weddings and funerals were also settings that participants reporting no or minimal fan dress. Twenty participants made a total of thirty-eight statements indicating that they wore or would wear either no fan dress items or only inconspicuous forms of fan dress to formal events. Eleven participants made a total of 19 statements indicating they would not wear fan dress to formal events. This was indicated through such statements as “Where I would not wear them would be certain things like formal events where a uniform is required” (Nicole). This also included statements where participants named specific formal settings in which they would not wear fan dress. For example, Taylor said, “I will not wear fan clothing to a formal dinner,” and Courtney explained that she would not wear her fan dress items “to a fancy dress party or fancy restaurant, or a somber occasion (like a funeral).” Three participants expressed reservations toward wearing fan dress items to weddings. For example, Lynn stated, “I guess the only place I wouldn't wear it [fan dress] to is religious events and weddings, funerals,” and she explained that “it would be inappropriate to draw attention to myself when the event is meant to be celebrating somebody else.”

While most participants who stated they would not wear fan dress to formal events illustrated that they did not feel it was appropriate for the occasion, two participants explained that their reason for not wearing fan dress to formal events was that the fan dress items that they owned and/or wore were simply too casual for formal events. As Natalie explained:

   The only time I'll avoid wearing fan fashion is if I'm representing my school, a professional setting, or a formal/semi-formal setting. That last one is actually only because I don't have any semi-formal or formal items that are fan based.

Alice stated that although “plenty elegant fan wear” was available, “I just don’t wear them typically.”
Three participants cited formal events where fan dress might not be appropriate, but explained that there were some exceptions. One exception was that the fan dress items selected were inconspicuous. Another exception was that the individual being celebrated is a fan. As Paige indicated, “I wouldn't suggest a Darth Vader dress when going to a Funeral as that might not come across well, unless the individual was a major fan.” Kaylee noted:

I've even worn a geek necklace to a funeral before because I knew it was a show that my deceased friend loved. And it was comforting to see others at the memorial doing the same. It actually bonded us even more, taking us out of the sadness to enjoy something together that he loved too.

Twelve participants made a total of 17 statements that indicated that they would wear or had worn fan dress clothing items to formal or special events. These clothing items were often indirect fan dress items, which included inspired garments or ensembles or replica garments. Briar stated “for our wedding anniversary, I made my own version of Peggy Carter (from Agent Carter)'s gold dress, and wore screen accurate lipstick for it.” She explained that this inspired ensemble was “more of a very subtle fan styling, which literally only myself and my husband knew was connected to a fandom.” Cagen stated that she wore Bella’s prom dress [Twilight], a replica garment, to “two weddings, a military formal I was working at and a friend's funeral.” She explained that these were “all very significant events” and that “the more significant the occasion, the more I want to wear something special to me.”

**Situations and settings where fan dress was less limited or unlimited.** Situations and settings in which participants were less selective of the types of fan dress wore (unlimited fan dress) were casual settings and fan settings. Casual settings included settings where participants engaged in a range of leisure activities such as included going out with friends or spouses, going to the movies, dining out, shopping, attending family weekends, going out to a bar or attending
parties, as well as settings in which they carried out daily activities that included running errands, grocery shopping, attending college classes, going to the gym or working out, or lounging at home.

i. Casual settings. In response to the question, “How would you wear or style these [fan dress] items differently depending on the situation?” Paige responded, “I'd say the more casual the setting, the more items that can more easily/freely be worn.” Many other participants supported her statement through their responses to interview questions regarding how their fan dress would differ depending on the situation. Eight participants made a total of 10 statements indicating they were most comfortable wearing fan dress in casual settings. Nicole explained, “I usually wear most of them [fan dress items] just for casual outings, um just because, you know, I get to show myself.” She also noted that she enjoyed wearing fan dress for these occasions because there was no set “criteria” or “uniform” that she was expected to wear. Twenty participants made a total of 41 statements indicating they wore fan dress in casual settings.

An examination of mentions of specific garments worn in these casual settings revealed that most participants particularly preferred wearing direct fan garments (both CFD and IFD) and larger or more noticeable accessories in casual settings. As Courtney, who mostly referred to her “graphic t-shirts” “with a bit more obscure references on them” (direct, IFD), explained, “I do feel more comfortable wearing fan shirts/shoes in more relaxed settings, like just hanging out with friends, or wandering around the city/running errands, since I think of them as my everyday wear.” Jasmine, whose t-shirts contained direct imagery with secondary logos (direct IFD) stated, “I only feel comfortable wearing my HP [Harry Potter] t-shirts if I am running errands,
eating in casual dining restaurants, or going to the movies. I don't feel comfortable in them outside a casual atmosphere.”

**a. Direct CFD.** Two participants noted reserving pieces that they described as recognizable to casual settings. For instance, Georgia stated, “I have a lot of bold, easily recognizable graphic tees, BUT I generally only wear them at home or to yoga class, etc.” Hannah said that she wore “a lot of casual pieces like graphic or logo t-shirts” that she described as “easily recognized and simple.” When she provided photographs of two of these shirts (see Figure 35), she explained, “I wear these sort of things as comfortable clothes when I'm going out with friends. I wouldn't wear these to any important or formal situation.”

![Figure 35. Graphic t-shirts. The Legend of Zelda main logo t-shirt (left) and t-shirt that references a recognizable fandom [Harry Potter] were described by Hannah as “easily recognized” (see Taxonomy of Fan Dress (see Figure 39)). Hannah only wears these fan dress items in casual settings. Photograph courtesy of participant, Hannah.](image)

**b. Direct and indirect IFD.** Direct IFD items were also worn in casual settings. These included t-shirts with obscure references, such as those containing only text. For example, Taylor stated:

I definitely love wearing my *Star Wars* clothes at home. For example, I'm wearing my ‘Ahsoka Lives’ shirt by Her Universe right now and *Star Wars* socks. I also love wearing them to work and to regular errands outside, like shopping and going out with friends to the movies.
Dawn explained that she wore an inspired ensemble containing a “graphic tee and patches from *Neon Genesis Evangelion* [an obscure anime fandom] [direct IFD]” as an “everyday outfit.” She added that she wore it while “grocery shopping, going to dinner with my husband, hanging out with friends.” Dawn also mentioned that she also wore “the graphic tee for athletic gear in the gym.”

Taylor, who wore a great deal of *Star Wars* geek fashion items (previously defined as fan dress items that have a direct reference to a television or film series or film that can pass as fashionable dress items and classified as IFD), explained that in addition to wearing her fan clothing to work, she wore it to “the corner store, going to the supermarket, visiting the doctor—situations like that.”

Farah stated that she often wore “things like the Mocking jay pin [*The Hunger Games*] and the Leaf pin from *The Hobbit* to keep my shawls in place when I go outside” while at home on her farm. In addition to these forms of IFD, she mentioned that the garments inspired by fantasy films [indirect IFD] that she designed and constructed were a part of her “everyday dress if I leave the house,” which include trips to the grocery store (see Figure 36).
**ii. Fan settings.** Fourteen participants made a total of 24 statements that indicated they wore fan dress at fan events, which included fan conventions, film showings, geek girl brunches, theme parks, themed parties; geek/nerd themed bars. Three participants noted that they felt the most comfortable wearing fan dress in these settings. For instance, Alice remarked, “Another place I feel comfortable is at various different conventions. I look at it as ‘We're all oddballs here–who is going to stare?’ in a way I blend into a crowd more that way.” Lacey explained that although she felt the most comfortable in these settings, she is growing more comfortable wearing fan dress in others:

I feel very comfortable wearing these outfits to conventions, Geek Girl Brunch. But it wasn't always that way. The first time is always the most difficult, but the more you do it the more confident you become. Now I can wear anything anywhere and feel confident, happy and fashionable.

Seven participants indicated that their fan dress differed in settings where they were surrounded or were interacting with other fans or geeks. Their dress differed by wearing a greater amount of fan items, wearing specific items not typically worn in other settings, such as costume pieces or more overt pieces, and dressing for the theme of the event.

Three participants indicated that the amount of fan dress items they wore increased in these types of settings. Piper stated, “My husband and I just recently went to a bar called 42 Lounge that's all geek and nerd themed and I wore several fan pieces on purpose because I knew I would be among peers.” Nicole said that when she attended conventions, she wore “more at the same time . . . to show how much appreciation I have for a show” as opposed to when she was “just going out.” Similarly, Anna remarked, “At a convention or Disney park, you turn it all up a notch to all fan items.”
Five participants indicated that they wore fan dress related to the theme of the event. This was particularly true of film showings and/or premiers. Two participants mentioned wearing some of the IFD items they wore in other settings to these events. Lacey explained, “I would wear these items anywhere and everywhere. I don't think anything I have is too crazy to not use in everyday life, but if I'm going to a specific movie, I like to dress in theme.” Following this statement, Lacey provided three photographs of fan dress items she wore to fan events/settings. The first featured an ensemble she wore to see a Star Wars film that featured a graphic top with obscure text-only reference (direct IFD), the second featured a plaid shirt (inspired garment; indirect IFD) she wore to attend a Back to the Future marathon, and the third photograph featured a Sherlock dress with inconspicuous print that she wore to a “Sherlock party” (direct IFD). Additionally, Jen indicated that she wore fan dress items to themed events in addition to everyday settings, “Sometimes I'll wear them to public cinema showings or if there are themed parties. But most of the time I wear them for my own pleasure.” Jen provided a photograph of one of these inspired ensembles that she wore to a Doctor Who-themed birthday party where she and her friends “went out dressed like characters from the show.” She explained that she dressed like the Doctor Who companion Donna.

Jen also mentioned wearing fan dress items that she could not wear to work, but wore in other casual settings to themed events. She provided a photograph of an ensemble made up of direct items related to Doctor Who, which included a graphic t-shirt and pair of graphic leggings, and described it by stating, “Here's one from the Doctor Who Christmas special. My husband and I went to a movie theatre to watch the premiere, and this was my outfit!” (See Figure 37). This suggests, that like casual settings, direct items are more freely worn in fan settings.
Figure 37. Direct fan dress items worn to a themed event. Jen wore direct Doctor Who fan dress items to the premiere of the *Doctor Who* Christmas special. Photograph courtesy of participant, Jen.

Three participants noted wearing select fan dress items that they do not typically wear on a daily basis to themed or fan events and settings. For example, Jasmine explained, “I only wear the sorting hat while we watch HP 1 [*Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (Arnow et al., & Columbus, 2001)]. Because that's when everyone gets sorted. My stepdaughter used to love that when she was little.” The sorting hat is a distinguished prop from the film and could be classified as a costume item, a form of CFD (see Figure 38). This could be the reason Jasmine reserved the sorting hat for this particular occasion. Future researchers should focus on science fiction and fantasy costume and replica items to determine the line between costume or cosplay and fan dress. Briar mentioned that she “dressed up in a costume I put together from a thrift store and went with a big group” to see the new *Star Wars* film, which is a costume that she did not mention wearing in any other settings. Beth stated although she occasionally wore her fan print dresses to the office, she typically did not “wear the fan dresses on a daily basis, but I do like to pull them out from time to time—for Hallowe'en, a significant date (say, May the 4th).” She
described these dresses as “pretty over-the-top, although some more than others—it depends on the style of the dress and the boldness of the fabric. (The Spiderman sundress is a lot less “in your face” than the big, full-skirted Star Wars dress.),” and this was the reason that she did not wear them very often. Beth explained that she wore her “big, full-skirted Star Wars dress” “to see the new Star Wars movie” with her husband and children (see Figure 38). She indicated that she typically attracted a great deal of attention when wearing her fan print dresses, even when the print was inconspicuous. This particular dress may be classified as direct CFD due to its bold pattern that references an extremely visible fandom [Star Wars]. Therefore, it could be concluded that CFD items are more freely worn in fan settings.

Figure 38. Fan dress items worn mostly in fan settings. Jasmine only wore her sorting hat while watching the film in which it is featured (left). Beth wore her Star Wars fan print dress, which she described as more “over-the-top” than others, to see Star Wars: The Force Awakens (Abrams, McGatlin, Harper, Burk, & Kennedy, 2015) (middle and right). Photographs courtesy of participants, Jasmine (left) and Beth (middle and right).
Chapter 5. Discussion

The purpose of this research was to explore women’s motivations for wearing inconspicuous science fiction and fantasy fan dress within various settings and social contexts, and to examine how inconspicuous fan dress (IFD) contributes to a fans’ social and personal identities and personal distinctiveness. Three subsequent research objectives and five research questions were developed. A discussion of the current research results as they relate to the research objectives and research questions will be presented in this chapter.

Thirty-three females who indicated that they had some interest in the science fiction, fantasy, or related genres and wore various forms of fan dress were interviewed online and in-person using an interview protocol with 22 questions that included six demographic questions and 16 questions designed to investigate the objectives and research questions (Appendices B & C). The interview data were managed using NVivo qualitative analysis software and analyzed using the constant comparison as detailed by Creswell (2007), and utilized by Reddy-Best and Pedersen (2015). In this chapter, results relating to participant demographic data, dress demographic data, fan dress merchandise, fan dress consumption sites will be discussed prior to the discussion of the four major emergent themes. The four major emergent themes included types of fan dress, personal motivations, social motivations, and impression management. The emergent themes will and how they relate to the research questions will then be discussed by comparing them to concepts found within a pre-existing theoretical framework, which consist of Dramaturgy, the concept of brand community, and Social Identity Theory.
Demographic Data

In this section, the demographic data related to participants in the current study was compared to demographic data reported in fan culture and brand community literature. Due to the limited amount of demographic data reported in previous research, the data presented here may provide insight into the identity of science fiction and fantasy female fans. Almost half of the participants (45.45%, N = 15) resided within the southern region of the United States, which is not surprising since the researcher was located in this region. Because brand communities are “non-geographically bound” (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001, p. 412), the remaining portion of the participants spanned the United States and Canada. Members of fan cultures are located internationally. Kozinets’ (2001) sample consisted of “self-proclaimed Star Trek fans” from “United States (69 percent), Canada, Brazil, Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Slovakia, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, South Africa, and Japan” (p. 70). Members of the Twilight fan base also spanned international borders (Shipley, 2010).

The total age range of participants was from 20 to 69 years of age. The majority of the sample (66.66%, N = 22) reported that their age fell between 25 and 34, thus, most of the participants were in their late twenties and early thirties. There has been a wide range of ages reported in fan culture literature. For example, in one study, the age range reported for cosplayers within anime fandom ranged from 18 to 29, with the majority of participants being in their early twenties (Taylor, 2009). In another study, the age range of American and British Doctor Who fans ranged from 19 to 24 (Morris, 2013). The age range of Star Trek fans was wider, ranging between 13 and 66 years (Kozinets, 2001). The author noted that 52% of these participants were female.
Three previous studies contained samples of only female fans, and these more closely resembled the wide age range of the current sample. Meggers (2012) surveyed 485 female online media fans of varying genres whose ages ranged from 18 to 64 (p. 51). Shipley (2010) also had a wide age range because the *Twilight* fan base “consists of people from tween years to adults, many of whom are mothers who range in age from their late twenties into their forties,” Shipley (2010) interviewed 23 adult fans, presumably above the age of 18 (p.1). In a separate study of *Twilight* fans, interviews were conducted with 10 female participants ranging in age between 15 and 22, and one participant who was 48 years of age (Thompson, 2009).

Demographic data concerning race, social economic status, and marital status were rarely reported in previous research concerning fan cultures. Although attempts were made to recruit a diverse sample in the current research, the majority of participants reported their race as white/Caucasian (84.85%, N = 28). It is not clear how the current samples’ race compared to others studies on fan cultures. One researcher vaguely implied that male and female participants who identified as a “nerdy fan” or “nerdy *Doctor Who* fan” in Morris’s (2013, p. 54) study, were Caucasian. The author explained that Americans were drawn to fantasy series because the genre has “a distinctly medieval European twinge,” which they felt connected them to their ethnic ancestry (Morris, 2013, p. 54). Another researcher also found that “self-identified nerds” in online chat rooms have been previously reported to be “mostly white, male, middle-class, young, and heterosexual” (Kendall, 1999b, 2000 as cited in Quail, 2011, p. 464). It appears that the female participants in the current research, several of which identified as a geek or nerd, had similar attributes to their previously studied male counterparts in terms of race and socioeconomic status.
The majority of participants reported their socioeconomic status as middle class (45.45%, N = 15) and over half (54.54%, N = 18) of the participants reported that they were married. Marital status was not reported in previous fan culture/brand community literature. However, Thompson (2009) mentioned that one of the *Twilight* fan sites she studied was exclusively for adults who were “25-years or older, a mother, or married” (p. 13).

The occupation of fans was also rarely reported. However, it was found that the majority of anime cosplayers were students, “young adults who, presumably, have not yet established a career” and “predominantly university students with part-time work” (Taylor 2009, p. 43). A sample of American and British *Doctor Who* fans consisted primarily of young people who were university students and graduate students, but also included a college graduate, two US Air Force officers, and an editorial assistant (Morris, 2013). The occupations reported in the present research were less homogeneous as they fell within a range of industries, which included retail, service, education, creative, science/technology, and military, and retired or volunteer. Additionally, there was a smaller number of students in the current research than what was reported in other studies.

**Fan Dress Demographic Data**

Participants were asked what kinds of fan clothing and accessories they wore, why they chose to wear those items, and they were asked to describe the items in detail. Details included the fandom their dress items represented. Participants were not asked to limit the amount of dress items that they described. This resulted in a total of 132 science fiction and fantasy fandoms worn. These included fan dress of unanticipated fandoms, including those surrounding Marvel and DC Comics superhero films based on comic book series and anime. The high level of
interest in Marvel and DC Comics films and film and television series is not surprising due to the rising number of superhero comic book titles that have been adapted to film and become popular in recent years (Majaw, 2015). The same is true of anime, which is defined as animated manga (Japanese comic books) (Majaw, 2015). Meggers (2012) wrote that online media fans “identified 140 different fandoms as their ‘primary fandom’ and were typically multi-fannish, or active in several different fandoms as well as fandom genres (e.g. television, drama, sci-fi, comic book)” (p. 51). Like online media fans, the majority of participants in the current research were “multi-fannish,” as they wore an average of four fandoms each.

