

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

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## LSU DOCTORAL DISSERTATIONS

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

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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 (Shiple, 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; Shiple, 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 competencies," (Cherry, 2013, pp. 107-108). 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.

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Science fiction often takes place in a dystopian society sometime in the future and contains elements of advanced technology. A fantasy story (<https://www.masterclass.com/articles/what-is-the-fantasy-genre-history-of-fantasy-and-subgenres-and-types-of-fantasy-in-literature>), on the other hand, is usually set in the fantasy realm and includes mythical creatures and supernatural powers. As should be obvious by now, science fiction and fantasy overlap quite a bit. There are even subgenres like science fantasy that explicitly blend the two: Plausibility: A science fiction story generally extrapolates elements of the modern world and attempts to predict how they could possibly develop.

Science fiction's founding mother Ursula K. Le Guin contributes two brilliant stories: *Forgiveness Day* explores the intricacy of gender roles in a society where they are further complicated by slavery and war, while *The Matter of Seggri* is set on a world with near-absolute segregation of the sexes. L. Timmel Duchamp incisively delineates how men react to a woman who doesn't fit the feminine role. James Patrick Kelly's seemingly traditional idea-SF story *Chemistry* just might be the most radical in the book, for it explores the purely chemical nature of love.