



Exploring the Recognizability and Nature of Media References in Female Science Fiction and Fantasy Fandom Dress

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The purpose of this research was to explore the types of fandom dress worn by female science fiction and fantasy fans and discover why these items were worn within various settings and social contexts using Erving Goffman's (1959) dramaturgy and the concept of brand community. Prior to this research, several studies and essays contained descriptions of types of fandom dress (Cherry 2013; Shipley, 2010; Thompson, 2015) and provided evidence that fandom dress may be either directly or indirectly related to sources of media, and also that some forms of fandom dress were more *conspicuous* or recognizable by non-fans than others (Cherry 2013; Shipley, 2010; Thompson, 2015). Therefore, types of fandom dress were not clearly defined, and the relationship between the nature and recognizability of media references was unclear. Additionally, previous research did not explore motivations behind wearing fandom dress in social settings and contexts outside a convention setting (Shipley, 2010, p. 30).

Method and Procedure

Thirty-one online interviews were conducted with females who wore dress related to science fiction and fantasy films and television series. The interview data were analyzed using NVivo qualitative analysis software and the constant comparison method. Three main themes emerged from the data: (a) Conspicuous fandom dress (CFD), (b) Direct inconspicuous fandom dress (DIFD), and (c) Indirect inconspicuous fandom dress (IIFD). These themes also helped to further define the types of fandom dress the participants wore.

Results and Discussion

The results led to the development of *The Model of Fandom Dress* (Figure 1), in which fandom dress media references are classified by their nature and recognizability, the settings where each type was worn, and motivations relating to impression management for each type. According to this model, CFD exclusively contains a direct reference through imagery or text to a film, television series, or film series that is highly visible and recognizable by fans and non-fans. DIFD contains a direct reference to a source of media through imagery or text that is less recognizable. DIFD includes small items or items containing small references, CFD items that could be masked by or layered with other items, items containing obscure references such as those that feature only text, secondary logos, unusual artistic styles, multiple sources within one design (mashups), and Geek fashion items. IIFD contains an indirect reference to a source of media through design, which includes the shape, color, or simply the name of the item that is not visible and/or is not recognizable by non-fans and includes replica garments/accessories, inspired garments/accessories, inspired ensembles, body modifications, hairstyles, makeup and fragrance.

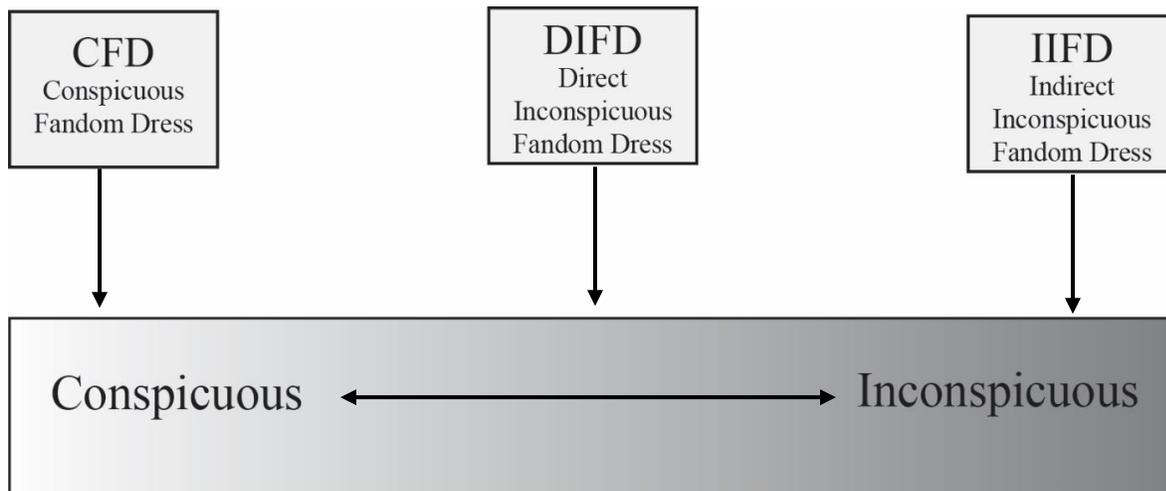


Figure 1. *The Model of Fandom Dress.*

Conclusions

The results also led to an in-depth understanding of female fans' motivations for wearing specific types of fandom dress, which provided a more holistic view of how different types of fandom dress functions within both mainstream and fan culture. Female science fiction and fantasy fans wore all types of fandom dress to express their admiration for science fiction and fantasy film or television series, but specifically wore the two forms of IFD to engage in impression management. The motivations underlying impression management were: (a) to subvert fan stereotypes, (b) project a positive impression, and (c) to communicate one's status as a "real" fan. By carefully selecting forms of IFD to wear within mainstream settings, participants attained subcultural capital within mainstream culture. Wearing IFD in casual and fan settings where participants were around other fans allowed participants to build cultural capital and communicate their status as true members of their fan cultures.

Theoretical implications of this research are related to the functions of inconspicuous fandom dress within mainstream and fan culture. *The Model of Fandom dress* provided a deeper understanding of wearing forms of IFD as codified dress behaviors and may be used in future research to explore the dress of fans of media genres not included in this research.

References

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