**Fan Merchandise and Dress**

In the current research, participants wore fan dress associated with a range of science fiction, fantasy, and a mix of science fiction and fantasy fandoms, which included *Star Wars, Star Trek, Lord of the Rings, The Chronicles of Narnia, Harry Potter, Game of Thrones, Doctor Who, Sherlock Holmes, Supernatural, The Hunger Games* and *Twilight*. These fandoms were anticipated as previous researchers found there was widespread availability of fan merchandise associated with these fandoms (Morris, 2013; Thompson, 2015). Participants wore fan dress items connected to these fandoms in addition to many others, including Marvel and DC Comics superhero television and film series, anime films, and Disney films. The availability of internationally-available Japanese anime and manga merchandise relating to clothing and dress had also been noted (Majaw, 2015; Taylor, 2009). Available adult superhero merchandise related to Marvel and DC Comics films includes that related to *Marvel’s Avengers* and *Guardians of the Galaxy*, although the majority of it was marketed towards male fans (Kinnunen, 2016; Rampy,
The available merchandise related to Disney films has also been documented (Scott, 2013).

Shipley (2010) noted that there was a variety of licensed and unlicensed Twilight clothing and accessories available. Two participants in the current research wore fan dress items relating to Twilight. These included Cagen’s replica of Bella’s prom dress, replica of Bella’s engagement ring, “rubber bracelets, one with Jacob's wolf charm and another with the Cullen lion,” and the Twilight body gel glitter that Valerie wore when the series was popular.

DeRosa (2013) cited many examples of commercially-available Star Wars fashion merchandise including items from Ashley Eckstein’s fashion line Her Universe. Many fan dress items similar to that mentioned by DeRosa (2013) were worn by participants in the current research. As previously mentioned, Star Wars was the most commonly worn science fiction fandom (N = 20), as well as the most commonly worn fandom overall. Participants mentioned wearing a number of Star Wars clothing and accessories, which included clothing items such as t-shirts, sweaters, outerwear such as fashion and active jackets and hooded sweatshirts, yoga pants, and aprons, and accessories such as necklaces, bracelets, earrings, scarves, shoes, socks, and handbags. This may have been the most commonly worn fandom for two reasons. For participants who cited Star Wars as their primary fandom worn, it was apparent that they had developed a lasting relationship with the series and were delighted to take advantage of the increasing amount of Star Wars clothing designed for women. Her Universe was founded in 2009 (Her Universe Store et al., 2016), and the company began with releasing Star Wars merchandise geared towards women and has remained a staple since its founding (Travis, 2013). Another reason for the popularity of Star Wars fandom among the sample may be due to the
release of *Star Wars: Episode VII: The Force Awakens* (Abrams, McGatlin, Harper, Burk, & Kennedy, 2015). The film’s release may have generated excitement among fans and moved them to acquire fan dress related to it and the rest of the series.

**Emergent Themes**

In this section, the relationship among the major themes and how they relate to previous research will be discussed. The four major themes that emerged from the data in current research include *types of fan dress, personal motivations, social motivations, and impression management*. These themes have been evident in previous research. However, these themes are spread across a range of literature and all four themes have not been discussed by any one author. Unlike in previous research, a broad range of fan dress items were examined in this dissertation and classified as direct conspicuous, direct inconspicuous, and indirect inconspicuous. The classification provided deeper understanding of how fans express themselves and their connection to other fans. Several studies and essays have been written that contain descriptions of types of fan dress, but none provided an in-depth understanding of how different types of fan dress function within fan cultures (Barker, 2010; Cherry 2013; DeRosa, 2013; Fuller 2013; Stenger, 2006; Thompson, 2015; Travis, 2013). One study of fan dress acknowledged the complex functions of fan dress within a convention setting (Shipley, 2010). While this study aided in the development of the current research, the author focused only on fan dress with direct references (Shipley, 2010). One essay provided some insight into the role of obscure references within fan cultures (Poore, 2013). One author briefly mentioned that *Doctor Who* fans wore costume pieces that passed as everyday items (Cherry, 2013), a form of fan dress that was classified in the current research as indirect IFD. This practice was not previously explored by
other authors. Therefore, by examining direct and indirect forms of fan dress, the current research provided a more holistic view of female fans’ dress practices.

In the current research, personal motivations for wearing fan dress were uncovered. To some degree, these were similar to personal motivations cited in studies that focused on fan dress and cosplay costumes within convention settings (Chen, 2007; Shipley, 2010; Taylor, 2009), as well as research on handicrafts and hand-crafted merchandise geared towards fans (Barker, 2010; Cherry 2013; Quail 2011). The use of Dramaturgical theory in the current research revealed that participants’ assigned diverse meanings to their dress and communicated aspects of the self, such as personal interests, values, and beliefs. This reflected findings in previous research utilizing Goffman’s (1959) framework (Fuller 2013; Johnson, et al., 2014; Miller-Spillman, 2015; Mun, et al., 2012; Strauss, 2003).

Social motivations for wearing fan dress relating to the Social Identity Theory process were uncovered in the current research. Like members of other brand communities, participants engaged in a type of brand identification by identifying with a character, group of characters, or series (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006; Brown 1997; Fuller 2013; Lam, et al, 2010; Stokburger-Sauer, 2010). Fan dress played an important a role in identifying other fans in the same way that consumption of other types of dress and products had in other fan cultures and brand communities (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006; Brown 1997; Carlson, Suter, & Brown, 2008; Chen, 2007; DeRosa, 2013; Jenkins, 2013; Shipley, 2010; Stokburger-Sauer, 2010; Taylor 2009). The current research provided an understanding of how female fans’ dress contributed to cultural capital and personal distinctiveness and findings were similar to those found in a broad range of research relating to fan cultures, brand communities, and subcultures, as well as women, dress,
and cultural capital (Brill 2007; Brown 1997; Cherry & Mellins, 2012; Guy & Banim, 2000; Holt, 1998; Jenß, 2004; Martin et al., 2006; Mishou, 2015; Schau et al., 2009; Taylor, 2009; Thornton, 1995, as cited in Varner, 2007). In the current study, a better understanding of how fan dress communicated the level or intensity of one’s fandom or devotion was gained. However, as it has been found in other studies, it is still unclear regarding how accurately dress communicates the intensity of fandom (Forde, 2015; Schau et al., 2009; Shipley, 2010).

In the current research impression management served as a motivation for wearing IFD, as well as wearing no or minimal fan dress and wearing IFD only in some settings. Impression management practices have also been noted in fan cultures and brand communities (Brown, Kozinets, & Sherry, 2003; Cherry, 2010; Kozinets, 1997; Kozinets, 2001; Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001; Schau et al., 2009; Shipley, 2010). Participants in the current research engaged in impression management practices typical of brand communities to subvert stereotypes and manage stigmas related to science fiction and fantasy fandom. This has been evident in previous brand community and fan culture research, as well as studies using Goffman’s (1959) Dramaturgy (Booth 2013; Brown, Kozinets, & Sherry, 2003; Cherry, 2013; Jenkins, 2013; Kozinets, 1997; Kozinets, 2001; Lancaster, 2014; Mun, et al., 2012; Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001; Schau et al., 2009; Shipley, 2010). As found in previous studies where impression management among women within different settings was studied, participants in the current research also engaged in impression management to make a positive impression in general and to build cultural capital, which contributed to personal distinctiveness (Guy & Banim, 2000; Montemurro & Gillen, 2013; Mun, et al., 2012).
Research Objectives and Research Questions

In the following section, the emergent themes will be discussed in relation to the three primary research objectives, which included:

1. To explore science fiction and fantasy female fans’ motivations for wearing IFD within various settings and social contexts.

2. To examine how science fiction and fantasy female fans’ IFD contributed to their social identity.

3. To investigate how science fiction and fantasy female fans’ IFD contributed to the construction of their personal identity and distinctiveness.

The next section was organized in accordance with the research questions and sub-questions that were informed by these research objectives.

Motivations

To respond to the first objective, which was “To explore science fiction and fantasy female fans’ motivations for wearing IFD within various settings and social contexts,” one research question and two sub-questions were answered. This first research question was, “What are female fans’ motivations for wearing inconspicuous fan dress?” Female fan’s motivations for wearing inconspicuous fan dress included both personal and social motivations. Personal motivations included the communication of fandom, self-expression, creative self-expression, and emotions derived from meanings that participants personally assigned to their dress. Social motivations included the identification with a character, group of characters, or series, identification as a nerd or geek, identification with others, distinction from others, and sharing interest with spouses and/or family.
Prior to this research, much of the research regarding fan dress was not focused on everyday fan dress. Because previous authors briefly mentioned fan dress while focusing on other topics such as costumes worn at such conventions as ComiCon and Cosplay (Chen, 2007; Taylor, 2009), consumption of comic books (Brown, 1997), and online fan cultures (Stenger, 2006), previous literature provided some insight regarding the motivations for wearing conspicuous fan dress. Motivations gleaned from previous literature included the exploration of personal identity, role-playing, the communication of fan identity, interaction with other fans, displaying level of devotion, and “team projects” (Chen (2007, p. 18). As evidenced above, motivations uncovered in the current research included these motivations, in addition to some others and served as motivations for wearing conspicuous fan dress (CFD) and inconspicuous fan dress (IFD) alike. As anticipated, impression management served as a motivation for wearing IFD.

**Personal motivations.** The personal motivations, *communication of fandom, self-expression, creative self-expression,* and *emotions derived from meanings* were motivations uncovered in the current research that related to motivations reported in previous research.

**i. Communication of fandom.** The communication of fandom was a personal motivation related to the communication of fan identity. It was anticipated that participants in the current research would wear fan dress to communicate fan identity, which entailed communicating one’s interest in or consumption of a source of media (Brown, 1997; Cherry, 2013; DeRosa, 2013; Fuller, 2013; Shipley, 2010). As anticipated, participants wore fan dress to communicate fandom. This was a primary motivation in which participants perceived their dress as a nonverbal form of communication of a source of media that they liked, loved, enjoyed, or
supported. For example, Karen stated, “When I wear the . . . dresses, like the Doctor Who or Batman dress, it's definitely broadcasting my love for those shows.”

**ii. Self-expression.** Participants in the current research used IFD to build personal identity, as well as a means of personal *self-expression*. Barker (2010) wrote that Jane Austen-related products allowed Jane Austen fans to express themselves creatively and explore their identities. Participants borrowed elements from the identity of a series or character or adopted a geek identity to create their own unique identity. For example, Jeanie explained that her subtle “bound looks” reflected her personality in addition to showing her support for a “character or look” that she loves. Participants reported that expressing themselves in this way provided them with a sense of authenticity. Bronies, male fans of the series My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic, felt that characters from the television show provided “an avenue for authentic self-expression because Bronies were able to express select aspects of themselves that they shared with characters within the series (Robertson, 2014).

**iii. Creative self-expression.** Participants also used fan dress as a means of *creative self-expression*, which included exhibiting creative skills. Beth explained that she “always enjoyed making a statement” with her clothes and that she enjoys receives “a lot of attention and compliments” when wearing the fan print dresses she made. Chen (2007) noted that anime/manga cosplayers derived satisfaction from the attention and compliments they received on costumes they created.

**iv. Emotions derived from meanings.** Emotions derived from meanings that participants personally assigned to their dress was a motivation for wearing fan dress. For example, Miriah wore her Game of Thrones Khaleesi top [indirect IFD] because it represented a powerful female
character and provided her with a sense of empowerment. Fan clothing and dress functioned much like tattoos with spiritual meaning in Mun, et al.’s (2012) study of women’s tattoos. The authors found that “participants thought their tattoo gave them emotional support, strength, and protection” (Mun, et al., 2012, p. 140).

Based on previous literature, it was speculated that some participants’ motivations would mirror those for wearing costumes for Cosplay, which included role-playing (Cherry, 2013; Stenger, 2006). This implied that the fans attempted to take on the identity and engage in a particular character’s behaviors by wearing dress connected to the character. In the current research, it was more common that participants drew on a character’s attributes, but did not try to become the character completely. Therefore, instead of role-playing, a motivation for dressing in cosplay (costume), emotions derived from meanings, which included emotional boost, a sense of empowerment, comfort, and inspiration, served as a motivation for wearing fan dress.

**v. Other personal motivations.** Motivations related to an attribute or the performance of a piece of fan clothing included functional and aesthetic needs (Lamb & Kallal, 1992). These motivations may be linked to women’s concerns for exercising power and control over their appearance, which were partially dependent on “the clothes performing as expected” (Guy & Banim, 2000, p. 324). Clothes did not perform as expected when they “produce[d] unanticipated negative reactions or that create unfavourable impressions about the wearer” (Guy & Banim, 2000, p. 319). “Clothes” referred to entire outfits, as well as individual clothing items (Guy & Banim, 2000). The performance of clothes depended on “specific aspects,” which included the ability to resist creasing, as well as “colour, style or length” (p. 318). Therefore, the performance
of clothing depended on both functional and aesthetic aspects. For participants Piper and Jeanie, clothes performed well if they showed off their figures to their advantage.

**Social Motivations.** Social motivations are those that relate directly to the Social Identity Theory process. Social motivations included the *identification with a character, group of characters, or series, identification as a nerd or geek, identification with others, the facilitation of interaction distinction from others, and sharing interest with spouses and/or family.* These motivations are briefly discussed below and will be discussed in-depth later in this chapter.

The social motivations *identification with a character, group of characters, or series,* and *identification as a nerd or geek,* related to the exploration of personal identity that was evident in previous research. It had previously been found that fans used fan merchandise and dress to experiment with personal identity, which entailed identifying oneself with “a film or television brand” (Quail, 2011, p. 465) or character (Barker, 2010).

**i. Identification with a character or group of characters.** Participants wore fan dress, particularly IFD that was connected to specific characters to show that they identified with or aspired to identify with them. For example, because Nicole felt that she had “many aspects with the character Anastasia,” she wore her “jewelry box necklace,” as well as “boots and hair styles” based on the character. The practice of wearing fan dress connected to a specific character may be similar to cosplayers dressing up in costume to express their admiration for specific or favorite characters (Chen, 2007).

**ii. Identification with a series.** Some participants indicated they wore fan dress (CFD and IFD) to *identify with a series.* In such cases, there was a specific element of the series that the participant admired and identified with. For example, during the interview Alice described
herself as “a very imaginative person.” When asked, “How do you use clothing/accessories to identify with a film, TV series, or character?,” she responded that she was more “attracted to the universes the series present,” because it “gives my imagination a chance to run wild.” Like Star Trek fans who adopted values from the television series, such as its utopian ideals regarding diversity, participants aspired to adopt certain attributes from the series they admired (Kozinets, 2001). More often, participants used attributes from the show that related to their own personalities to express that part of the self.

iii. Identification as a nerd or geek. Other participants indicated that they used their fan dress to communicate nerd or geek identity rather than their relationship to specific series or characters. Some individuals bought fan dress connected to the film Napoleon Dynamite to identify with the image of a nerd as it was portrayed in the film (Quail, 2011). For some, donning dress connected to films and television series known to be geeky was a way of identifying as a geek or a nerd in general. However, the geek identity sought out by participants in current research aligned with McArthur’s (2009, p. 62, as cited in Robertson, 2014, p. 22) definition of geeks:

Geeks are typically characterized as enthusiasts of board games, videogames, the genres of science fiction and fantasy, cartoons, comics, anime, manga, computer programming, and the internet in general.

This was evident when Regan explained that she identified as a geek because it related “entirely to my love of sci-fi/fantasy and gaming,” and Beth described herself as a “fantasy nerd” and later indicated that she used her fan dress to communicate her relationship to a range of science fiction and fantasy series rather than being “totally about one fandom.” Clearly, among the participants, being a nerd or geek was not considered a negative identifier.
iv. Identification with others. Participants not only wore fan dress to communicate their interest in a film or television series, or character, but also to identify with other fans. As Courtney explained, “I think of it as a way to identify as a geek/nerd. To show others that I might be part of their tribe.” As described in previous research, the communication of fan identity, entailed communicating one’s affiliation with a fan culture (Brown, 1997; Jenkins (1992) in addition to one’s interest in or consumption of a source of media (Brown, 1997; Cherry, 2013; DeRosa, 2013; Fuller, 2013; Shipley, 2010). Wearing fan dress was a way of identifying with a specific character, while simultaneously identifying with other fans (DeRosa, 2013).

v. Facilitation of interaction. The facilitation of interaction was a function or result of wearing fan dress, but also served as a motivation for wearing it. Participants in the current research provided many stories about how their fan dress, including IFD, brought them into contact with other fans. For example, Hillary explained:

One day, I decided to wear one of my Harry Potter t-shirts out to lunch. It wasn't an overly blatant design, but it showed each of the horcruxes created by Voldemort in a pattern with the title “Horcrux Hunter” across the top. When I walked in, the young hostess jumped up and down, excitedly exclaiming that she loved my shirt. I thanked her and chatted with her a bit.

Participants, especially those that described themselves or fellow fans as “shy” or “introverted, noted that their fan dress also provided them with a source of conversation.

The facilitation of interaction was another social motivation uncovered in the current research that related to the communication of fan identity. DeRosa’s (2013) narrative in which he described his experience wearing his hat with a “Captain America shield on it” provided some insight into how fan dress aided in facilitating interaction. The author noted his surprise when “strangers” frequently approached him to compliment his hat (DeRosa, 2013, p. 25). The
findings in the current research provide empirical support for DeRosa’s (2013) claim that fan
dress was a “nonverbal form of communication to others that says whether or not you are into
this world, we have something to talk about” (p. 25). Knowledgeable about this function of fan
dress, participants wore fan dress to provide them with a topic of conversation in uncomfortable
social settings.

vi. Distinction from others. Another motivation for wearing fan dress uncovered by this
research was the distinction from others. Participants wore fan dress to gain distinction from both
non-fans and fans. Participants did this through unique personal styling or wearing IFD, DIY fan
dress, and atypical fan dress items. Because these practices align with gender expectations within
mainstream culture (Guy & Banim, 2000) and “feminine competencies” within fan culture,
participants were allowed to gain personal distinctiveness and build cultural capital in both
mainstream and fan culture (Cherry, 2013, pp. 107-108). The use of feminine competencies to
gain cultural capital was a finding not evident in fan culture brand community, and subculture
research (Brill, 2007; Schau et al., 2009, p. 38; Kozinets, 2001). This is perhaps due in part to
cultural changes taking place in recent years, such as social acceptance of fandom (Jenkins &
Scott, 2013).

vii. Other social motivations. Other social motivations uncovered in the current research
included sharing interest with spouses and/or family. Participants coordinated their fan dress
with their spouses and children for fan events. For example, Beth stated that she, her spouse, and
her children dressed up to see Star Wars: The Force Awakens (Abrams, McGatlin, Harper, Burk,
& Kennedy, 2015). Participants additionally indicated that they supported other family members’
interests in science fiction and fantasy fandom and engaged in other activities involving fan
dress, such as making and sewing fan dress items for their children. For this reason, *sharing interest with spouses and/or family* is counted as another motivation for wearing fan dress. Previous researchers reported that groups of individuals coordinated their costumes or fan clothing to attend fan events, which included anime/manga conventions and *The Official Twilight Convention*, to enhance the social experience (Chen, 2007; Shipley, 2010; Taylor, 2009).

**Dress Practices and Social Contexts**

The sub-question, “How do their dress practices differ within various settings and social contexts?” will be addressed by discussing the differences in participants’ dress practices within various social contexts in relation to “*dramaturgy*” (Goffman, 1959; Kaiser, 1985), the theory offered by sociologist Erving Goffman (1959). Participants’ dress practices differed across settings and situations. Sometimes the participants chose not to wear fan dress, limited the amount of fan dress worn (for instance, accessories only) or selected different types of fan dress, which included direct inconspicuous fan dress (dress that referenced a source of media directly through imagery or text that is not easily recognizable), and indirect conspicuous fan dress (dress that referenced a source of media indirectly through design that is not easily recognizable).

Selecting different types of fan dress also included being selective regarding the particular fandom that was represented. For example, several participants noted that symbols connected to some fandoms appear “occult looking” (Hillary) and would not wear accessories or clothing containing those symbols to church or while in the company of individuals who might have misinterpreted or been offended by them.
Goffman (1959) claimed individuals create identities according to their roles within different social environments like actors who create their characters in theater by dressing and acting a part based on the expectations of their role. Based on their roles, participants generally indicated that they would gear their fan dress to the situation by selecting fan dress items according to what was viewed appropriate for the situation. In many cases, this depended on the casual or formal nature of the item addition to its subtlety.

**Fronts.** Wearing no fan dress, limiting the amount of fan dress worn, or selecting different types of fan dress may be considered a *front* or a *personal front*, employing “expressive equipment” (Goffman, 1959, p. 22). In the current study participants “intentionally employed” fronts in a range of settings and social contexts to communicate something about themselves, while employing it in a manner appropriate for the situation.

Apart from expressive equipment such as dress, personal fronts consist of appearance-related demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, and race (Chaney & Gaulding, 2015, p. 2). The demographic characteristic, age, in particular, influenced participants’ motivations and dress practices relating to fan dress as it had in previous research exploring impression management among women (Montemurro & Gillen, 2013, p. 178). Several participants were concerned with appearing age-appropriate since a great deal of commercial fan dress items were considered too “juvenile” in appearance for them to wear (Kaylee). They did not want to fulfill the stereotype connected to popular fan cultures and/or geek cultures in which they would be perceived as “childish” and “immature” (Brown, 1997, p. 18) or ‘incompletely adult’” (Kendall, 1999, p. 263, as cited in Robertson, 2014, p. 22). The need to appear age-appropriate led
participants to employ fronts and played a key role in their decisions selecting fan dress in
general, as well as when, where, and how much or how little should be worn.

**Setting.** Setting refers “to the scenic parts of expressive equipment” and Goffman (1959) differen-
tiated the types of settings in which social interaction occurs by describing them either as the “front region” or “back region” (pp. 107, 112).

In this research, it was anticipated that the front region included “conservative settings” such as workplaces where the overt expression of fandom may not be appreciated in the same respect when worn in more private, leisure settings (Eicher & Evenson, 2015). It was also anticipated that the front region would be any setting wherein members of the mainstream public are located. This anticipation was based on brand community and fan culture research wherein authors have claimed members take part in impression management practices to avoid being perceived as a stereotypical fan (Brown, Kozinets, & Sherry, 2003; Kozinets, 2001; Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001; Schau et al, 2009; Shipley, 2009). Additionally, researchers have claimed that for women, the front region was made up of multiple social settings, with very few settings being classified as the back region (Buse & Twigg, 2014; Guy & Banim, 2000). The current examination of fan dress practices revealed that the line between the front and back regions were not clear and difficult to define. Based on this examination, settings where fan dress was most limited were defined as the front region and settings where fan dress was less limited or unlimited were classified as the back region.

i. **Front region.** In the current research, settings and situations where participants limited their fan dress may be considered the front region. These generally included professional settings, consisting of a range of work settings, settings in which participants would be in the
presence of certain people, church, and formal settings such as weddings and funerals. In the front region participants actively tailored their expressions of fandom to be more subtle. For example, some participants chose to wear no fan dress items “in front of an interviewer in the job market” (Dawn) or to “funerals, weddings, etc.” (Valerie). Some participants chose to wear minimal fan dress in these settings. For example, Alice stated that she “wanted to tone it down” when she interviewed for her current job at a comic book shop, so she wore a “simple (but obvious) Sailor Moon necklace.” Participants chose to wear IFD only in some professional situations, such as an average or typical work day. Taylor stated, “I also love wearing Star Wars attire to work, especially subtle attire.” This attire consisted of geek fashion items (direct IFD) by Her Universe. Irene explained that she wore inspired ensembles (indirect IFD) more often to work and stated that they were “always work appropriate.” When the front region also consisted of settings where the fan was in the presence of certain people, participants were selective of the fandom they represented through their dress. An example of this included attending events centered on an opposing fandom. Emma stated that she would not “wear a Star Wars shirt to a Star Trek movie.”

As previously mentioned settings may be distinct physical locations. For instance, “lounge and dining areas” served as the “public ‘front’” region in care homes for patients with dementia (Buse and Twigg, 2014, p. 76). For science fiction and fantasy fans, however, the front region was most often defined by the activity taking place (i.e., job interviews) or the individuals present. This has also been the case in previous research. In Mun et al.’s (2012) study of women’s tattoos, the front region was defined by the presence of a department head in the
workplace, family members who would likely disapprove of tattoos, and “conservative places” (p. 144).

ii. Back region. It was clear that participants felt like they could express themselves more freely in casual and fan settings than settings within the front region by wearing CFD. It was anticipated that the back region settings consisted of fan settings such as fan conventions or small gatherings of fans, such as watch parties, where fans gather to watch an airing of the film series or television series. However, for participants in the current study, the back region consisted of casual settings and fan settings. Participants were also able to drop their fronts while participating in leisure activities, included going out with friends or spouses, going to the movies, dining out, shopping, attending family weekends, going out to a bar or attending parties, as well as settings in which they carried out daily activities that included running errands, grocery shopping, attending college classes, going to the gym or working out, or lounging at home. They also dropped their fronts in fan settings that included fan conventions, film showings, geek girl brunches, theme parks, themed parties, and geek/nerd themed bars. These were settings where participants felt the most comfortable wearing fan dress. Haley stated:

I feel much more comfortable wearing my fandom items in casual settings and at events that are specifically created for fantasy and sci-fi fans. In these types of environments, I think it is much more acceptable to be somewhat more uniquely dressed than everyone else.

The greatest difference in back region and front region dress practices, in general, was that participants reserved wearing CFD to back region settings. This was particularly true when comparing dress practices in casual settings (settings where fan dress was less limited) to professional or formal settings (settings where fan dress was limited). For example, Hannah said that she wore her more recognizable graphic or logo t-shirts when “going out with friends,” and
explained, “I wouldn't wear these to any important or formal situation.” For example, Taylor stated that in addition to work, she wore a great deal of *Star Wars* geek fashion items (direct IFD) in a range of casual settings, such as grocery shopping and Doctor’s appointments.

Dress practices differed the greatest in fan settings (settings where fan dress was unlimited) in which participants wore a greater amount of fan items, or wore specific items not typically worn in other settings, such as costume pieces or more overt pieces, to dress for the theme of the event. For example, Nicole said that she wore a greater amount of fan dress items while attending conventions. Jen wore direct fan dress items that may be classified as CFD to a television show premier at a movie theater rather than an inspired ensemble. Likewise, Briar mentioned that she wore a costume to see the new *Star Wars* film. This is not surprising since dressing up for movie premiers and midnight showings is a widely practiced participatory behavior among fans (Balkind, 2014; Mishou, 2015). However, it is surprising that some participants, when given the opportunity for full expression, still chose to wear IFD in such settings. For example, Lacey’s ensemble that she wore to see a *Star Wars* film featured a graphic top with obscure text-only reference (direct IFD).

For science fiction and fantasy fans, settings within the back region were more often defined as distinct physical locations. These included movie theaters, grocery stores, the gym, and participant’s homes. “Smaller and lower” spaces located “at the back of and below the main house, and in the old kitchen offices” served as the “‘backstage’ areas” or back region in care homes for patients with dementia (Buse & Twigg, 2014, p. 78). In the current study, back regions were also defined by the presence of particular individuals. In a similar manner, for women with tattoos, the back region was defined by audiences comprised of like-minded people
who would likely appreciate and enjoy seeing one’s tattoos (Mun, et al., 2012). It may be beneficial to note that casual settings were often defined by the presence of those who knew the participant well, such as “friends and family” (Haley); whereas, fan settings were defined by the presence of those with similar interests, such as “friends that share my fandom” (Irene), or like-minded people. Therefore, the back region was not limited to the presence of other fans.

The differences in dress practices between these two settings are also notable, suggesting that fan settings may be considered to be a true back region and casual settings may be classified as a region in between the front and back region. Eicher and Miller’s (1994) *Dress and the Public, Private, and Secret Self Model* as it was utilized by Miller-Spillman (2015) may be used to address this “in-between region” in future research. On the model, three types of self, “public,” “private,” and “secret,” and three types of dress, “reality,” “fun/leisure,” and “fantasy” are displayed (Miller-Spillman, 2015, p. 167). On this model, it was acknowledged that there are types of dress and settings that allow for various degrees of self-expression.

**Motivations, Dress Practices, and Social Contexts**

The sub-question “How do motivations differ according to their dress practices and setting/social contexts?” will be addressed in this section. The motivations for wearing fan dress in general was the same in all settings. For example, Georgia stated that when she was not at work, she usually wore “t-shirts that depict characters [CFD]–usually female characters–from series I enjoy.” She explained that her fan t-shirts would be “really ‘loud’” and “distracting” if worn at work, but that she would “occasionally wear” them “under a blazer” in that setting. Because the participant used these dress items to nonverbally communicate that she enjoyed watching the series to which the character belonged, it was clear that her motivation for wearing
these t-shirts was to communicate fandom whether she was at home or at work. Therefore, personal and social motivations uncovered by the current research were apparent in all settings where fan dress was limited (professional, formal, around certain people) or less limited (casual), and settings where fan dress was unlimited. In the present research, there were two motivations not apparent in all settings where fan dress was worn. Impression management was an added motivation where fan dress was limited (professional, formal, around certain people) or less limited (casual). A motivation present in fan settings and not in others included celebration of an event theme, which allowed for the full expression of fandom. Although the social motivation distinction from others was evident in all settings, it is especially notable in casual and fan settings because participants expressed this motivation by wearing IFD in settings in which wearing CFD would have been appropriate.

**Impression management.** Impression management is defined as the control an individual exercises “to prevent the audience from seeing backstage and to prevent outsiders from coming into a performance that is not addressed to them” (Goffman, 1959, p. 238), and is a way for an individual to control how others respond to and treat that individual (Lancaster, 2014). The motivation impression management was evident in front region settings, as well as some back region settings (casual settings). The dress practices within these settings that were informed by this motivation included (a) wearing no fan dress items, (b) wearing minimal fan dress, (c) wearing IFD only, (d) wearing selective fandoms, and (e) reserving CFD to back region settings. Participants engaged in impression management most often by controlling the visibility of direct and indirect references in the same way that participants controlled the visibility of their tattoos in Mun et al.’s (2012) study. As evident here, participants engaged in
impression management in more ways than wearing IFD. They did this for two primary reasons that have been noted in previous research. These were to subvert negative stereotypes and to have others perceive them positively (Chaney & Gaulding, 2015; Goffman, 1959; Lancaster, 2014; Mun et al., 2012).

Although the fan stereotype commonly refers to male fans, there was some evidence that participants engaged in impression management to subvert the fan stereotype. As previously mentioned, the concern for appearing age-appropriate and not “infantile” or juvenile may be linked to subverting the fan stereotype. By wearing IFD, one participant wanted to show that she was not a brainless consumer “who will buy anything associated with the program or its cast” and a social misfit “so obsessed with the show that it forecloses other types of social experience” (Jenkins, 2013, p. 10). Nicole explained:

> I try and show myself as a person who enjoys a show enough to buy the merchandise. Again I am not on the obsessive level so I do not walk around decked out in merch. I usually make my accessories and fashion more subtle for the people who actually watch the show rather than those whom have heard or seen of it. IE: inside show jokes or plots.

She also stated that wearing IFD “also helps break the idea of what fans look like for the sci-fi and fantasy world. We don't all look the same. We are normal people you see every day. I like to show that.”

It appears that IFD is an alternative form of fan dress that does not carry the same stigma as more recognizable or visible forms of fan dress, such as CFD, or as Nicole suggested, multiple layers of female fan dress. This supports previous researchers who have shown that certain types of dress reinforced stigmas or stereotypes more than others (Lancaster, 2014; Kozinets, 2001; Shipley, 2010, p. 29). In the *Star Trek* consumer culture, wearing a t-shirt or sweatshirt instead of the *Star Trek* uniform was a way for a fan to show their affiliation with the fan culture without
inviting “ridicule” and reinforcing “stigmatic mainstream perceptions of Star Trek fans” (Kozinets, 2001, pp. 75-76). There is some evidence in previous research that the practice of reducing the amount of fan dress (wearing minimal fan dress items) may be less stigmatic than being completely “decked out in merch.” (Nicole). As previously mentioned, in the convention setting, wearing multiple layers of Twilight gear distinguished an individual as a “true fan” and symbolized the “level of one’s devotion” to the franchise (Shipley, 2010, p. 29). If wearing a maximum amount of fan dress is a sign of intense fandom, some participants who are concerned with embodying the fan stereotype may be careful not to give off the impression that they are an obsessed fan, especially when that is not what they are trying to communicate through their dress. It was clear that it was important for Nicole to express her fandom. However, she was selective to whom she chose to communicate it. This was illustrated by her choice to wear IFD to engage “the people who actually watch the show rather than those whom have heard or seen of it.” By making sure others do not perceive her as an obsessed fan, while also making a point to incorporate her fandom in her dress quite frequently, Nicole exhibited a common attitude present among members of brand communities. According to Muniz and O’Guinn (2001):

> Brand community members possess a fairly well-developed understanding of their feelings toward the brand and their connection to other users. Members know it isn’t the most important thing in their lives—not even close—but neither is it trivial. They know they share a social bond around a branded, mass-produced commodity, and believe it is reasonable to do so. They do not wish to be confused with indiscriminate zealots who are “weird nuts” occupying marginal positions (p. 418).

Perhaps more relevant to the current sample was the subversion of the fangirl stereotype, which has been described as “eroticized” and “manifested in the images of screaming teenage girls” (Jenkins, 2013, p. 15). The only evidence of this among participants was that they took on
the brand community impression management practice of “justifying,” which is “deploying rationales generally for devoting time and effort to the brand and collectively to outsiders and marginal members in the boundary” (Schau et al., 2009, p. 44). Star Trek fans “rationalize[d] their devotion and attire based on having fun, supporting social mission of the series or value of collecting” (Schau et al., 2009, p. 44). In the same way, some of the participants rationalized wearing female fan dress to communicate that it was “okay to be a girl geek” (Lynn) and that it helped show support for fan merchandise geared toward women in typically male-dominated fandoms (Anna). For these participants, wearing female fan dress (CFD and IFD) featuring imagery from male-dominated fandoms was a way to subvert the fangirl stereotype.

Participants claimed control over their fangirl image in the same way that female motorcycle riders claimed control over their sexual image by wearing extremely feminine and sexualized dress (Martin et al., 2006). By wearing female dress connected to male-dominated fandoms, participants were determined to show that they were just as knowledgeable and passionate about the series as males within the fandom. Some participants within in the sample were adamant that a series like Star Wars was not “just for boys,” (Travis, 2013, p. 53).

The management of fangirl identities was also apparent in the way participants defined themselves as fangirls. Anna did not identify with the fangirl stereotype, but explained that she used the label because “I tend to interact with shows, read up on them, find ways they inspire me to create.” Briar acknowledged the common perception of a fangirl:

Fangirl I think is more nebulous, but is more connected with media, like TV and movies, than general fandoms, and has the immediate visual of a girl jumping up and down at the prospect of seeing Tom Hiddleston [actor who plays character Loki in Avengers films] shouting “Squee!”
However, to her, fangirls were also “very exuberant about their particular fandom, and some connection to other communities of fellow fangirls.” Briar explained that whether or not she labelled herself as a fangirl changed “depending on the audience.” Awareness of various audiences’ interpretations would cause her to select the label that would most likely create a positive impression.

The majority of participants felt that wearing fan dress had become more socially-acceptable in recent years. For example, Gale stated, “It's becoming less of a stigma and more of a social marker for men and women.” The social acceptance of fandom certainly led participants to feel comfortable wearing CFD in a variety of casual settings. It also led some participants to wear fan dress in the most conservative front region settings, such as professional and formal events. Perhaps this phenomenon is due to the “mainstreaming of fan culture” (Jenkins, 2013, p. xvii), evident in the recent “proliferation of fan and geek characters within popular culture” (p. xv). However, Jenkins and Scott (2013) explained that mainstream media perpetuates the fan stereotype and indicated, “contemporary representations continue to play around with the same themes of earlier fan stereotypes rather than offering us an alternative conception of what it might mean to be a fan” (p. xv). Because pop culture fan and geek male characters, such as those featured on the Big Bang Theory, are still portrayed in a negative light, it is likely that some participants were unwilling to wear fan dress at all in conservative front region settings (Jenkins & Scott, 2013).

For many participants, it was not fan or fangirl stereotypes that motivated them to engage in impression management, but the desire to be viewed positively. In the case of this research, participants wanted others to perceive them as professional, competent, and respectful in front
region settings. An example of impression management was Marie’s choice to wear a minimal amount of fan accessories to weddings where she worked as a photographer.

It was noted that the motivation for women to engage in impression management through dress may be more complex than simply subverting stereotypes. The participants’ need to be viewed as professional, competent, and respectful in front region settings seemed to be linked to women’s concerns for exercising power and control over their appearance (Guy & Banim, 2000). This concern entailed “appearing appropriately dressed for the situation” (Guy & Banim, 2000, p. 324). For participants in the current study, dressing appropriately was a more prominent reason to engage in impression management than to subvert fan and fangirl stereotypes. Miriah indicated this when she explained that the same “general rules and standards” from “the normal fashion world” apply to fan dress. In this sense, impression management was evident in casual settings where participants did not want to appear overdressed. Miriah explained that she designed “a Captain Phasma (Star Wars) inspired cape dress,” that would be too formal to wear “to a college class or grocery shopping.”

Giving off a positive impression is important in building self-esteem, which is contingent on avoiding negative consequences (Chaney & Gaulding, 2015). While there were examples of maltreatment of female fan reported in previous literature (Shipley, 2010; Travis, 2013), participants in the current research noted that their fan dress rarely led to negative consequences. Participants explained that most negative experiences resulting from wearing fan dress occurred during their adolescent years, which resulted in feeling low self-esteem at that time. Many participants stated that wearing fan dress in general made them feel happy, as it allowed them to genuinely express who they were and what they were interested in. It is likely that a major source
of this self-esteem was their success at managing impressions. One setting in which participants cited that they were fearful of negative consequences from wearing fan dress were those settings in which tensions could arise between opposing fandoms. Because these settings were in the form of events that celebrated one fandom (Star Trek convention or Star Wars theatrical film showing), participants were careful in selecting the fandom they represented through their dress.

**Distinction from others.** In settings where fan dress was less limited (casual settings) participants wore CFD items that they did not wear in front region settings. However, some participants chose to wear IFD in these settings, as well as fan settings. Lacey’s ensemble that she wore to see a Star Wars film serves as an example. This dress practice is notable because it could also be driven by impression management, as well as the desire for distinction from others. Wearing IFD in the back region highlights the aspect of the Dramaturgical framework in which symbolic cues served as a way for others to gather information about individuals when they meet and provide a guide for interaction and behavior toward that individual (Cutts, Hooley, & Yates, 2015). In this research, direct IFD with obscure references and possibly other types of IFD, were used to give the impression that the wearer was a more devoted, intense, or hardcore fan. Participants noted that IFD functioned as a secret code among more intense fans and provided a guide for interaction within the fandom by communicating that the wearer had a deeper level of knowledge of the film or film or television series. This allowed participants to engage with “real fans” (Lacey) rather than “casual viewers or people who've just seen the movie poster” (Georgia).

This finding is in contrast to the results of Shipley’s (2010) study on Twilight fan dress at a Twilight convention. The author interpreted the motivation for one fan to wear “a shirt with
only text and not any photos on it” as downplaying her devotion to the series to avoid being categorized as a stereotypical *Twilight* fan (Shipley, 2010, p. 36). The author believed that *Twilight* fans drew “lines between different levels of fans,” and that these “levels” were “not clear” because they were engaging in impression management (Shipley, 2010, p. 36). As a result, the level of devotion of *Twilight* fans could not be properly gauged.

**Celebration of an event theme.** In fan settings participants had opportunities for full expression and often wore specific items not typically worn in other settings, such as costume pieces or CFD. As previously mentioned, dressing up for movie premiers and midnight showings is common among fan cultures (Balkind, 2014; Mishou, 2015). While cosplay was not the focus of this study, cosplay and items not typically worn by the participant worn in fan settings may be compared to historical costumes worn in “fantasy settings” where historical reenactors could express parts of the self that they could not in other settings (Miller-Spillman, 2015).

**IFD and Social Identity**

To respond to the second objective, “To examine how science fiction and fantasy female fans’ IFD contributed to their social identity,” and the research question, “How does women’s inconspicuous dress contribute to the construction of social identity?,” the Social Identity Theory and the concept of brand community was applied to the results of the current study.

**SIT process.** The personal and social motivations uncovered in this research shed light on how IFD contributed to a science fiction and fantasy female fan’s social identity. Participants in the current research engaged in the Social Identity Theory process in ways that were described in brand community literature and Social Identity Theory research. They first categorized themselves as members of a group (social categorization), then identified with a group by taking
on behaviors/conforming to group norms of members in that group (social identification), and finally, compared themselves to members of an outside group (social comparison) (McCleod, 2008).

i. Social categorization. Some participants categorized themselves as being part of an in-group when they identified as a geek or nerd and by doing so positioned themselves as part of an in-group, nerds and geeks. Other participants categorized themselves as being part of an in-group by using other labels, which included fan, fanatic, and fangirl.

Explicit out-groups have not always been identified in studies drawing from Social Identity Theory (McNeill & Graham, 2014; Matthews, 2012). In the current research, distinctive out-groups were rarely identified, but were made up of others “within society at large,” individuals within wider mainstream culture that are not members of the in-group (Matthews, 2012, p. 10). This was evidenced by the fact that the participants labeled themselves as a nerd or a geek without providing labels for individuals who did not identify as a geek, nerd, fan, fanatic, and fangirl. There were only four cases where distinctive outgroups were identified and these included “soccer moms” (Denise), “football kids” or sports fans (Lynn), colleagues (Piper), and co-workers (Karen).

According to Social Identity Theory, in order for social categorization to occur, members must simply define themselves in similar ways (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). However, Lam, et al. (2010) argued that in brand communities, individuals did not need to perceive themselves to be similar to other brand users, but perceive themselves to be similar to attributes of the brand itself to establish membership within the brand community. It was suspected that for participants, social categorization would be a form of brand identification in which participants perceive that
they share similar attributes with a television or film series (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006; Stokburger-Sauer, 2010, p. 352). Just as it was found in Robertson’s (2014) study of the Brony fan culture, participants in the current research often aligned their self-images with a character within a science fiction or fantasy film or television or film series. This was evident when the majority of participants identified with a character, group of characters, or series. For example, Anna, who works as an engineer, stated:

> The determination and aptitude for engineering exhibited by Rey and her isolation (*The Force Awakens* (Abrams, McGatlin, Harper, Burk, & Kennedy, 2015)) made me identify with her. I like to wear my hair like her, I bought the boots she wears in the movie and I enjoy wearing clothes with her on them.

Consistent with brand community research regarding the relationship between brand identification and brand community membership, participants in the current research did not define themselves based on attributes of other fans, but simply perceived themselves to have similar attributes of a source of media to categorize themselves as belonging to a community of fans (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006; Carlson, Suter, & Brown, 2008; Lam, et al, 2010; Stokburger-Sauer, 2010). Therefore, as participants identified with a character, group of characters, or series they took part in social categorization.

According to Social Identity Theory, communication with others within the group is not necessary for social categorization (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This claim is supported by the current research as participants provided numerous examples that showed that interaction with other fans or geeks followed social categorization (identification with a character, group of characters, or series or identification as a nerd or geek). In the current research, participants engaged in social categorization simply by perceiving themselves as a part of wider community of fans, whether or not they interacted with other fans. For some participants, it was clear that
they had a perceived sense of brand community (PSBC), rather than an interactive brand community. The results supported brand community research that found that interaction among members does not need to occur in order to identify with a brand and categorize oneself as a member (Carlson, Suter, & Brown, 2008).

ii. Social identification. Social identification involves taking on behaviors exhibited by other members within a group (McCleod, 2008). For participants in the current research, these activities involved wearing fan dress, a practice that led them to engage in social identification, the second step of the Social Identity Theory process. By wearing fan dress, participants were partaking in common brand community practices, particularly the “community engagement practice” of “badging,” the “impression management practice” of “evangelizing,” and the “social networking” practice of “empathizing” (Schau et al., 2009, pp. 34-35).

Badging is “the practice of translating milestones into symbols” (Schau et al., 2009, p. 45). Milestones are “stand-out brand experiences” (Schau et al., 2009, p. 34). According to Schau et al. (2009, p. 45), examples of badges related to dress include a “Star Trek fan recounting the first time she donned “Bajoran earrings” and did not care about looks from others” in Kozinets’ (2001) study and “body modifications that commemorate brand use and brand milestones” in Schouten and McAlexander’s (1995) study. An example in the current research would be Briar’s t-shirt “with the Doctor Who logo” that she bought “at the Doctor Who Exhibition in Glasgow” when she was studying abroad there. Tattoos were clear examples of badges among the sample. Miriah explained that she got her “mudblood” [Harry Potter] tattoo “after reading a passage” of fan fiction. While her motivation for getting her tattoo was identification with a character, Miriah’s tattoo marked a new experience with the Harry Potter
brand, as well as communicated her commitment to continue engaging with it even “after the books ended.” When fan dress served as a badge by marking significant experiences with a film or television series, participants’ fan dress certainly communicated their fan social identities.

The practice of wearing fan dress led to evangelizing, which is a brand community practice (Schau et al., 2009, p. 43). According to Schau et al. (2009, p. 45), examples of this practice include “Jeep owners enthusiastically talking about the ‘love’ for their vehicles with ‘missionary zeal.’” For Lynn, part of the importance of wearing fan dress was the opportunity to evangelize or the “‘spreading the love’ aspect.” She explained, “When I wear fan clothing, people ask about it, which means I can tell them about how awesome this show is, and then hopefully they get to fall in love with it, too.”

Social identification also involves sharing in experiencing the group’s fate, successes, and failures, which contributes to the member’s self-esteem (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). A brand community practice related to sharing in experiencing the group’s fate, successes, and failures (Mael & Ashforth, 1992) is empathizing (Schau et al., 2009). In the current research, empathizing was evident when participants described their efforts in promoting geek fashion and female fandom in general. For example, Taylor mentioned that she used social media to show her support and encourage others who wear geek fashion.

Participants also mentioned participating in activities and events to celebrate their fandom. These included attending fan conventions and themed events such as themed parties and film showings. Attending these events are common among brand communities in which members celebrate and consume the brand at brandfests (Chen, 2007; McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002).
Aside from engaging in behaviors typical of other fans, it was clear that the participants in the current research engaged in social identification through their identification with others. While some participants mentioned that dress items represented milestones, their dress certainly communicated brand use. Participants’ fan dress signaled to others that they were fellow consumers of the particular source of media represented through their dress. As Brown (1997) suggested, fan dress may be an outward expression that symbolizes the consumption of and knowledge of the original source of their fandom, which in this case was a film or film or television series. In other words, fan dress was a nonverbal form of communication.

There was an understanding that fan dress served as visual evidence of the wearer’s consumption of media, and with this the expectation that the wearer was knowledgeable about this source of media. DeRosa (2013) recounted his experience wearing a Boston Red Sox hat for physical comfort and fit rather than to communicate his knowledge of the baseball team. He explained, that he was a “fraud for wearing a pair of red socks on my hat and not knowing the intimate details of the Red Sox or baseball” and warned his readers about this expectation among members of fan cultures (DeRosa, 2013, p. 26). He stated that “anyone who’s wearing a Rebel logo [Star Wars] on his or her hat/shirt/apron/shoes/whatever and does not know what it means” he considered a “fraud for not knowing the difference between a Rancor and a scruffy-looking nerf herder!” (DeRosa, 2013, p. 26). Therefore, when participants wore fan dress, other fans made the assumption that the participants were knowledgeable about the fandom they represented. Other fans identified with participants based on this assumption.

iii. Social comparison. The social motivation distinction from nonfans provided insight into the ways that science fiction and fantasy fans engaged in “social comparison,” the third
stage of the Social Identity Process. In the third stage, a group compares the attributes and performance to an out-group that is distinctly different (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The majority of participants engaged in social comparison by comparing themselves to a non-distinctive other, while four participants compared themselves to a distinctive other. When comparing themselves to non-distinctive others within mainstream culture, participants believed they shared attributes among fans without assigning attributes of the out-group. For example, Jen stated that one thing she noticed about “our generation of fans” was that “we all primarily don't give a crap about what other people think!” Participants rarely described attributes of non-fans, and when they did, participants did so indirectly. For example, Piper implied that non-fans had an inability to understand obscure references when she stated, “Red underwear means something very different to a John lock fangirl [a reference to Sherlock] than a normal person.” Matthews (2012) found this to be the case among members of a clothing swap group who also did not name a distinct out-group. The author explained:

Although direct comparisons to other groups are not necessarily seen on Rehash, it is clear that there is some social comparison exhibited by these women, as they indirectly compare themselves to others by naming themselves “Rehashionistas,” and setting themselves apart from others who are not a part of this group (Matthews, 2012, p. 179 - 180).

The reason for indirect comparisons among the others and the participants may be that it was difficult to identify specific attributes when comparing themselves to a non-distinct other. When comparing themselves to a distinctive other, participants assigned attributes to both the in-group and the out-group more often. For example, Lynn described herself as “somebody who might be more interested in discussing epic stories” and a football fan as “somebody who might be more interested in discussing . . . epic plays.”
iv. Personal distinctiveness. Participants did not aim to achieve social distinctiveness, but personal distinctiveness. This was consistent with brand community and fan culture literature (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001; Schau et al., 2009). Evidence of participants aiming for personal distinctiveness gave credence to the elimination of the fourth step in the Social Identity Theory process in this research. Although many participants acknowledged that science fiction and fantasy fandom has become acceptable in mainstream culture, they, like previous fan cultures studied, acknowledged the group’s marginal or low status as it is perceived by mainstream culture (Jenkins, 1992; Shipley, 2010). The perceived low status was apparent in their need to manage impressions by wearing no fan dress, limiting their fan dress, or wearing IFD in some settings. The participants did not want to be stereotypically perceived in the same manner of other popular fan cultures, which have been criticized for being “childish” and “immature” (Brown, 1997, p. 18). These impression management practices showed the participants’ acknowledgement that they would not gain status in mainstream culture as a group by wearing fan dress, but instead would achieve status and personal distinctiveness within their fan cultures by displaying knowledge of their source of fandom through dress (Brown, 1997; Holt, 1998; Schau et al, 2009).

Fan Dress and Personal Distinctiveness

To respond to the third objective, “To investigate how science fiction and fantasy female fans’ IFD contributed to the construction of their personal identity and distinctiveness,” and the research question, “How does women’s inconspicuous dress contribute to the construction of personal identity and distinctiveness?,” the concept of brand community and the theory of cultural capital were applied to the results of the current study.
By exploring personal motivations and the desire for *distinction from others*, it was clear that participants strived to attain personal distinctiveness. As expected, participants aimed to distinguish themselves from other fans rather than a specific out-group. Participants tried to achieve personal distinctiveness through dress by engaging in such dress practices as styling fan dress items differently than others, creating unique dress items by sewing their own fan dress items or altering commercial fan dress items (DIY fan dress), seeking out more subtle (choosing to wear primarily IFD) or atypical fan dress items.

As previously mentioned, participants engaged in common brand community practices, which include practices related to dress. Brand community practices “endow participants with cultural capital,” which is a means for individuals to gain status and personal distinctiveness (Schau et al., 2009, p. 38). It was clear that participants’ fan dress items were an *objectified* form of cultural capital, which *embodied* “implicit practical knowledges, skills, and dispositions” of participants (Holt, 1998, p. 3). In this case, the skills and knowledge that were *embodied* through fan dress included those used to style character-inspired ensembles, create unique dress items, or seek out IFD or atypical fan dress items.

Community engagement practices, in particular, aided in building cultural capital (Schau et al., 2009, p. 38). Therefore, the community engagement practice of badging is notable for this reason. As previously discussed, fan dress items were badges in the community and served as visual evidence to others of the wearer’s consumption of a source of media. For example, if a participant wore a *Star Wars* dress, she was expected to know something about the fandom (DeRosa, 2013). With this visual evidence came the expectation that the wearer actually had the knowledge that the participants’ dress embodied. This was particularly evident in Miriah’s
statement that her dress was “visual evidence” to “fanboys” who wanted to “test” her “actual love” of a source of media, as well as Lynn’s description of some interactions with male fans whose responses to her fan dress have been “the stereotypical ‘prove to me you deserve to be a fan.’” Therefore, fan dress contributed to cultural capital even though it was not always representative of “stand-out brand experiences” (Schau et al., 2009, p. 34) or status as it objectified the fan’s knowledge of the television series (Stenger, 2006).

**Accumulation of fan dress and personal distinctiveness.** Previous researchers have provided evidence that simply collecting dress contributes to cultural capital within fan cultures (Cherry, 2013; Kirby-Diaz, 2013; Stenger, 2006; Thompson, 2009). For some participants, fan dress also contributed to cultural capital by communicating that they had a deeper level of knowledge than other fans. In brand communities, badges became more numerous and complex as the “length and intensity” of membership increased (Schau et al.’s, 2009, p. 37). Although participants were not asked how long they had been a fan (this should be explored in future research), some hinted towards the length of their involvement in fan culture. For example, Valerie stated that she had “been a fangirl all my life,” and the number of fan dress items she wore and owned were numerous. Valerie described 15 specific dress items during her interview, but provided photographs of approximately 40 fan dress items. While it is likely that the number of items are connected to the length and intensity of membership, it may not be the best indicator of the length of one’s fandom, because other factors may have influenced the number of badges accumulated. As Valerie explained:

I wear MUCH more Star Wars/fangirl stuff to work now than I ever would have even up to about 5 years ago. A lot of it has to do with the availability of female-focused garments and fashion pieces...Thank you, Her Universe!!
Although Shipley (2010) was referring to the display of fan dress items when she reported that wearing multiple layers of *Twilight* gear distinguished an individual as a “true fan” and symbolized the “level of one’s devotion” to the franchise, the multiple layers represented an increased number of items collected (p. 29).

According to the results of this study, participants may gain cultural capital by knowing where to acquire the badges or fan dress items. Taylor, who often wore subtle items to work such as dresses and sweaters with small prints (geek fashion; IFD), explained that she felt she was different from other fans because she was knowledgeable about where to find it. This was particularly evident among participants who preferred atypical fan dress items. For example, participants cited several online retailers that sold atypical fan dress items (some of which feature clothing with graphics designed by fans) such as Welovefine.com (Mighty Fine, Inc., 2009 – 2016), Redbubble.com (Redbubble, n.d.), Lookhuman.com (Print Syndicate, Inc., 2016), Teefury.com (Teefury LLC, 2016) and Deviantart.com (Deviantart, 2016).

The acquisition of fan costumes and props has been thought to have increased a fan’s cultural capital (Stenger, 2006). Two participants noted finding “shirts or clothes, even accessories at thrift stores, items that may not have been sold in years” (Paige). Nicole noted the value of such items:

> I find a lot of my stuff at garage sales because there’s people whose parents are trying to get rid of their husband’s stuff or their son’s stuff who is now grown up and moved out of the house. It’s kind of where I find a lot of my things because people don’t realize the value in them.

The value of second-hand fan items have been noted in previous research:

> Many commodities offered for sale on eBay should according to the conventional logic of use and exchange-value, be almost worthless. However, due to many of them having been intensely subjectively valued by fans, such as commodities take on a redefined
exchange value . . . created through the durability of fans’ attachments, and through the fans’ desire to own merchandise which is often no longer being industrially produced (Hills, 2002, p. 35 as cited in Stenger, 2006, p. 32).

The two participants who noted acquiring second-hand fan dress items felt that it differentiated them from other fans. As Nicole explained, her Star Wars t-shirt that contained a poster from one of the original films helps communicate that she was a fan that was distinctly different from other fans. Paige explained that her second-hand items “tend to draw more attention” because “they’re not what everyone is used to seeing/the newest released items.” Therefore, wearing older fan dress items gave the fan the ability to stand out within their fan cultures.

**IFD and personal distinctiveness.** As found in previous research, not only the number of badges, but the complexity of badges increased along with the “length and intensity” of membership (Schau et al., 2009, p. 37). There is some evidence in the current research that IFD was an indicator of the intensity of fandom. Because IFD, particularly that containing direct obscure text-only or visual imagery, required the fan to have a greater amount of knowledge to understand their meanings, these dress items may be considered complex badges. Denise explained that she liked “the not-instantly-recognizable look,” because it was “more of a secret handshake with other mega fans” and that the subtle nature of her dress was more about communicating the intensity of her fandom “than trying to hide the fact that I'm a geek.” Because Denise’s dress commonly included inspired ensembles, other forms of IFD other than fan dress containing direct obscure text-only or visual imagery may also be considered complex.

Replica garments [indirect IFD], such as Piper’s “screen accurate” “Dr. Horrible's Sing Along Blog Penny hoodie” and Cagen’s replica of Bella’ prom dress from Twilight, required detailed knowledge of what film or television media characters wore on-screen. Wearing replica
dress items may contributed to cultural capital in a similar way that the creation and wearing of accurate costumes does in other fan cultures because the costumes objectify the fan’s embodied knowledge of accurate and authentic costumes of the television series (Chen 2007; Mishou, 2015; Schau et al., 2009; Taylor, 2009). While it was likely that all IFD may be considered complex badges, it was more evident for IFD containing direct obscure text-only or visual imagery. More research should be conducted to examine if small items or items with small logos or small print with direct references may be considered complex badges.

IFD, when representative of the intensity of fandom, functioned as a secret code among the most dedicated and knowledgeable fans of a film or television or film series. As Hannah explained, “There are, in a way, levels to fandom clothing. . . . For instance, wearing an Avengers logo on your shirt shows you like the franchise.” The Avengers logo currently represents a highly visible fandom and therefore was classified as CFD because many non-fans may recognize it. She explained that a shirt with an obscure reference such as one with “a joke from the film on it” was “more valuable” within a fandom. This may be because “badging behaviors codify the expression of brand identity, suggesting the proper behaviors to be a true member . . . and the proper idiom for expressing that membership” (Schau et al., 2009, p. 37). IFD then, may be the proper way of expressing that one is a “true” fan.

Codification behaviors were also evident in subcultures, which are “structured by intricate patterns of inclusion and exclusion” (Brill, 2007, p. 112). Several participants wore IFD with obscure references to limit their interaction to only intense or “hardcore” fans (Cherry & Mellins, 2012, p. 9). For example, Lacey explained:

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Most of my nerdy clothing is pretty discreet. An accessory that reminds me of a fandom or I have some simple text tank tops. I don't like to be over the top. I like to be less obvious so that the real fans can find me.

This quote provided evidence that fan dress plays a key role in establishing the hierarchical structure within fan culture in much the same way that it does in other subcultures (Brill, 2007; Cherry & Mellins, 2012; Jenß, 2004). For example, within the German sixties scene, a subculture in which members adopted a “‘Sixties-like’ lifestyle,” becoming a “‘credible’ member” adopting the right dress practices, which included wearing actual sixties vintage garments or wearing period-accurate replicas (Jenß, 2004, pp. 388-396). Wearing complex badges such as IFD contributed to personal distinctiveness by distinguishing them as a true fan, indicating that they had a deeper knowledge than non-fans and/or other fans.

Subcultures have also been found to be “hierarchical, cliquey and controlled internally by disciplinary codes” (Thornton, 1995, as cited in Varner, 2007, p. 170). Gale explained that sometimes fan dress containing obscure references discouraged membership by excluding those that were not “in the know,” thus providing evidence of fan cultures’ “cliquey” nature (Thornton, 1995, as cited in Varner, 2007, p. 170). Gale felt that extremely obscures references were representative of the fact that “geekdom has this barrier to entry and you have to prove you are worthy.” It was interesting that although Gale enjoyed wearing mash-ups [direct IFD] that the “barrier to entry” was something that she did “NOT respond to.”

**DIY fan dress and personal distinctiveness.** Sewing their own fan dress items or altering commercial fan dress items (DIY fan dress) also contributed to some participants’ personal identity and distinctiveness. Creating and altering fan dress are considered participatory behaviors (Cherry, 2013; Kirby-Diaz, 2013; Thompson, 2009). According to Forde (2013, p. 64),
an intense fan was distinguished from a "typical' fan" by his/her participatory behaviors within a fan culture (Forde, 2013, p. 64). One participant suggested that DIY fan dress items (often IFD), communicated that she was “more dedicated” because she “put effort into making something unique.” Piper explained, “It's like my version of writing fan fiction or drawing fan art. Cosplay is like that for me too, but I don't have as much time nowadays to afford making costumes, but I can happily make fandom related items.”

However, the majority of the other participants who wore DIY fan dress felt that it certainly differentiated them from other fans, but did not communicate that they were a more intense or devoted fan. Previous researchers focusing on the creation of fan dress such as crafting or "handicrafting" have contradicted the notion that DIY dress could be an indicator of intense fandom (Cherry, 2013, p. 107). Therefore, the motivation to display fandom through DIY dress may be mediated by the personal motivation creative self-expression. Participants also communicated that much of their motivation to engage in these participatory behaviors were directly related to their interest in sewing and knitting, and their engagement in an online sewing community. These participants also shared similarities with Buffy [Buffy the Vampire Slayer] crafters who were motivated to craft for the sense of community they receive by communicating with other fans who are also crafters (Fuller, 2013, p. 118). Despite not being a mode for communicating intense fandom, DIY dress still contributed to cultural capital because it embodied knowledge of a film or film or television series, although not necessarily communicating a deeper level of knowledge than other fans.

**Styling and personal distinctiveness.** Styling fan dress items differently than others also contributed to personal distinctiveness. This was also informed by the exploration of the social
motivation *distinction from others*, the personal motivations *self-expression* and *other personal motivations* relating to functional and aesthetic needs, and *impression management*. It was revealed in this research that styling of fan dress may be added to the list of “gendered fan behaviors” because these are seemingly traditionally female activities (Cherry, 2013, pp. 107-108). However, these dress practices could also be added to the list of “feminine competencies” through which female fans gain cultural capital and personal distinction (Cherry, 2013, pp. 107-108).

The “feminine competencies” within fan culture intersect with women’s attainment of cultural capital (Cherry, 2013, pp. 107-108). Guy and Banim (2000) found that women gain cultural capital by “appearing in control of oneself; appearing appropriately dressed for the situation” (p. 324). Participants in the current research used careful clothing selection and personal styling to achieve the “‘correct’ use of clothes” (Guy & Banim, 2000, p. 317).

In order to appear “in control of oneself,” (Guy & Banim, 2000, p. 324), one has to first appear “appropriately dressed for the situation” (Guy & Banim, 2000, p. 324). Gale noted her embarrassment when she wore a Han Solo closet cosplay “by accident” and then being unaware that she “would have to give a lecture to a group of graduate students.” As previously explained, professional work presentations or special visits were common settings in which fan dress was limited. Although the students did not recognize her inspired ensemble, on a personal level, she felt it was inappropriate. Kaylee explained that she styled her inspired ensembles to achieve a “more mature, classy, professional appearance” that was appropriate enough to wear in “a professional work environment,” but she did not always succeed. She explained that her
ensemble inspired by the character Tony Stark [Iron Man & Avengers] was “not the best, but it was my first and a learning experience.”

Another factor in achieving control over one’s appearance was to have the dress items perform as expected (Guy & Banim, 2000, p. 324). Gale noted that her Hans Solo-inspired ensemble caused further embarrassment when one of the students she lectured pointed out that she had a “‘visible panty line.’” Participants styled their ensembles by selecting items they knew would perform well. Valerie explained that she styled her fan dress item by giving it her “own sense of style, flair, personality, etc.,” while also selecting items “that flatter me and my face, body, etc., and not be ‘sloppy’.”

For some participants who sought to achieve personal distinctiveness through styling were careful not to be too distinct. As Guy and Banim (2000) found “it was important that it was the person who was noticed rather than merely the clothes [visible panty line or sloppy clothes]. The desired image should be individual or distinctive, but also appropriate to the situation that women were dressing for” [appropriate for professional settings] (p. 316). Consistent with Guy and Banim’s (2000) findings, participants gained cultural capital by not simply wearing fan dress, but wearing it in appropriate situations and having the items perform as expected. Because the “‘correct’ use of clothes” contributed to participants’ cultural capital in mainstream settings, it may be that the female fan is able to achieve status in mainstream culture in ways that male fans cannot (Guy & Banim, 2000, p. 317).

For several participants, styling was related to their interest in geek fashion. For instance, Lacey said, “I feel like I always try to bring in a fashion element to my looks. I don't want to JUST wear a tee shirt and jeans. I want to create an entire thought-out look.” She, along with
several other participants, authored blogs where they showcased geek fashion pieces styled in a unique way. Other participants were authors of blogs or participated in podcasts where they discussed topics related to science fiction and fantasy fandom geared to female fans. Consistent with other brand community and fan culture research, these women created or participated in their own domains or spaces where they could showcase their competencies (Cherry, 2013; Martin et al., 2006; Wakefield, 2001). Like those dedicated to fan handicrafting, domains that featured discussions related to fan dress (availability of female fan merchandise and dress, everyday cosplay, geek fashion, fashion design and sewing) "provide[d] a space for intensely feminine fandom that some male-dominated, masculine fandom groups look down on" (Cherry, 2013, p. 108).

It has been theorized that the reason women in subcultures, brand communities, and male-dominated fan cultures seek out their own domains is because they occupy subservient positions within them (Shipley, 2010; Martin et al., 2006). As previously mentioned, some participants authored blogs and participated in podcasts relating to topics applicable to the female fan to showcase their “feminine competencies,” which revolve around participating in traditionally female activities such as personal styling and design of geek fashion (Cherry, 2013, pp. 107-108). Therefore, women within science fiction and fantasy fan cultures may be compared to female members of the goth subculture who gain subcultural capital and personal distinctiveness by “capitalizing on feminine beauty and attractiveness” (Brill, 2007, pp. 124-125).

However, there was some evidence in this research that women were judged by the same standards as men and expected to fulfill the same competencies to attain status. Several
participants reported that male fans expected the participant to be as knowledgeable about the fandom. Therefore, women within science fiction and fantasy fan cultures may be also be compared to women within the Harley Davidson subculture of consumption who had to fulfill the expectations set forth by men and women in the subculture (Martin et al., 2006). The attainment of status may be more “complicated” for these fans (Martin et al., 2006, p. 182). Future research comparing the contribution of male fan dress to the construction of person distinctiveness to the findings of this research should be conducted to achieve a deeper understanding of female fans’ status within the science fiction and fantasy fan culture.

While showcasing competencies in these domains contributed to cultural capital and personal distinctiveness through the embodied form (Cherry & Mellins, 2012), these domains allowed participants to gain cultural capital through the institutionalized form. This form of cultural capital is “institutionalized in official degrees and diplomas that certify the existence of the embodied form” (Holt, 1998, p. 3). An example of this institutionalized form are awards given to Xena fans for their accomplishments in creating accurate costumes related to the series (Schau et al., 2009). When sharing her thoughts on Ashley Eckstein’s geek fashion line Her Universe, Valerie stated, “Ashley Eckstein is my hero...I've been honored to be selected as Fangirl of the Day . . . twice!!” This honor is one in which a photograph of the fan wearing some form of fan dress (including cosplay) and a biography of a female fan is featured daily on the home page of the Her Universe Blog (Her Universe Store et al., 2016). Although this recognition was not provided in the form of “official degrees and diplomas” (Holt, 1998, p. 3), it was an official form of recognition of her fan dress by a prominent figure within the science fiction and fantasy fan culture.
Fan Dress and Personal Identity

Using Goffman’s (1959) Dramaturgy uncovered personal meanings that participants in the current research assigned to their fan dress. This theory was also beneficial in understanding of the relationship between dress and the self. In turn, this was beneficial in exploring how fan dress contributed to the construction of personal identity.

Like Star Trek fans, the participants attributed diverse meanings to the film or television series they admired (Kozinets, 2001). This was also true of the special meanings they assigned to their dress. In the current research, it was evident that like tattoos, a form of body modifications, fan dress “had meaning and were expressive of their selves, their personal values and interests, important life events (e.g., marriage), and religious/sacred beliefs” (Johnson, et al, 2014, p. 19-20). As previously discussed, fan dress expressed participants’ interest by nonverbally communicating that they liked, loved, enjoyed, or supported a source of media or its characters. Like other forms of dress, such as the Confederate American Civil War re-enactment uniform, fan dress communicated individual participants’ beliefs, which included religious beliefs and personal values. For example, Cagen explained that fan dress items containing a lion, such as Twilight Cullen lion bracelet and her Harry Potter t-shirt with the rampan lion reminds her of “Narnia's Aslan” and stated, “the character is Jesus, and every time Aslan speaks, I shiver. Aslan is an inspiration to me and my faith.” One participant explained that her tattoo marked an especially difficult life event. However, multiple participants noted their relationship to a character, group of characters, or series developed during trying times in their lives and was very meaningful as a result. Jasmine said her relationship to the Harry Potter series was “deeply personal” and that the “series has DEEP sentimental value,” because she read the books and
watched the films during her military deployments. Like participants in a study on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* crafts, participants in the current study turned to series for emotional support (Fuller, 2013). Participants illustrated through their dress that they looked to series and characters for emotional boosts, empowerment, and comfort.

In addition to expressing these aspects of self, participants used their dress to communicate personality characteristics that they shared or aspired to share with a series or character. It was evident among *Star Trek* fans that they adopted attributes from the series, such as its utopian ideals regarding acceptance of diversity, as their own (Kozinets, 2001). This was evident among participants in the current research who aspired to have characteristics of a character. For example, Anna enjoyed wearing clothing items that featured “heroic characters,” because she “aspired” to be heroic herself. However, it was more common among the current sample to communicate personality attributes that they shared with a character. These participants’ dress could be viewed as physical manifestation of brand identification in which participants viewed themselves to be similar to that character (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006; Stokburger-Sauer, 2010). For instance, Miriah stated that the *Harry Potter* character Hermione was “always a character I related with. . . . She's me to me.”

**Types of Fan Dress**

*Types of fan dress* was a theme that emerged from the data that was not tied to the objectives of this research. As previously mentioned, a result of this research was the development of the definitions of conspicuous fan dress (CFD) and inconspicuous fan dress (IFD), as well as the Development of the *Taxonomy of Fan Dress* (see Figure 39). Two characteristics were added to the definitions of CFD and IFD, and these included (a) the nature
of the reference to a source of media (i.e. direct or indirect), and (b) the visibility of the reference to a source of media (conspicuousness or inconspicuous).

**Direct and indirect.** Thompson (2015) focused her study on dress items containing obscure visible relationships to Jane Austen fandom. The author implied that references could be indirect when she explained that merchandise tagged with the name “Jane Austen” by sellers on Etsy.com (2015) either had a “tenuous relationship to the author” or had “no connection whatsoever to Austen or her historical time period” (Thompson, 2015, p. 114-115). This included “jewelry made from dominoes or other game pieces covered with colourful Regency-era images” (Thompson, 2015, p. 112), which contained imagery connected to the regency time period, but none directly related to Jane Austen or her novels.

It is clear from previous research that individuals use dress that is directly and indirectly related to a source of media to express fandom. However, the nature of fan dress references were not clearly defined. By exploring the types of fan dress worn by participants in the current research, it was determined that the nature of a reference of a fan dress item is direct if the reference contains imagery or text of a film, television series, or film series. It was also determined that the nature of a fan dress item is indirect if the shape, color, or in some cases, the name of the item mimics or resembles or is perceived to resemble something related to a film, television series, film series or character. This exploration also provided insight into the relationship between the nature of the reference to a source of media (i.e. direct or indirect) and the visibility of the reference to a source of media (conspicuousness or inconspicuous). The results of the current research led to the development of the *Taxonomy of Fan Dress* (see Figure
which graphically displays this relationship. The characteristics direct and indirect appear at the top level of this model.

**Conspicuous and inconspicuous.** Prior to this research, there was minimal evidence regarding the visibility or the ability to recognize references to sources of media. Because Thompson (2015) described a fan dress item a “marker” of “conspicuous fandom,” (p. 112), the terms selected to describe this characteristic of fan dress are conspicuous and inconspicuous. The characteristics conspicuous and inconspicuous are located on the second level of the Taxonomy of Fan Dress (See Figure 39).

**Direct conspicuous.** Previous researchers have provided little evidence that some forms of fan dress are more conspicuous then others. However, some authors have implied that there is a relationship between the nature of the references to a source of media and the visibility of it, but this relationship is unclear. For example, in her study of Twilight fans in a convention setting, Shipley (2010) found that her participants wore fan dress instead of wearing costumes because they did “not [want to] become classified as an overzealous Twilight fan” (p. 27). She also found that one participant selected an alternative type of “Twilight gear” (p. 21) with a less visible reference in order to avoid this classification:

One fan said that she wanted a shirt with only text and not any photos on it because she did not want it to be totally clear at first glance that it was a Twilight shirt. The public who is not familiar with the series might not recognize the name of the character or the quote, but would most likely recognize a photo because of all the advertising for the movies (p. 36).

Within this description, the author implied, but did not explain whether or not the main title or logo of the Twilight series was included in the text. However, Shipley (2010) supplied several photographs of her participants wearing shirts containing only text that did not feature the main
Participants in the current study indicated that fan dress items containing a main logo/character were more conspicuous than others, particularly if the reference was a graphic image largely displayed and connected to a highly visible fandom. As a result of this findings, these three characteristics are featured on the *Taxonomy of Fan Dress* (see Figure 39) under the classification under *CFD*, which contains both the characteristics *Direct* and *Conspicuousness* as indicated by the arrows pointing from the boxes containing these labels.

**Figure 39. Taxonomy of Fan Dress.** The *Taxonomy of Fan Dress* is a model that indicates the classifications of fan dress.
**Direct inconspicuous.** References not containing main logos or graphic images require the viewer to be more familiar with a source of media in order to recognize it, making it inconspicuous. As a result, the characteristics *Direct* and *Inconspicuous* are combined to create the classification *Direct IFD*. This relationship is indicated on the *Taxonomy of Fan Dress* (see Figure 39) through arrows pointing from the boxes containing the labels of the two characteristics and pointing to the box labeled *Direct IFD*.

**i. Obscure references.** As previously mentioned, one of Shipley’s (2010) participants chose to wear a *Twilight* t-shirt containing only text, but did not disclose the content of the message. However, it was clear that the message was intended to be recognized only by other fans and exclude non-fans. One participant in the current research, Alice, suggested that references may be specifically designed to target fans and this is what makes them obscure when she described her experiences encountering references to *Supernatural* or *Doctor Who* fandoms in which she is not a part, and failing to interpret them. Poore (2014) explained that “memes,” were “badges of belonging” because the reference was familiar only to fellow fans (p. 136). Participants indicated that fan dress items containing references with text only were inconspicuous because they were more obscure. This is reflected on the *Taxonomy of Fan Dress* (see Figure 39) through the use of the label *Text-only*. Fan dress items containing references with text-only are classified under *Obscure references*, which appears just beneath *Direct IFD* on the *Taxonomy of Fan Dress*.

While previous researchers had touched on the visibility or ability to recognize of text-only references, they have not discussed the differences in visibility or ability to recognize particular types of visual imagery. Shipley (2010) explained that in her study where “the t-shirts
and sweatshirts that people had on were graphic heavy; most of them had photographs from the movies on them as well as text” (p. 24). However, the author did not provide details regarding the visual images featured on these garments. Thompson (2015) implied that fan dress items containing imagery were conspicuous. However, the item she described contained an indirect reference to Jane Austen’s novels. Is this fan dress item truly indicative of Jane Austen fandom? Participants in the current study contradicted this claim. Perhaps the reason for this contradiction is that Thompson (2015) equated the idea of “conspicuous fandom” to “the element of conspicuous consumption” which refers to the acquisition rather than the wearing of fan items to express fandom (p. 112). Prior to this research, the understanding of the relationship between references containing obscure imagery and conspicuousness was incomplete.

Participants in the current study indicated that some types of direct imagery could be classified as obscure references. Participants believed references to be obscure if the imagery was comprised of secondary logos, characters, symbols, or motifs drawn differently than highly visible presentations [unusual artistic styles], specific references or references to multiple sources [mashups]. Participants not only preferred to wear obscure references because they were inconspicuous, but because wearing the obscure references better communicated their knowledge of a source of media; thereby, increasing the likelihood of interacting with other knowledgeable fans.

In his narrative, DeRosa (2016) wrote that he believed wearing fan dress communicated that the wearer had a level of knowledge that non-fans did not have. He explained that “It’s simply to let others know I’m in on the joke” (DeRosa, 2013 p. 25). When describing his experience wearing hat with a “Captain America shield on it,” the author explained that the hat
communicated to other fans that he was “just as knowledgeable and passionate about this subject as they are” (DeRosa, 2013 p. 25). DeRosa’s hat contained a main logo that referenced Marvel’s Avengers, which in recent years has become a very recognizable fandom, and thus, did not provide much insight regarding the connection between obscure visual references and its communication of knowledge. However, it was evident in the current research that references with obscure visual imagery functioned much like text-only references in that obscure imagery enabled participants to communicate that they had more intimate knowledge of the source of media. As Hannah explained, a “joke from the film on it” [obscure reference: text only] was “more valuable” within a fandom than “wearing an Avengers logo on your shirt” [main logo]. Although DeRosa (2013) referred to a fan dress item containing a recognizable visual reference, items with obscure visual imagery communicated a similar message – that the wearer had an intimate knowledge of the source of media that was represented by the image. The characteristics Secondary logos, Specific references, Unusual style, Mashups, and Obscure fandoms are classified under Obscure reference, which is located under Direct IFD on the Taxonomy of Fan Dress (see Figure 39).

ii. Small items. Small accessories, such as a ring or accessories that could be easily hidden like a wallet were predicted to be perceived by participants as inconspicuous. While researching the dress of Twilight fans in a convention setting, Shipley (2010) noted that along with t-shirts, Twilight jewelry was worn “to show their support of the series without seeming like a crazed fan” (p. 27-28). As a result of the current research, fan dress items containing imagery were also inconspicuous if they were small in size. As Kaylee indicated, she preferred “subtle and small” jewelry, “nothing too big or gaudy” (see Figure 13). These fan dress items are
classified as small items on the *Taxonomy of Fan Dress* (see Figure 39) under *Direct IFD* as part of the label *Small items/contains small reference*.

**iii. IFD masked.** Accessories in general regardless of their size, could be considered inconspicuous because they were fan dress items that participants felt could be worn anywhere. These included accessories that could be easily hidden. As Valerie explained, she would feel comfortable wearing any fan dress items that she could “*mask*’ with another item” no matter what the situation. For this reason, the classification IFD items that could be masked appear on the *Taxonomy of Fan Dress* (see Figure 39) under *Obscure references* as part of the label *CFD/IFD masked*.

**iv. Fashionable materials/geek fashion.** Participants indicated that other than size of the accessory, its inconspicuousness depended on other features such as its containment of secondary logos (listed under *Obscure references*) and make up of fashionable materials. For example, Taylor’s Alex and Ani’s *Star Wars* gold and silver bangle bracelets bearing the recognizable farewell “May The Force Be With You,” were classified as fashionable materials on the *Taxonomy of Fan Dress* (see Figure 39) under *Direct IFD* part of the label *Fashionable materials/geek fashion*.

In addition to smaller items, larger items with small direct references, such as small prints or motifs, were believed to have been inconspicuous. Many of the items featuring small prints or small motifs fell under the category of geek fashion, which were pieces that could pass as everyday fashion items, and included dresses with “small or subtle print” (Taylor), such as Taylor and Valerie’s Darth Vader dress from ThinkGeek.com (ThinkGeek, Inc., 1999-2016). Dresses featuring large or busy print, Like Lynn’s blue Batman dress, were also felt by
participants to be inconspicuous because the reference to a form of media was not obvious at first glance. This projection was not based on previous research, but the researcher’s own experiences wearing dresses with small and busy prints that referenced Disney films. As a result of this research, these fan dress items are classified geek fashion on the Taxonomy of Fan Dress (see Figure 39) under Direct IFD as part of the label Fashionable materials/geek fashion. Additionally, an arrow is drawn from this label to the classification Small items/contains small reference to indicate that some geek fashion items contain references that are small in size.

v. CFD masked. An additional unanticipated result was that larger dress items such as a t-shirt with a direct conspicuous reference could also masked or toned down to appear inconspicuous, qualifying it as IFD. For example, Georgia masked her conspicuous wonder woman t-shirt by covering it was a blazer and Lynn layered her busy print dresses with a lab coat to make them less distracting (see Figure 23). This is reflected on the Taxonomy of Fan Dress (see Figure 39) as CFD masked, which is included in the label CFD/IFD masked, and is classified under Obscure references located beneath Direct IFD.

vi. Direct body modifications. While fan dress may include clothing and accessories, the definition of fan dress was also extended to body modifications (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992, p 7). Shipley (2010) classified temporary tattoos as accessories and included these items in the definition of “Twilight gear” (p. 18). She found that her participants wore temporary tattoos to show support for a character or a group of characters such as “vampires and werewolves” (p. 26). DeRosa (2013) concluded that Star Wars tattoos were part of a “extension of personal fashion” that were “simply a means of expressing one’s love for personal passions/hobbies, in this case a distant galaxy that remains far, far way” (p. 25).
Shipley (2010) and DeRosa (2013) did not mention the visibility of the body modifications. However, Mun et al. (2012) found that women chose to locate tattoos on less visible areas of the body that could be easily concealed with clothing. The authors felt that participants chose to reduce the visibility because tattoos have been viewed as “indicators of engagement in deviant behaviors” and “are social stigmas” (p. 144). This was not evident among the current sample. Jasmine did not mention concealing her tattoo, which contained direct imagery related to *Harry Potter*, with clothing, but stated that it was located on her inner forearm, a location with relatively limited exposure. Still, she viewed her tattoo as one of her “more subtle ways of expressing fandom.” She described her tattoo as subtle, but did not explain why she felt that it was. It may be that her tattoo contained text and secondary logos. Jasmine’s tattoo contained the phrase “mischief managed” and the “stars . . . from the books” that were “clustered around the page numbers” (See Figure 24). Lacey did not describe her “Deathly Hallows tattoo,” another secondary logo related to *Harry Potter*, as inconspicuous, but noted that she usually tried “to wear clothing that allows my nerdy tattoo to be in view,” and stated that it was “going to be shown most of the time.” Because tattoos with direct imagery were described as inconspicuous and participants were willing to expose them in almost any situation, these body modifications were classified as a form of *Direct IFD* on the *Taxonomy of Fan Dress* (see Figure 39). However, because one tattoo was located on an area of the body that was less visible, an arrow pointing from *Tattoos* and to *CFD/IFD masked* was drawn. *Nail art* was also a body modification classified as a form of *Direct IFD* on the *Taxonomy of Fan Dress*. As indicated on the taxonomy, an arrow points from the label *Nail Art* to the classification *Small items/contains small reference* because the direct imagery or text on the fingernails is small in size.
The relationship between indirect references and inconspicuousness has been evident in previous academic literature, as well as online periodical sources. Female *Dr. Who* fans and handicrafters sought out the same garments worn by characters on the show from mainstream clothing stores, allowing them to express their fandom inconspicuously (Cherry, 2013). Also, authors of online periodicals that reported on fashionable clothing lines inspired by films or television shows boasted about the lines’ fashionability and wearability, implying that the clothing enables the wearer to express his/her fandom discreetly (“Hot Topic Announces New Cinderella Collection,” 2015, para 3). Because the “costume elements” (Cherry, 2013, p. 110) and garments featured in fashionable clothing lines were not described as containing direct references, but mimicked or was inspired by the shape, color, or some other attribute of something related to a film, television series, film series or character, the classification *Indirect IFD* is featured on the *Taxonomy of Fan Dress* (see Figure 39) to the right of the two characteristics *Indirect* and *Inconspicuous*. The relationship between these two characteristics to *Indirect IFD* is indicated by arrows drawn from *Indirect* and *Inconspicuous* to *Indirect IFD*.

**v. Replica garments/accessories.** The “costume elements” that (Cherry, 2013, p. 110) described were referred to as replica garments in the present research because the garments faithfully mimic the design through shape, color, and/or any other attributes of dress items worn in a film or film or television series. Replica garments such as Piper’s “*Dr. Horrible’s Sing Along Blog* Penny hoodie,” were worn and described as inconspicuous (see Figure 25). In addition to replica garments, replica jewelry and accessories like Natalie’s “Daenerys Targaryen’s” dragon egg necklace, were also worn and described as inconspicuous (see Figure 26). *Replica*
garments/accessories appear on the *Taxonomy of Fan Dress* (see Figure 39) as a form of *Indirect IFD*.

**vi. Inspired garments/accessories.** As anticipated, participants reported wearing fashionable fan dress items inspired by a source of media. However, none reported wearing garments as part of clothing lines marketed to “fan girl” customers (“Hot Topic Announces New Cinderella Collection,” 2015, para 3). It was evident in the current research that expression of fandom through indirect references was much more complex as it reached beyond a connection to fandom established through marketing and merchandising.

Thompson (2015) examined hand-crafted fan dress items marketed to Jane Austen fans on Etsy.com (2015) and illustrated that clothing and accessories that do not faithfully mimic the design of items featured in a film or film or television series could be consumed to express fandom. The author explained that these items were “connected to the Regency period” (and therefore, had some connection to Jane Austen) and had a “tenuous relationship to the author” or had “no connection whatsoever to Austen or her historical time period” (Thompson, 2015, p. 114-115). Thompson (2015) stated that items “connected to the Regency period” included “patterns of fingerless mitts, spencers and reticules” (p. 114). These could be considered inspired garments that do not faithfully mimic or replicate items worn in any visual media based on Austen’s work, but are inspired by items that Austen’s characters actually wore. Thompson (2015) continued, “some patterns are more obscure and hard to perceive as having much appeal: a knitted Hussar’s jacket, for example, a knitted bonnet made to look like a straw bonnet” (p. 114). This statement illustrated that the inspiration for the design of the item did not have to be directly evident for a Jane Austen fan to express his/her fandom.
Several participants in the current research noted creating and wearing garments and accessories inspired by characters within their fandoms. For example, Valerie stated, “The zipper/watch/bracelet I made myself—I went to Hobby Lobby and bought random charms that I felt ‘spoke’ to me . . . a trident for Aquaman, a spider for Black Widow . . . a wolf for Jacob . . . etc.” Participants referred to these items’ references to the form of media as inconspicuous. As a result, Inspired garments/accessories appear on the Taxonomy of Fan Dress (see Figure 39) as a form of IFD.

Thompson (2015) illustrated that a fan item may be connected to a fandom simply through its name. The latter example demonstrated that an item may be perceived as a fan item even when the connection to fandom through design is limited. These perceived relationships were evident in the current research. For example, Paige stated that her “Ewok hat” is actually only “a fuzzy hat that's marketed as a ‘werewolf’ hat.”

vii. Inspired ensembles. The definition of IFD was thought to have also extended to fashionable combinations of garments inspired by media characters, referred to in the current study as inspired ensembles. Prior to conducting this research, the researcher noted these inspired ensembles were featured on websites such as Pinterest.com (2016), Polyvore.com (2016), and Tumblr.com (n.d.). Putting together these ensembles digitally on these websites, as well as physically, was indicated by participants to be a popular practice throughout science fiction and fantasy fandoms. For example, Denise pointed out, that she is like other fans because she wears character-themed outfits. Following this statement, Denise provided a link to Pinterest.com (2016) that featured inspired ensembles that had been created digitally. Although these types of ensembles were referred to by participants using a number of different terms, which include
every day cosplay, casual cosplay, closet cosplay, Disneybound, bounding/bound, and 
geekbound, these appear as Inspired ensembles on the Taxonomy of Fan Dress (see Figure 39) as 
a form of IFD.

viii. Indirect body modifications. Body modifications, such as hairstyle, hair color, and 
cosmetics contained indirect references to a form of media when worn. In a figure caption, for a 
photograph of a girl wearing Princess Leia’s hairstyle [Star Wars], Scott (2013) wrote “The 
character-orientedness of Star Wars leads to a variety of ways of displaying fan favorites” (p. 
16). Here the author implied that fans display their fandom for characters by adopting hairstyles 
resembling those characters, but he did not refer to them as conspicuous or inconspicuous. In the 
current study, participants adopted characters’ hairstyles and they indicated that adopting these 
body modifications were an inconspicuous way of expressing fandom. For example, Denise 
explained that the wearing her “long black hair in a Dothraki-ish braid,” along with a replica 
“Game of Thrones Targaryen necklace” allowed her to express her fandom in a subtle way that 
was acceptable for her military occupation. Other examples include Hannah’s blush applied 
under the eyes to look like an anime girl and Valerie’s Star Wars Covergirl line that had an 
established connection to fandom through marketing, but once applied, the reference would not 
be apparent. Due to these findings, body modifications such as Hairstyles/Hair color and 
Makeup/Fragrance appear on the Taxonomy of Fan Dress under Indirect IFD (see Figure 39). 

CFD and IFD Redefined

As a result of the findings in the current research, the terms conspicuous fan dress (CFD) 
and inconspicuous fan dress (IFD) were redefined to address both the nature of the reference to a 
source of media (i.e. direct or indirect) and the visibility of the reference to a source of media
(conspicuousness or inconspicuous). Therefore, CFD is now defined as dress that exclusively contains a direct reference through imagery or text to a film, television series, or film series and is easily seen or noticed. As indicated on the *Taxonomy of Fan Dress* (see Figure 39), CFD dress items are often those that contain large, recognizable graphics that feature a main logo or main character that refers to a film or television or film series that is highly visible in popular culture.

IFD is now defined as fan dress that contains either a direct reference to a source of media through imagery or text or an indirect reference to a source of media through design, which includes the shape, color, or simply the name of the item, and is either not easily seen or noticed due to the object’s small size or due to the obscurity of the reference to the source of media. As implied by this definition, there are two forms of IFD. Direct IFD is defined as fan dress that contains a direct reference that is “not very easy to see or notice.” In the context of this research, this means that the reference will be unrecognizable to nonfans. As indicated on the *Taxonomy of Fan Dress* (see Figure 39), Direct IFD includes small items or items containing small references, items containing obscure references such as those that feature only text, secondary logos, specific references, unusual artistic styles of execution, and multiple sources within one design (mashups). Direct IFD also includes CFD items that could be masked or toned down to appear inconspicuous, items made from fashionable materials or appear to be fashionable dress (geek fashion), and body modifications containing direct imagery such as tattoos and nail art. Indirect IFD is defined as fan dress that contains an indirect reference to a source of media through design, which includes the shape, color, or simply the name of the item and is not easily seen or noticed. As indicated on the *Taxonomy of Fan Dress*, indirect IFD includes replica garments and accessories, inspired garments/accessories, inspired ensembles,
and body modifications such as hairstyles and/or hair color and cosmetics such as makeup and fragrance.

For female science fiction and fantasy fans, fan dress served as a form of “expressive equipment,” communicating both personal and social identity (Goffman, 1959, p. 22). Participants not only wore IFD to manage impressions, but to engage in a secret language with other fans. The practices surrounding IFD allowed participants to build cultural capital and achieve personal distinctiveness within their fan cultures and within mainstream culture as well.
Chapter 6. Conclusions

The purpose of this research was to explore women’s motivations for wearing inconspicuous science fiction and fantasy fan dress within various settings and social contexts, and to examine how inconspicuous fan dress (IFD) contributes to a fans’ social and personal identities and personal distinctiveness. Three subsequent research objectives and five research questions were developed. The results were compared to concepts found within a pre-existing theoretical framework, which consists of Dramaturgy, the concept of brand community, and Social Identity Theory.

Thirty-three females who identified as fans and wore various forms of fan dress were interviewed online or in-person using an interview protocol. Participants were recruited by the primary researcher through word of mouth and snowball or chain sampling via blogs, Facebook (Facebook.com, 2016) pages, and email.

Summary

Almost half of the participants (45.45%, \( N =15 \)) resided within the southern region of the United States and the remaining portion of the sample spanned the United States and Canada. The majority the participants reported that their age fell between 25 and 34, their race as white/Caucasian, and their marital status as married. Just under half of the participants reported that they were middle class. Participants’ occupations fell within a range of industries, which included retail, service, education, creative, science/technology, and military, and retired or volunteer.
The interview data were managed using NVivo qualitative analysis software and analyzed using the constant comparison as detailed by Creswell (2007), and utilized by Reddy-Best and Pedersen (2015). Four major themes emerged from the analysis and included (a) types of fan dress, (b) personal motivations, (c) social motivations, and (d) impression management.

The first theme *types of fan dress* emerged from the data and led to the development of *The Taxonomy of Fan Dress* (see Figure 39). By evaluating descriptions of individual fan dress items by participants, these items were classified as direct conspicuous, direct inconspicuous, and indirect inconspicuous. This classification led to a redefinition of conspicuous fan dress (CFD) and inconspicuous fan dress (IFD). CFD is now defined as dress that exclusively contains a direct reference through imagery or text to a film, television series, or film series and is “very easy to see or notice” (Merriam-Webster Inc., 2015, para 1). As indicated on the *Taxonomy of Fan Dress*, CFD dress items are often those that contain *large, recognizable graphics* that feature a *main logo or main character* and represent *highly visible fandoms*.

IFD is now defined as fan dress that contains either a direct reference to a source of media through imagery or text or an indirect reference to a source of media through *design*, which includes the shape, color, or simply the name of the item, and is either “not very easy to see or notice” due to the object’s small size or is “not very easy to see or notice” due to the obscurity of the reference to the source of media. As implied by this definition, there are two forms of IFD.

Direct IFD is defined as fan dress that contains a direct reference that is “not very easy to see or notice.” As indicated on the *Taxonomy of Fan Dress* (see Figure 39), Direct IFD includes *small items or items containing small references*, items containing *obscure references* such as

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those that feature only text (*text-only*), secondary logos, specific references, unusual artistic styles of execution, and multiple sources within one design (*mashups*). Direct IFD also includes CFD items that could be masked or toned down to appear inconspicuous, items made from fashionable materials or appear to be fashionable dress (*geek fashion*), and body modifications containing direct imagery such as *tattoos* and *nail art*.

Indirect IFD is defined as fan dress that contains an indirect reference to a source of media through *design*, which includes the shape, color, or simply the name of the item and is “not very easy to see or notice.” As indicated on the *Taxonomy of Fan Dress* (see Figure 39), indirect IFD includes *replica garments and accessories, inspired garments/accessories, inspired ensembles*, and *body modifications* such as *hairstyles and/or hair color* and cosmetics such as *makeup* and *frAGRance*. Unlike previous research and essays that featured discussions of fan dress, the current research led to a deeper understanding of how different types of fan dress function within fan cultures (Barker, 2010; Cherry 2013; DeRosa, 2013; Fuller 2013; Stenger, 2006; Thompson, 2015; Travis, 2013).

The second theme *personal motivations* included the *communication of fandom, self-expression, creative self-expression, and emotions derived from meanings* that participants personally assigned to their dress. The *communication of fandom* was a primary motivation in which participants used fan dress to nonverbally communicate that they liked, loved, enjoyed, or supported a particular source of media. *Self-expression* and *creative self-expression* were motivations where participants used fan dress to show that a film or film or television series or character was integral to their identity, and allowed participants to express themselves creatively. Two motivations related to self-expression was an *interest in fashion*, especially *geek fashion*,...
and feelings of pleasure/fun/escape. Participants were motivated to wear fan dress by the emotions derived from special meanings they personally assigned to their dress. Other personal motivations included motivations related to an attribute or the performance of a piece of fan clothing and included functional and aesthetic needs (Lamb & Kallal, 1992).

The third theme social motivations included motivations that related directly to the Social Identity Theory process. These were the identification with a character, group of characters, or series, identification as a nerd or geek, identification with others, the facilitation of interaction, and distinction from others. Other social motivations included sharing interest with spouses and/or family. Participants either wore fan dress to identify with, relate to, or aspire to identify with a character or group of characters, to identify with or show admiration for a specific element of a series, or to generally identify as a geek or nerd, rather than specifically identify with a character, group of characters, or series. Participants also wore fan dress to communicate one’s affiliation with a fan culture (identification with others) (Brown, 1997; Jenkins, 1992) and to facilitate interaction with other fans (facilitation of interaction) by using it as a tool for engaging in conversation and starting friendships and relationships. Fan dress was also worn to gain distinction from both non-fans and fans (distinction from others) through personal styling or wearing IFD, DIY fan dress, and atypical fan dress items. Other social motivations included sharing interest with spouses and/or family as participants engaged in other activities involving fan dress with their families.

The fourth theme impression management emerged from participants’ explanations of the types of fan dress they would wear and in what settings they would wear fan dress. Participants engaged in impression management by adjusting their dress practices according to the setting
and situation. Dress practices included (a) wearing no fan dress items, (b) wearing minimal fan dress, (c) wearing IFD only, (d) wearing selective fandoms, and (e) reserving CFD to back region settings. *Settings and situations where fan dress was limited* were those in which participants wore no or minimal fan dress, and included professional settings that included a range of work settings, and settings in which participants would be in the presence of certain people, church, and formal settings, which included weddings and funerals. *Settings and situations where fan dress was less limited* were those in which participants were less selective of the types of fan dress worn and included casual settings. Casual settings encompassed leisure activities, such as going out with friends or spouses, going to the movies, dining out, shopping, attending family weekends, going out to a bar or attending parties. Carrying out daily activities, such as running errands, grocery shopping, attending college classes, going to the gym or working out, or lounging at home were also considered casual settings. *Settings and situations where fan dress was unlimited* were those in which participants had opportunities for full expression, and included various fan settings, such as fan conventions, film showings, geek girl brunches, theme parks, themed parties and a geek/nerd themed bar.

**Relation to Theory**

Exploring the personal and social motivations for wearing fan dress was useful in exploring how fan dress, particularly inconspicuous fan dress, contributed to a fan’s social and personal identities and personal distinctiveness. A theoretical framework combining many concepts from Goffman’s (1959) Dramaturgical theory described in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, brand community, and Social Identity Theory provided insight into the very complex dress practices, motivations, and identities of science fiction and fantasy female fans.
By using this combined framework, it was revealed that female fans manage impressions to gain distinctiveness within both mainstream culture and their fan cultures by taking part in “feminine competencies,” which involve gendered dress practices (Cherry, 2013, pp. 107-108).

Participants’ engagement with the Social Identity Theory process were driven by a combination of the personal and social motivations for wearing fan dress explored in this research. Participants first categorized themselves as members of a group (social categorization) by forming a relationship with a film or film or television series, character, or group of characters. This resembled a type of brand identification that takes place among members in brand communities (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006; Lam, et al, 2010; Stokburger-Sauer, 2010). Participants identified with a source of media by borrowing attributes from the characters or series to better communicate to others who they were as individuals. For example, Natalie identified with the character Vegeta [Dragon Ball Z], a character she admired for his determination. By wearing clothing that featured the character, she was able to communicate to herself and others that she, too, was also determined, particularly while working out in the gym. Participants’ relationships to one of these sources of media was often a meaningful one, which led participants to assign special meanings to dress. These meanings gave participants an emotional boost or a sense of empowerment, comfort, and/or inspiration, and strengthened their relationships with the source of media.

Second, participants identified with others by taking on the same practices as others within the fan cultures (social identification). Because this includes wearing fan dress, this step in the process occurs simultaneously with social categorization. The results of this research support the idea that interaction with others within a brand community does not need to occur to
identify with other members (Carlson, Suter, & Brown, 2008). For some participants, it was clear that they had a “perceived sense of brand community (PSBC)” (Carlson, Suter, & Brown, 2008, p. 284). It was not until the participants’ relationships with the films or film or television series were established that participants began to take on common brand community practices, which included badging, evangelizing, and empathizing (Schau et al., 2009). These practices brought participants into contact with and aided in interaction with other fans. Participants drew on the special ability of fan dress to facilitate interaction by relying on it to bring about conversations in some settings and situations.

Third, participants compared themselves to others outside of their fan culture or fandom (social comparison). These others included a distinctive and a non-distinctive other. When comparing themselves to a non-distinctive other or non-fans, participants rarely assigned attributes to this other. The tendency for participants to compare themselves to others “within society at large” provided support for the assertion that members of fan cultures closely resemble brand communities that seek status and distinctiveness within their own communities, rather than seeking distinctiveness outside of it (Matthews, 2012, p. 10).

Interestingly, participants in the current research sought status and distinctiveness from other fans, and others within mainstream culture. Participants aimed to gain personal distinctiveness within their fan cultures by engaging in brand community practices centering on dress. Participants’ fan dress items were an *objectified* form of cultural capital that *embodied* “implicit practical knowledges, skills, and dispositions” of participants (Holt, 1998, p. 3). These skills and knowledge included those used to style character-inspired ensembles, create unique dress items, or seek out subtle or atypical fan dress items. While it was clear that for some
participants, wearing forms of IFD was an indicator of a “real” fan, it was unclear if it was an accurate indicator of the length or intensity of one’s fandom. For instance, DIY fan dress may have shown that one participant was “more dedicated” (Piper), but for many it seemed that their motivation for wearing fan dress was mediated by love of sewing and design.

Participants sought personal distinctiveness from non-fans by engaging in impression management. The social acceptance of fandom or “mainstreaming of fan culture” led participants to wear fan dress in a variety of settings, including the most conservative, such as job interviews and weddings (Jenkins & Scott, 2013, p. xvii). However, the indirect or direct nature and the visibility of their fan dress were carefully controlled in some settings. While some participants engaged in impression management out of their concern for appearing age-appropriate, a concern that may be tied to the science fiction and fantasy fan stereotype that positions fans as “infantile,” (Jenkins, 2013, p. 10), most participants were largely concerned with exercising power and control over their appearance (Guy & Banim, 2000). This entailed being appropriately dressed for the situation or setting. In front region settings, participants wanted others to perceive them as professional, competent, and respectful. Dress practices performed to appear distinctive while still appearing appropriate, such as personal styling, may be considered “feminine competencies” within fan culture (Cherry, 2013, pp. 107-108). Because these competencies intersect with women’s attainment of cultural capital and personal distinctiveness, female fans enjoy the special benefit of gaining distinctiveness within both mainstream and fan culture. This benefit may be unique to female fans as it may not be available to their male counterparts (Guy & Banim, 2000).
Implications

Implications of this research have both theoretical and practical applications. A theoretical implication was that recent cultural changes such as the mainstream acceptance of fandom have positioned female fans in a unique position within mainstream culture. While brand community impression management practices were apparent in this research, the persistence of the science fiction fan and fangirl stereotypes was not a motivating force for these practices in most cases. Instead of managing impressions to subvert science fiction and fan stereotypes, female fans may engage in impression management to appear professional, competent, and respectful. Doing so enables the science fiction and fantasy female fan to build cultural capital and attain personal distinctiveness within mainstream culture.

Another theoretical implication was that the dress was among the codified behaviors typical of fan cultures that distinguish one as a real fan and “true member” (Schau et al., 2009, p. 37). The Taxonomy of Fan Dress (Figure 39) provided a deeper understanding of these codified dress behaviors. The taxonomy may be used by future researchers while studying interactive groups of fans within specific fan cultures to gain a deeper understanding of how types of fan dress function within fan cultures and contribute to their social identities.

The overlap of Social Identity Theory and brand community concepts was another theoretical implication. The combination of these theories provided a more accurate picture of how members of fan cultures identify with a group. The concept of brand identification was especially important because identifying with a form of media (character or series) was necessary for the Social Identity Theory process to begin. Even in cases where participants identified generally as a geek or a nerd, relationships with science fiction or fantasy films or
television or film series were formed and marked the beginning of the Social Identity Theory process. The combination of theoretical concepts also revealed that the Social Identity Theory offered out-moded perspectives concerning individual group member’s desire to gain status for the entire group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; 1986; Turner et al., 1979). Brand community research has consistently shown the importance of gaining personal distinction and status through building cultural capital within groups (Schau, et al., 2009; Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001; Schau et al., 2009). Therefore, a combined framework as it was used in this study is suggested for future research on fan cultures.

A practical implication may be for producers and retailers of fan dress. These retailers should aim to satisfy the needs of fans, particularly females who are aspiring professionals. These fans grew up in an age where science fiction and fantasy films and television series were in the forefront of popular culture. As a result, they actively seek fan dress items that express their fandom in age-appropriate and subtle ways. The creation of DIY fan dress that communicates level of involvement or intensity of fandom is another practice implication. Informed by the Taxonomy of Fan Dress (Figure 39), fans may create their own fan dress or to sell on websites like Etsy.com (2015) that better communicates their personal relationship to a source of media or their status in relation to other fans.

These theoretical and practical implications may be extended to a wide audience of readers that may include members of fan cultures themselves. This research may provide them, as well as the general public, with a better understanding of the special functions of fan dress and create an awareness among wearers of fan dress of what they are communicating when they wear it.
Limitations

The sampling methods utilized in this research limited the generalizability of the research, serving as one limitation to the study. The in-person interviews were limited by the distance from the researcher. The conservative nature of the geographical area where many of the participants resided may have exerted strong influences on participants’ dress practices and motivations. While attempts were made to recruit a diverse sample, the sample was somewhat homogeneous in terms of race, socioeconomic class, and marital status.

Another limitation was that men were not included in the study. This eliminated a basis of comparison between men and women concerning motivations for wearing conspicuous or inconspicuous fan dress as well as the relationship between dress and cultural capital. While studying women within the Harley Davidson subculture of consumption, Martin et al. (2006) revisited the theory of subcultures of consumption used in Schouten and McAlexander’s (1995) original study of the Harley Davidson subculture, which focused on males. Referring to the conclusions of the original study, Martin et al. (2006) were able to conclude that men and women are judged by the same standards to attain status, but still women occupy a lower status than their male counterparts. The authors also found differences in the way female bikers interpreted subcultural core values:

In the case of this study, women bikers relate to the values at the core of the Harley-Davidson subculture, including freedom and hyper-masculinity, but they interpret them differently. More to the point of gendered consumption, they interpret them in ways that challenge male hegemony and expand and enhance multiple femininities (Martin et al., 2006, p. 191).
While there was some evidence that women in science fiction and fantasy cultures occupy a lower status within the fan cultures, future research that includes men may be warranted in order to provide a basis for comparison.

Other limitations of this research included the exclusion of other gender identities and youth and teenage fans from this research, as well as the homogeneity of race and ethnicity within the current sample. The specific fan dress behaviors and motivations for wearing fan dress of individuals that identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered (LGBT) were not explored in this research. This research was also limited by age. The study of dress practices and motivations of youth and teenage fans were excluded from this research because it was believed that they had fewer situations and settings (for example, work settings) where they engaged in impression management. While attempts were made to recruit a diverse sample, the sample was somewhat homogeneous in terms of race. This served as another limitation of this research.

**Future Research**

Future researchers should examine males’ science fiction and fantasy fan dress and how it contributes to cultural capital in order to provide a basis for comparison to the results of the current research. Additionally, it may provide support for the theoretical implications of this research. Future quantitative studies may aid in further development of the *Taxonomy of Fan Dress* (see Figure 39). A questionnaire with visual examples of the types of fan dress featured on the taxonomy may provide a clearer understanding of the line between cosplay costume items and fan dress items. For example, according to the *Taxonomy of Fan Dress*, Jasmine’s sorting hat would be classified as a replica accessory (indirect IFD) because it replicates the design of the
character and prop in the first *Harry Potter* film. However, many fans may classify this as CFD because it is a very distinguished and recognizable costume piece.

Future research should be conducted to expand the *Taxonomy of Fan Dress* (see Figure 39). The study of interactive groups of fans within specific fan cultures using a range of traditional ethnographic and netnographic methods is recommended. Although the study of blog and internet content was excluded from analysis in the current research to manage the size of the study (apart from photographs provided), participants in the current research provided links to blogs and websites that contained extensive information not mentioned in the interviews. An analysis of netnographic content alongside online interviews is suggested in future research exploring the dress practices of fans. The *Taxonomy of Fan Dress* may also be used while exploring the dress of fans of media genres not included in this research, such as horror fans and science fiction and fantasy gamers. As previously mentioned, future researchers may also expand the taxonomy by exploring the role of obscure references in gaining or barring entry into fan cultures. By doing this, researchers may be able to determine how much obscurity is too much obscurity for individuals to fail to gain entry into fan cultures.

Findings from the current research may be used as part of a theoretical framework for future researchers examining the relationship between fandom and creating DIY fan dress and fandom and interest in fashion. Possible research topics include the investigation into how interests in fashionable dress, fashion design, and sewing influence women’s choices of fan dress.

Future research should explore the dress practices and motivations of individuals that were unexplored in the present research. Individuals that identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or
transgendered (LGBT) may have different dress practices and motivations, and therefore, may play a different role in contributing to these individuals’ cultural capital. Future research may explore these differences among specific gender identities. Future research into the motivations and dress practices of youth and teenage fans is also noteworthy, as well as studies focusing exclusively on the motivations and dress practices of science fiction and fantasy fans within different ethnic groups.
References


Google Images. (n.d.). Penny from Dr. Horrible's Sing Along. Blog Retrieved from https://www.google.com/search?site=&tbm=isch&source=hp&biw=1600&bih=736&q=dr+horrible+sing+a+long+b=long+blog+penny&oq=dr+horrible+sing+a+long+blog+penny&gs_l=img.3...1509.10224.0.10581.38.263.297.0j19j21.0....0...1.ac.1.64.img.5.27.2795...0j0i30j0i24j0i10i24.qrCh7AjMwE8#tbm=isch&tbs=rimg%3ACZ28YZbC4q1Jji64WN0g6jDvREV41n69Z5W98seLkkO4_1Nt_13k0J31GBF11ttHNOUcwiDRdWuRv31IVNjJR8ioSCbrhY3SDqMO9EaeMEemtMe5mKhlIJEYXjWfr1nYRGRQYVt9zpWZ8qEgn3xyx4uWQ7j8xEfcapfUl7XusCvW3_1eTQnfUYEEavbf4P2RM_1KKhIJXXW2120c05QRmbqFkhAurReEqEglzCNF1ai5HBGSZX0jnVyPoSCtUuh0mMIHyEbmhiEd8-RdE&q=dr%20horrible%20sing%20a


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Appendix A
Types of Inconspicuous Fan Dress (IFD)


2. TARDIS Dress. The *Dr. Who* TARDIS dress is one of the nine pieces of the Dr. Who holiday fashion line by Hot Topic in conjunction with the BBC Dr. Who series. (Sage, 2015).

4. *Blue Phone Boxes and Black Swirls on White - Large Swirls.* This is a *Dr. Who* inconspicuous print fabric featured on Spoonflower.com (Spoonflower Inc., 2008-2015).

5. *Harry Potter-ish black.* This is a *Harry Potter* inconspicuous print fabric featured on Spoonflower.com (Spoonflower Inc., 2008-2015).

7. Sherlock Holmes Buttons. Merchandise that contains slogans or “memes” that are familiar only to fellow fans, such as buttons that reference the conspiracy behind the *Sherlock Holmes* character Moriarty may be a *form of inconspicuous fan dress* (Poore, 2014, p. 136).

8. Kingsman Clothing Line. Clothing pieces that are part of a men’s clothing and accessory line featuring items from the film “Kingsman: The Secret Service” was created based on by the film’s costume designer exclusively for Mr Porter, a retailer that offers exclusive designer menswear (Moazami, 2015; Mr Porter, 2015).

9. Scandal Fashion Line. Pieces from a fashion line was launched based off character costumes of television series “Scandal,” which included a “Kerry Washington-esque plaid cape” (Stampler, 2014, para 2).
10. Disney Cinderella Corset Ball Gown. This dress was part of Hot Topic’s “Cinderella” collection that included “fashion apparel inspired by costumes and iconic moments from the feature film” (Hot Topic Announces New Cinderella Collection, 2015, para 2).

Appendix A Image References


Appendix B
Interview Protocol

Interview Process and Questions

Greetings and Introductions, Procedural Aspects, Review of Consent Form and Research Goals

Interview Questions for Demographics

1. What is your age?
2. In what city and state do you live?
3. What is/are your occupation or source of income(s)?
4. Marital/partner status?
5. How would you describe your race and socioeconomic status?
6. What shows/series do you watch, enjoy?

Interview Questions for RQ3: How IFD Contributes to Personal Identity/Distinctiveness

1. What label do you use to describe your relationship to the film, TV series, or character? Why?
   a. For example, Fan, fanatic, admirer, casual viewer, obsessed?
2. How does your clothing/accessories show what kind of fan you are? Why?
3. What is the importance of wearing these clothing/accessories that are related to the film, TV series, or character? Why?

Interview Questions for RQ2: How IFD Contributes to Social Identity

1. How do you use clothing/accessories to identify with a film, TV series, or character? Why?
2. How do you use clothing/accessories to identify with others that like the same film, TV series, or character? Why?

3. How is the way you dress different or the same as others who like the same film, TV series, or character? Why?

4. How do you feel your clothing/accessories connect you with others that like the same film, TV series, or character? Why?

Interview Questions for RQ 1: Motivations for Wearing IFD

1. What kinds of fan clothing and accessories do you wear and why?
   a. For example, graphic t-shirts, dresses with small prints, accessories…?
   b. For example, demure, easily hidden, not obvious/noticeable/recognizable or obvious/noticeable/instantly recognizable, or recognizable/noticeable by other fans only?

2. Describe these items in detail and what you like about them.

Interview Questions for RSQ 1: How dress practices differ within various settings and social contexts.

1. When and where would you wear these items? Why?

2. When and where would you not wear these items? Why?

Interview Questions for RSQ 2: How motivations differ according to their dress practices and setting/social contexts.

1. In what situations would you wear no fan items?

2. In what situations would you wear some fan items, but not others, and why?

3. How would you wear or style these items differently depending on the situation?
4. Do you feel comfortable wearing some/all/any of these items in some situations more than others? Why or why not?

5. Do you feel comfortable wearing some/all/any items all the time/in all situations? Why or why not?
Appendix C
Wardrobe Interview Protocol

Interview Process and Questions

Greetings and Introductions, Procedural Aspects, Review of Consent Form and Research

Goals

Wardrobe Selection

1. Ask the participant to pull all/some of the fan dress items she wears on a regular basis.
2. Select a minimum of equal number of garments and accessories to discuss. This number may vary by participant. A minimum of 4-6 total items is desired.
3. Direct the interview questions for RQ1-3 toward the particular dress items that were selected.

Interview Questions for Demographics

1. What is your age?
2. In what city and state do you live?
3. What is/are your occupation or source of income(s)?
4. Marital/partner status?
5. How would you describe your race and socioeconomic status?
6. What shows/series do you watch, enjoy?

Interview Questions for RQ3: How IFD Contributes to Personal Identity/Distinctiveness

1. What label do you use to describe your relationship to the film, TV series, or character?
   Why?
   a. For example, Fan, fanatic, admirer, casual viewer, obsessed?
2. How do these items show what kind of fan you are? Why?

3. What is the importance of wearing these clothing/accessory items? Why?

**Interview Questions for RQ2: How IFD Contributes to Social Identity**

1. How do you use these items to identify with a film, TV series, or character? Why?

2. How do you use these items to identify with others that like the same film, TV series, or character? Why?

3. How is the way you dress different or the same as others who like the same film, TV series, or character? Why?

4. How do you feel these items connect you with others that like the same film, TV series, or character? Why?

**Interview Questions for RQ 1: Motivations for Wearing IFD**

1. How would you define these clothing and accessory items and why?
   a. For example, graphic t-shirts, dresses with small prints, accessories…?
   b. For example, demure, easily hidden, not obvious/noticeable/recognizable or obvious/noticeable/instantly recognizable, or recognizable/noticeable by other fans only?

2. Describe these items in detail and what you like about them.

**Interview Questions for RSQ 1: How dress practices differ within various settings and social contexts.**

1. When and where would you wear these items? Why?

2. When and where would you not wear these items? Why?

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Interview Questions for RSQ 2: How motivations differ according to their dress practices and setting/social contexts.

1. In what situations would you wear no items?
2. In what situations would you wear some of these items, but not others, and why?
3. How would you wear or style these items differently depending on the situation?
4. Do you feel comfortable wearing some/all/any of these items in some situations more than others? Why or why not?
5. Do you feel comfortable wearing some/all/any items all the time/in all situations? Why or why not?
Appendix D
IRB Approval

ACTION ON EXEMPTION APPROVAL REQUEST

TO: Dina Smith-Glaviana
   Textiles, Apparel Design, and Merchandising

FROM: Dennis Landin
   Chair, Institutional Review Board

DATE: January 11, 2016

RE: IRB# E9715

TITLE: Inconspicuous Fandom: Exploring Subtle Women’s Expressions of Science Fiction and Fantasy Fandom Through Dress


Review Date: 1/11/2016

Approved X Disapproved

Approval Date: 1/11/2016 Approval Expiration Date: 1/10/2019

Exemption Category/Paragraph: 2b

Signed Consent Waived?: Yes for online but script has to be read to subjects and consent noted. No for in-person.

Re-review frequency: (three years unless otherwise stated)

LSU Proposal Number (if applicable):

Protocol Matches Scope of Work in Grant proposal: (if applicable)

By: Dennis Landin, Chairman

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING – Continuing approval is CONDITIONAL on:

1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report, and LSU’s Assurance of Compliance with DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects.
2. Prior approval of a change in protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of subjects over that approved.
3. Obtaining renewed approval (or submittal of a termination report), prior to the approval expiration date, upon request by the IRB office (irrespective of when the project actually begins); notification of project termination.
4. Retention of documentation of informed consent and study records for at least 3 years after the study ends.
5. Continuing attention to the physical and psychological well-being and informed consent of the individual participants, including notification of new information that might affect consent.
6. A prompt report to the IRB of any adverse event affecting a participant potentially arising from the study.
8. SPECIAL NOTE: When emailing more than one recipient, make sure you use bcc.

*All investigators and support staff have access to copies of the Belmont Report, LSU’s Assurance with DHHS, DHHS (45 CFR 46) and FDA regulations governing use of human subjects, and other relevant documents in print in this office or on our World Wide Web site at http://www.lsu.edu/irb
Appendix E
IRB Modification 1

ACTION ON EXEMPTION APPROVAL REQUEST

TO: Dina Smith-Glaviana  
Textiles, Apparel Design, and Merchandising

FROM: Dennis Landin  
Chair, Institutional Review Board

DATE: January 19, 2016

RE: IRB# E9715

TITLE: Inconspicuous Fandom: Exploring Subtle Women's Expressions of Science Fiction and Fantasy Fandom Through Dress

New Protocol/Modification/Continuation: Modification

Brief Modification Description: Post flyers to expand sampling and recruitment methods

Review date: 1/19/2016

Approved X Disapproved ________

Approval Date: 1/19/2016 Approval Expiration Date: 1/10/2019

Re-review frequency: (three years unless otherwise stated)

LSU Proposal Number (if applicable):

Protocol Matches Scope of Work in Grant proposal: (if applicable) ________

By: Dennis Landin, Chairman

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING – Continuing approval is CONDITIONAL on:

1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report, and LSU’s Assurance of Compliance with DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects.
2. Prior approval of a change in protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of subjects over that approved.
3. Obtaining renewed approval (or submittal of a termination report), prior to the approval expiration date, upon request by the IRB office (irrespective of when the project actually begins); notification of project termination.
4. Retention of documentation of informed consent and study records for at least 3 years after the study ends.
5. Continuing attention to the physical and psychological well-being and informed consent of the individual participants including notification of new information that might affect consent.
6. A prompt report to the IRB of any adverse event affecting a participant potentially arising from the study.
8. SPECIAL NOTE: Make sure you use bcc when emailing more than one recipient.

*All investigators and support staff have access to copies of the Belmont Report, LSU’s Assurance with DHHS, DHHS (45 CFR 46) and FDA regulations governing use of human subjects, and other relevant documents in print in this office or on our World Wide Web site at http://www.lsu.edu/irb

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Appendix F
IRB Modification 2

ACTION ON EXEMPTION APPROVAL REQUEST

TO: Dina Smith-Glaviana
Textiles, Apparel Design, and Merchandising

FROM: Dennis Landin
Chair, Institutional Review Board

DATE: February 25, 2016

RE: IRB# E0715

TITLE: Inconspicuous Fandom: Exploring Subtle Women's Expressions of Science Fiction and Fantasy Fandom Through Dress

New Protocol/Modification/Continuation: Modification

Brief Modification Description: Online participants will include residents within the United States and Canada. On-site interviews will be conducted at two comic book conventions: CoastCon in Biloxi, and Southern GeekFest in Hattiesburg, MS.

Review date: 2/24/2016

Approved X Disapproved ______

Approval Date: 2/24/2016 Approval Expiration Date: 1/10/2019

Re-review frequency: (three years unless otherwise stated)

LSU Proposal Number (if applicable):

Protocol Matches Scope of Work in Grant proposal: (if applicable) ______

By: Dennis Landin, Chairman

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING – Continuing approval is CONDITIONAL on:

1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report, and LSU’s Assurance of Compliance with DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects*.
2. Prior approval of a change in protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of subjects over that approved.
3. Obtaining renewed approval (or submittal of a termination report), prior to the approval expiration date, upon request by the IRB office (irrespective of when the project actually begins): notification of project termination.
4. Retention of documentation of informed consent and study records for at least 3 years after the study ends.
5. Continuing attention to the physical and psychological well-being and informed consent of the individual participants including notification of new information that might affect consent.
6. A prompt report to the IRB of any adverse event affecting a participant potentially arising from the study.
8. SPECIAL NOTE: Make sure you use bcc when emailing more than one recipient. Approvals will automatically be closed by the IRB on the expiration date unless the PI requests a continuation.

*All investigators and support staff have access to copies of the Belmont Report, LSU’s Assurance with DHHS, DHHS 45 CFR 46) and FDA regulations governing use of human subjects, and other relevant documents in print in this office or on our World Wide Web site at http://www.lsu.edu/irb

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Vita

Dina Cherise Smith-Glaviana is an aca-fan who’s personal and academic interests revolve around dress. She earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Fashion Merchandising at The University of Southern Mississippi (USM) and a Master of Science degree in Historic and Cultural Aspects of Dress at The University of Georgia (UGA). While attending Louisiana State University (LSU), she established a successful publication track record and joined USM’s Marketing and Merchandising Department as an Adjunct Faculty member. Smith-Glaviana is a member of the professional organizations Costume Society of America (CSA) and International Textile and Apparel Association (ITAA). In addition to these professional memberships, she is a member of Louisiane Vintage Dancers, a group that performs English Country Dance wearing Regency and 1860s dress that allows her to integrate her hobbies and academic interests.